



Bolivia

Bolivia is one of South America's least explored countries. Landlocked, it stretches from the Andes to the Amazon basin. Formerly one of the richest nations in the Americas due to the silver extracted from its legendary Cerro Rico mine, Bolivia's colonial legacy is still very much visible in the blend of European and indigenous culture. This is reflected in the bowler hats and the bright flowing skirts of the colourful Aymara Indians.

A visit to Bolivia can easily be combined with Peru, Brazil or Chile.

Climate and when to go

Due to its altitude, Bolivia's altiplano can be very hot during the day and bitterly cold at night. The colder, dry season is from May to October, which is the most popular time to travel. From November to April the temperatures are warmer, but coincide with summer rains which often cause flooding to the Salar de Uyuni and make many roads both in the south and in the lowlands impassable. The rainforest and semi-tropical lowlands are warm and humid most of the year.



Totora reed boat



Uyuni



Salvador Dali



Llamas, Uyuni



Lake Titicaca



La Paz

Ringed by the snow-capped peaks of the Andes, La Paz is the highest capital city in the world at 3,600m. Founded in 1548, the city sprawls upwards in all directions and now engulfs even the surrounding canyon walls. The clutter of colonial architecture, colourful markets and cobbled alleys combined with several fine museums offers a fascinating insight into Bolivia's colonial past.

Lake Titicaca

North of La Paz, straddling the border with Peru, lies Lake Titicaca, the sacred lake of the Incas. It is formed by two lakes, Huinamarca and the larger Chucuito, which contains the legendary Islands of the Sun and Moon from which, according to myth, the Inca civilisation emerged a thousand years ago. Trips to the islands run from the pretty lakeshore town of **Copacabana** and it is worth spending a night in the simple lodgings on the islands to explore some of the Inca ruins and enjoy the panoramic views. Just south of the lake lies perhaps Bolivia's most fascinating and enigmatic ruin, **Tiahuanaco**, an ancient citadel dating back to 1600BC.

The Cordillera Real and the Yungas

Stretching north-east from La Paz along the eastern shores of Lake Titicaca rise the magnificent Andean peaks of the **Cordillera Real**, Bolivia's trekking and mountaineering centre. There are 6 peaks over 6,000 metres, the highest being Illimani. Treks can be arranged from the picturesque colonial town of **Sorata**, 5 hours north of the capital and at the foot of Illampu (6,368m). Further east, where the mountains plunge into Bolivia's semi-tropical lowlands, lie the lush valleys and forested slopes of the **Yungas**, gateway to the Amazon.

The Northern lowlands

The most popular starting point for jungle adventures into the semi-tropical lowlands is the tiny village of **Rurrenabaque**, on the Beni river. It is reached from La Paz either by a short flight or along the 'death road', a spectacular winding track which drops thousands of metres from the heights of the Andes through the Yungas and into the lowlands. The Bolivian jungle contains well over half of all the country's mammals and birds and waterway (*pampa*) trips are especially good for wildlife.

HOSTERÍA LAS BALSAS



At Puerto Pérez, on the southern shores of Lake Titicaca an hour from La Paz. Swiss-owned small hotel with fantastic views over the lake towards the snow-capped mountains of the Cordillera Real, especially at sunset.



Northern lowlands



Kalahuta



Weaver



TUICHI RIVER EXPEDITION



Every October our friends at Amazonas Explorer, the best adventure outfitter in Peru and Bolivia, run the following trip, travelling through a rarely visited area of outstanding natural beauty in the heart of Bolivia's largest National Park, the Madidi.

This 14 day group trip starts with a drive along the shores of Lake Titicaca, through the breathtaking Apolobamba mountain range and descending, past cloud forests, into the Amazon basin, staying in simple village inns.



A 2 day trek along an ancient Inca Trail leads to the Rio Tuichi, the starting point for 4 days of white-water rafting through primary rainforest (excellent wildlife viewing opportunities), with camps on the river bank.



A further 2 days are spent in a jungle lodge exploring the rainforest, before returning to La Paz to visit artisan markets and the ruins at Tiahuanaco.

Sucre and Potosí

The beautiful 'white city' of Sucre is Bolivia's legal capital, a thriving university town with stunning colonial architecture and fine museums and buildings. A long dusty road takes you to **Potosí**, at 4,090m the highest city in the world and a living reminder of the tragic legacy of the Cerro Rico mine. Once the jewel of the Spanish conquest, helping to fund Europe's industrial revolution, Potosí is now a fascinating shell of cobbled streets, colonial architecture and countless churches.

Santa Cruz de la Sierra and the Jesuit Missions

Santa Cruz is the southern gateway to the subtropical lowlands and the famous Jesuit missions of **Chiquitano**, seven of which survive, dating back to 1691. Every 2 years a marvellous festival of baroque music is held here. Southwest of Santa Cruz, at Samaipata, is the enormous sculptured ceremonial site of El Fuerte, considered of Inca or even Amazon origin: a series of channels and religious symbols carved out of one vast slab of rock. Close by is the southern edge of the **Amoró National Park**, with an incredible diversity of plant and animal life. The 1.5 million hectare **Noel Kempff Mercado National Park**, where waterfalls tumble over sheer cliffs, is on the Brazilian border.

Salar de Uyuni and the Southern deserts

Towards the south-western tip of the country, bordering Chile and Argentina, is some of Bolivia's most captivating scenery. This is an inhospitable area of barren landscapes, distant mountains and tiny colonial towns under huge aqua-blue skies. The highlight is the **Salar de Uyuni**, a dazzling salt-lake of white hexagonal salt crystals stretching out to the horizon. Almost as impressive are the bizarre rock formations and high-altitude lakes which border Chile and the multicoloured canyons of Tupiza further south.



Uyuni



Potosí



Laguna Colorada, Uyuni



Sucre



Laguna Verde, Uyuni



Bolivia Itineraries

LA PAZ, SUCRE, POTOSÍ, AMBORÓ AND SANTA CRUZ



A stunning trip through the colonial heart of Bolivia to the Jesuit Missions of Santa Cruz and the spectacular Ambaró National Park.

La Paz

Day 1: A night at the central and comfortable Hotel Europa.

Sucre and Potosí

Days 2-5: Fly south to the beautiful colonial city of Sucre for 2 nights at the Hotel Premier, close to the main square and cathedral. Here you will visit an old colonial farm and nearby Indian village famous for its traditional handmade textiles. Driven 270km south-west to Potosí for 2 nights at the Hostal Libertador, with good views over the town. Visit the Casa de la Moneda, the country's first mint, and the Cerro Rico mine where an estimated 8 million people lived and died throughout its tragic history.

The Northern lowlands

Days 6-8: Fly to Cochabamba and overnight at the colonial-style Hotel Aranjuez. The following day you will take a 7 hour bus ride through the tropical valley of Chapare to the Ambaró National Park. Ambaró hosts an incredible diversity of wildlife, and you have 2 nights (one of which is in a fixed jungle camp) in the Ambaró Eco Resort Hotel, with guided walks in the jungle.

Santa Cruz and the Jesuit Missions

Days 9-14: Continue to Santa Cruz de la Sierra for a night in the modern Hotel Camino Real. Start a 4 day guided trip to six of the Jesuit missions. Accommodation will be in simple hotels around San José de Chiquitos, San Ignacio and Concepción. Return for a final night in Santa Cruz, before a transfer to the airport for onward connections.



Campanario Mission



Train at Pulacayo



Potosí

BOLIVIA AND CHILE: LA PAZ, LAKE TITICACA, UYUNI AND THE ATACAMA DESERT



Travel overland through dramatic and ever-changing scenery from the highest capital in the world to the driest desert.

La Paz, Bolivia

Days 1-2: Two nights at the modern, comfortable and central Hotel Plaza gives you time to visit the handicraft market, San Francisco church and the Moon valley.

Lake Titicaca

Days 3-5: Driven to Copacabana, on Lake Titicaca, with a visit to Tiahuanaco on the way.

Take a boat (1 hour) to Sun Island, and walk to La Estancia Lodge, a simple but beautiful base for a 2 night stay. After a day exploring the island continue across the Tiquina strait and round the lake to Puerto Pérez for a night at Hosteria Las Balsas (see page 15).

Salar de Uyuni and the Southern deserts

Days 6-8: Drive (4 hours) to Oruro for a comfortable 6 hour train journey to Uyuni and a night at the Hotel Jardines de Uyuni. Start a 3 day jeep tour through the Salar de Uyuni, visiting Isla Pescado, the desert of Chiguana, the pink flamingos at Laguna Hediona, the coloured rock formations of the 'Salvador Dali' desert and finally Laguna Verde. Accommodation is in very simple hostels in the village of San Juan and at Laguna Colorada.

Atacama Desert, Chile

Days 9-12: Cross the border and descend into San Pedro for 3 nights at the Hotel Casa de Don Tomás, a small rustic hotel in the village. Visit El Tatio geysers, Puritama hot springs and the local villages before flying from Calama to Santiago for onward connections.



Tiahuanaco



Laguna Verde



Uyuni market

See page 26 for another Bolivia itinerary