

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Welcome to Bolivia and to BOLIVIA CULTURA Travel and Tours

This guide contains information that you may need during your time in Bolivia. Please take the time to read through it.

- **1) PASSPORTS, VISAS AND IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS**
- **2) MONEY AND FINANCES**
- **2) IMMUNISATIONS COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS**
 - **DIARRHOEA**
 - **ALTITUDE SICKNESS (SOROCCHI)**
- **3) SAFETY and SCAMS**
- **5) CULTURAL DO'S AND DON'TS**
- **6) THINGS TO BRING**
- **6) RESOURCES**

PASSPORTS, VISAS AND IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Most nationalities do not need to get a visa before coming to Bolivia, and in fact getting one may cause you problems. To check the status of your country, check <http://www.rree.gov.bo/>

For citizens of countries that don't need to apply for a visa in advance (i.e. most western countries) you will receive a 30 day stamp when you arrive in the country. Two extensions of 30 days each can be obtained any immigration office. Anyone planning to stay longer than 6 months may need to get a year visa. All of this may seem a bit confusing, so please contact the office if you have any questions or concerns.

Leave a photocopy of your passport and other important documents with your family at home and when you arrive, leave a copy of your passport and entry stamp with the Bolivia Cultura Viajes y Turismo office. Write down the serial numbers of credit cards, traveller's cheques, and the phone number of the lost/stolen hotline. Keep these in a separate place from the originals.

Bolivian law requires you to carry identification at all times – we recommend that you carry in addition to your passport a photocopy of your passport and show this when asked, never the original. It is a good idea to make copies of other important documents such as: airline tickets, insurance policies, important prescriptions be sure to store them separately from the originals.

Be aware of the expiration dates of your passport and credit cards/debit cards/travellers cheques. Insurance which covers medical emergencies, evacuation, personal belongings and repatriation is strongly recommended. Be sure to take note of the medical waiver fees. Keep a copy of your vaccination record with you.

MONEY AND FINANCES

- Travelers checks are very difficult to change and the charges are often quite steep.
- You can exchange small amounts of US dollars, into bolivianos in the streets. It is recommended that you use banks or casas de cambio (exchange houses) for large amounts (\$us.100 or more) not street money changers.
- It is common that nobody will accept dollar bills that look old or are torn. Not even banks!!
- Credit cards - Visa (most common), and Master Card are accepted in main cities. Cash can be withdrawn by credit card at some banks. Debit cards can be used in many locations, ENLACE is the most common system available.
- When changing money it is advisable to ask for small bills as it is often difficult to change large bills.

IMMUNISATIONS

It takes time to have an effective course of immunisations so you will need to speak with your doctor or travel clinic at least 12 weeks before you intend to travel.

We recommend the following immunisations for Bolivia: Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Typhoid, Yellow Fever (required), and Rabies.

Serious tropical diseases are spread through infected mosquitoes. Malarial pills are not necessary in the high altitude sections of the country, but you may want to bring some along in case you travel to the tropical regions of the country.

In addition to the above, check that your other vaccinations are up to date (polio, TB, meningitis, MMR, diphtheria, tetanus). It is recommended that you have a general check-up and dental exam before you travel especially if you will away for an extended period of time (+3 months). Check out these websites for up to date information.

www.who.int
www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk
www.cdc.gov
www.travelhealth.com

COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS

“BOIL IT, COOK IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT”

DIARRHOEA

The most common health problem with tourist is “traveller’s diarrhoea”, caused by nasty bugs found in contaminated food and water. More serious diarrhoeal illnesses caused by internal parasites are Giardia and Amoebic dysentery, or by bacteria eg. Cholera and Typhoid. The best way to avoid the above is by paying careful attention to what, and where, you eat and drink.

- Do not drink tap water in Bolivia or brush your teeth with it.
- Be wary of ice in drinks.

- Always ensure bottled water is properly sealed, it is cheap and available almost everywhere.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before eating and drinking.
- Street food is never certain to be safe particularly avoid undercooked meat and fish, dairy products and raw vegetables.

Dehydration can easily occur at higher altitudes and is a serious danger when you are experiencing diarrhoea (be sure to drink at least a cup of water for each trip to the bathroom). At high altitudes you should drink at least 2 litres of water per day.

If you do find yourself suffering from dehydration (symptoms include: headache, muscle spasms) a good re-hydration mix is: 1 litre of water, 1 spoon of sugar, 1 spoon of salt. You can also buy re-hydration salts in any pharmacy.

ALTITUDE SICKNESS (SOROCCHI)

Altitude sickness (sorocchi) can occur (especially when first arriving to the El Alto airport!), the best cure if possible is to descend to lower altitude. The symptoms (headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, insomnia, loss of appetite) can be avoided or alleviated by taking it easy your first few days, eating small meals and avoiding alcohol your first few nights in town.

Sorocchi pills are sold in almost all pharmacies and are a mixture of caffeine and aspirin, which can also be helpful in alleviating symptoms.

Remember the sun is strong especially at high altitudes. It is a good idea to follow our friends the Australians:

SLIP on some clothes

SLOP on some high factor sunscreen

SLAP on hat

SAFETY and SCAMS

Bolivia is one of the safest South American countries and most Bolivians are friendly and helpful although, as in every country, you should take precautions.

- Be aware that Bolivians drive on the right and pedestrians do not have right of way.
- Lock your baggage when travelling.
- Keep your valuables, including passport, in a money belt under your clothing.
- Don't wear expensive jewellery.
- Don't walk alone after dark in isolated areas. Take a radio taxi.

These scams will be tried on you throughout Bolivia ...read through the list below, be aware, and remember they happen when you least expect it...

1. The friendly tourist and the plain-clothes police officer.

A "tourist" approaches you and asks for directions, moments later, someone else comes over and shows you an official looking ID. He claims to be a police officer and asks to see your passport/entry stamp. Your new "friend" says this isn't unusual and takes out his own ID / passport

/ entry stamp. The “police officer” then asks to inspect your money for counterfeit notes and / or your bag for drugs. During the process the two will steal your money / contents of your bag. Variations include being asked to get into a taxi to go to the police station, during the ride they will go through your wallet / bag robbing you.

What to do?

Assume plain-clothes police officers are con – artists. Don’t allow anyone to search your bags. Only show a photocopy of your passport. Never get into a taxi with a stranger or with other people already in it.

2. It’s raining money / credit cards / white powder, etc.

Someone drops money or some other potentially valuable item near you. You bend down to pick it up and:

- a. You are accused of stealing it and asked to pay to avoid arrest.
- b. You are asked to share your find while being robbed
- c. While bending over, you are pick-pocketed / have your bag snaked/stolen.

What to do?

Ignore “accidentally” dropped items – keep walking, minding your own business. If someone approaches you with “dropped” money / phonecard / credit card, become suspicious, watch your bags, and get away from the situation. Be rude if necessary.

3 Helpful cleaners

You’re walking down the street and a helpful person points out spit / vomit / mustard / dulce de leche etc. on your bag / jacket. They, or someone else, offer to help clean it off – while another person empties your pockets / bag or runs off with the jacket / bag you’ve just taken off to clean.

What to do?

Ignore said mess and keep walking. Wait until you get to your hostel / hotel / a safe restaurant to clean it off. Be careful the nearest convenient spot may be a set up to rob you.

4 The unlucky traveller

A “respectable looking traveller” tells you they’ve just been robbed / they’ve just got out of prison / their sisters just died, etc. and ask you for money.

What to do?

Do not give them anything; if in doubt give them information on the nearest police station / their country’s embassy details.

5 Bag – slashers and pick – pocketers

You are in the busy market / bus terminal and someone casually brushes against your back / bumps into you. The contents of your pockets / your bag have disappeared.

What to do?

Always carry your valuables in a safe place (ex. Money belt) underneath your clothes. Don't have large amounts of cash in your pocket / bag. Wear backpack / bag on the front of your body.

6 People lurking at the bus terminal / café / outside hostel

Someone distracts you, asking for directions, telling you their life story etc., while someone else snatches your bag.

What to do?

Always have one eye on your belongings. Try not to travel alone. Make a habit of hooking your leg / arm through the strap of your bag.

7 The extra – long bus ride

You are on the bus and the person next to you, asks you to open their drink. You oblige, and being polite, the person offers you a little. You take a swig and hours later you wake up in a daze, having been drugged with no belongings; even your shoes are gone.

What to do?

Never accept drinks or food from strangers.

CULTURAL DO'S AND DON'TS

It is almost certain that one of the reasons you are coming to Bolivia is its culture. Bolivian culture is still a vibrant part of everyday life and the innumerable festivals and remote small villages will allow you to experience it firsthand.

However, as any culture, Bolivia may at times irritate or disturb you because it is different from what you are use to. You may find the poverty or treatment of domestic animals disturbing or be frustrated by Bolivians' lack of punctuality. It is very important that you try to gain a respect for, and understanding of, the cultural differences. One way to do this is to read about Bolivia before you come.

Here are a few tips for lessening that culture shock and helping you figure out some common social situations.

- Greeting is an important part of Bolivian culture one should always acknowledge all the people in a room when you enter or leave it. You can do this by looking at each person and saying buenos días/tardes/noches, shaking hands or by a simple kiss on the right cheek.
- It is considered rude to stretch, yawn or burp in front of someone.
- If there is a mat or rag in a doorway take the hint and use it to clean your feet.
- If someone is eating and leave the table you should say “provecho” – “permiso” and if it is said to you, respond with “gracias”. The same “permiso” should be used when you enter or leave a group or meeting.

- Bolivians are in general, are quiet people so be aware of the volume of your voice especially when in groups of foreigners
- Drinking is a part of almost all fiestas, weddings, baptisms and even Todos Santos and Bolivians can often times be very insistent that you join in. If you don't feel up to having a few cups with them it may be best not to go attend the event. It may work to say you are mal de estomago (sick) or pregnant but the social pressure will still be there.

THINGS TO BRING

Light-weight fast drying clothing which is easy to wash is ideal. Layers are most flexible with the climate. When you pack remember LESS is MORE, many people wish they hadn't brought so many clothes. If you forget something or need an extra sweater, good quality clothing is cheap and easily available in Bolivia.

We recommend that you bring the following:

- Lightweight layerable clothing
- Jacket and sweater
- Bath towel
- Comfortable walking shoes (tough to find shoes larger than 42)
- Rain gear
- Small knapsack
- Tampons (expensive) and contraceptives if necessary
- Camera
- Extra film or memory chip
- Money Belt
- Swimsuit
- Insect repellent
- Sun screen lotion 30 factor
- Sunglasses
- A good sun hat
- Flashlight
- Medical supplies (including antiseptic, aspirin, charcoal, Imodium/Lomotil, lip and nose moisturizer)

RESOURCES

Travel Guides

- Lonely Planet: Bolivia
- Footprints, Bolivia Handbook
- Rough Guide to Bolivia

General history/information

- A Concise History of Bolivia, **Herbert Klein**.
- The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Ché Guevara and Other Captured Documents, **Ernesto Guevara with Daniel James ed.**

- We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines, **J Nash**, a classic study of miners in Bolivia.
- Llamas, Weavings and Organic Chocolate: Multicultural Grassroots Development in the Andes and Amazon of Bolivia, **Kevin Healy**, An interesting overview of development in Bolivia especially the first four chapters.
- Teetering on the Rim: Global Restructuring, Daily Life, and the Armed Retreat of the Bolivian State, **Leslie Gill**.
- Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Globalization and Social Resistance by **Ben Kohl and Linda Farthing**, Zed Press, London 2006.
- Whispering in the Giants Ear by **William Powers**, 2006.
- The Price of Fire-Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia by **Benjamin Dangle**, 2007.