

Chapter II

Preparation for Your Trip

For many travelers, preparing for a trip can actually be fun. It gives them a chance to productively channel their nervous energy and learn something about their destination at the same time. Since Bolivia is a third world country, the amount of time and effort invested in preparation is likely to pay off two or three fold once you arrive in-country. The return on investment will manifest itself as a more enjoyable, interesting, affordable, and problem-free travel experience. In the following section, we are going to address of each of the topics listed below:

Airline Tickets	Immigration Procedures
Car Rentals	Internet Connectivity
Clothing and Shoes	Language Schools and Culture
Eating in Bolivia	Luggage Issues
Electrical Appliances	Money Matters
Gratuities, Tips, and Taxes	Reading and Research
Hotel Reservations	Responsible Tourism
Weather and Climate	Telecommunications

Airline Tickets

Airfare is almost certainly going to be the greatest expense of your trip to Bolivia. If Bolivia is your only South American destination, expect to pay between \$550 USD to \$700 USD for a roundtrip coach ticket between Miami to La Paz or Santa Cruz. Miami is the airline gateway from the USA to South America. Miami is also a stopover and connection point for many flights from Europe.

The two carriers that make the Miami to Bolivia run are Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) and American Airlines. LAB tends to have slightly cheaper fares than American but American is consistently superior in service and dependability.

American Airlines

www.aa.com

Tel. (800) 433-7300 (English)
Tel. (800) 633-3711 (Español)
Tel. (800) 237-0027 (Japanese)
Tel. (800) 492-8095 (Mandarin)
Tel. (800) 543-1586 (TDD)

Lloyd Aereo Boliviano

www.labairlines.com

Tel. (800) 337-1018

If you travel with American Airlines, you may board your return flight in either La Paz or Santa Cruz at no extra cost as long as this arrangement is made at the time you purchase your ticket. American also has direct flights to Sao Paulo, Brazil from Dallas-Fort Worth.

Several airlines, but not American, connect Sao Paulo with Santa Cruz and La Paz (e.g. Varig, LAB, and GOL).

For passengers coming from the western part of the USA and Canada or traveling from Asia or Australia/New Zealand via the western USA, one alternative route is LAN Airlines' flight between Los Angeles and Lima, Peru with a connection on to Bolivia. There is also Mexicana Airlines' service between several cities in the western USA to Mexico City with a connection to Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The major inconvenience with these routes is the long layover associated with connecting flights. If however you plan a visit to Mexico City or Lima, the problem is eliminated.

LAN

www.lan.com

Tel. (866) 435-9526

Mexicana de Aviación

www.mexicana.com

Tel. (800) 531-7921

If you are planning a multi-country South American adventure, be advised that there are flights between La Paz and Santa Cruz, Bolivia and most other major South American cities such as Caracas, Buenos Aires, Lima, Cuzco, Santiago, Asunción, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

If purchasing a round trip ticket between the USA and Bolivia, we recommend that you make your airline reservations directly with the carrier. This can be done over the telephone or Internet. If you plan to travel to other countries in South America, before or after a visit to Bolivia, and your itinerary will involve more than one airline, we suggest you seek the assistance of a travel agent.

Note that Bolivian immigration laws require that foreign visitors pre-purchase their outbound flight tickets as a condition of receiving an entrance permit.

Airline Reservations

Since the airlines ceased providing travel agencies with commissions, many travel agents no longer provide customized flight and hotel reservations for individual customers. Additionally, very few USA agencies are familiar with Bolivia. Tour agencies continue to arrange flights but, almost always, as part of a tour package that may include unwanted and expensive add-ons.

The airport codes for Bolivia's main cities are (1) La Paz =LPB, (2) Cochabamba = CBB, and (3) Santa Cruz = VVI.

Car Rental

Vehicles may be rented in any of Bolivia's larger cities. It is best to have a four-wheel-drive jeep or sports utility vehicle (SUV) if you are planning to venture into the rural countryside.

Renting a vehicle in Bolivia will likely cost you 25 to 50 percent more than the equivalent rental in the USA or Europe. In addition, driving in Bolivia is complicated. Navigating in the cities is almost impossible for a novice driver. Country roads are treacherous and signage

almost non-existent. Yet, renting a vehicle allows you to visit some of the more difficult-to-reach but fascinating areas of the country and to do so on your own schedule.

Expect a bit of red tape when renting a vehicle. You will need to present your passport, a credit card, and your home country driver's license.

Although not required, an International Driving Permit can be helpful when renting and car or passing through highway police checkpoints. A permit may be obtained from the American Automobile Association at the cost of approximately \$10 USD. Contact the AAA at: <http://www.csa.com/travel/internationaldrivingpermit/0,1445,1003040700,00.html>.

When renting a vehicle we recommend that you consider obtaining the services of a driver (referred to in Bolivian Spanish as a *chofer*). Car rental agencies will charge between \$30 USD and \$60 USD a day to assign one of their drivers. You can also book a driver independently for about \$30 USD to \$50 USD a day depending on the nature of the trip and whether *per diem* (food and lodging) is part of the contract.

Clothing and Shoes

If you are spending time in La Paz, Cochabamba or other highland areas, bring some warm clothing. Generally, a blouse/shirt and sweater combination along with a warm coat will do nicely. For inclement weather, add another layer with a rainproof windbreaker. For sleeping, we suggest warm pajamas or a sweatshirt and pants. This type of clothing is also useful in Santa Cruz during the winter (June-August).

While in the highlands, you will probably want to purchase one or two llama, alpaca, or vicuña articles of clothing such as sweaters, shawls, vests, or hats. These and related items are sold at bargain prices. They will make a nice compliment to your wardrobe while traveling in Bolivia and then next winter back home.

In Santa Cruz for most of the year, you will need light clothing appropriate for the very warm and humid weather that is common in this tropical climate. Even here however, you sometimes will need a light raincoat.

Wherever you go in Bolivia, a good pair of walking shoes is a must. Dark colors are more versatile and will allow you to blend into local crowds without drawing attention.

Eating in Bolivia

In general, Bolivians sit down to eat five times a day. We recommend that visitors take advantage of this custom while in Bolivia.

Breakfast – *El Desayuno*

The morning meal is usually served from around 6:00 to 9:30. Most Bolivians are satisfied with bread, pastries, fruit, cheese, and coffee. Tourist hotels and some restaurants and coffee shops now offer American and British type breakfasts with eggs, meats, pancakes and the like.

Quirky Bolivian Coffee

Bolivia is a coffee producing country but to foreigners, the way in which coffee is served results in a split decision regarding its aroma and taste.

At breakfast, a guest in a house or a customer at a restaurant is likely to be confronted by three thermos bottles, one with coffee extract, one with hot water, and a third with hot milk. You are supposed to mix the three fluids proportionately to your gusto. Most Bolivians create a concoction that is nearly half milk, one-sixth extract, and one-third water. At other meals, the mixing is limited to just the coffee extract and water.

Morning Snack - *La Merienda*

Around 10:30 a *merienda* or snack is taken. The most popular food at this time is the famous *Salteña*, a pastry filled with meats and vegetables, of Bolivian origin even if it has an Argentine name. *Salteñas* come in a regular and a spicy version referred to as *picante*. Competing with *Salteñas* are the extremely popular *Empanadas Tucumanas*, hearty meat pies that are really from Argentina. Bolivians commonly have a soda, tea, or coffee as part of the morning *merienda*.

Lunch – *El Almuerzo*

Lunch is the main meal of the day. About two thirds of Bolivian workers still make the traditional trek home for lunch which is followed by a siesta. This consumes the time period between 12:00 and 15:00 each afternoon. These refreshed workers return to their place of work until 19:00. A growing minority of office staff now follow an *horario continuo*, meaning that they take only a half hour lunch, usually at a fast food or fixed-menu location away from home, and then work until approximately 17:30 in the evening.

By the way, when you see a sign at a restaurant that says "*Almuerzo*", note that it not only means that the restaurant serves lunch but that they have available fixed-menu plates discounted at a set price. Such *almuerzos* represent terrific bargains in most cases. Expect to pay between \$1.50 USD to \$4.00 USD. Many of the nicer restaurants will let you choose between two or three entrées. Of course, if you don't like any of these choices, you can always select *a la carte* from the menu at the regular price.

Lunch is an elaborate meal that usually begins with the *entrada*, a starter dish that is generally a small salad or appetizer. This is followed by a *caldo* or hearty Bolivian soup. The main course is referred to as the *segundo* or second dish and is commonly a pasta, fish, or meat *entrée*. To finish off the meal a small desert (*postre*) is served along with coffee or tea.

Afternoon Tea - *El Té*

Around 17:00 in the afternoon, a proper tea is served in many coffee shops and salons. Office workers are served at their desks. The *Té* consists of small sandwiches or other appetizers and pastries along with coffee or tea. Bolivians, who have some free time, tend to go to a teahouse, coffee shop, ice cream parlor, or a bakery to enjoy their teatime.

Dinner – *La Cena*

On regular weekdays, dinner is not of any special importance to most Bolivians. Around 19:30 a light meal is served in most homes and smaller crowds migrate toward restaurants. If anything, after work, many Bolivians are more likely to end up in a pub, a snack bar, or coffee shop rather than a full service restaurant.

Dinner offerings at restaurants tend to be similar to the *entrées* served at lunchtime. Don't expect however to be served an *entrada*, *caldo*, or even desert unless ordered *a la carte*. Most restaurants do not offer a fixed menu at dinnertime except on special occasions.

While restaurants are not especially busy during weekday evenings, the situation is much different on weekends. Expect crowds Friday through Sunday brunch with Friday evening being the busiest time of the entire week. Reservations may be needed at the more popular establishments.

Bolivian Food

Bolivianos like spicy foods, potatoes, bread, rice, and meat. Overall, Bolivians tend to follow a *criollo* diet, heavily influenced on one hand by European cuisine, especially Spanish, and on the other by indigenous foods especially Quechua, Aymara, and Guarani.

At every meal, a small bowl of Ilaqwa (Quechua) or jallpawayk'a (Aymara), a salsa made from the *locoto chile* plant will be placed on the table. Use sparingly unless you are a *chile* buff.

Bolivians eat a variety of vegetables especially different types of potatoes, some of which are freeze-dried according to Incan traditions (*chuño* and *tunta* for example). After all, the potato is native to the Andes. Other tuber crops such as *yuca* and *oca* are also popular.

Fruits are another staple and some are quite exotic. Besides papaya, guava, and mangos, try *cherimoya*, a custard-like white tropical fruit or tunas, the bud of a cactus plant.

Meat dishes are plentiful and varied. Besides typical European cuts of meat, Bolivians also partake of indigenous recipes made with goat, sheep, guinea pig, llama, jerky, and wild game of all sorts as well as Andean trout and various lake and river varieties of fish.

Electrical Appliances

Unlike the United States, most of Bolivia runs on 220 volts (220V) rather than 110V. To confuse things a bit, many buildings in La Paz have both 220V and 110V outlets if they were constructed before 1995. Be careful with this because the outlets are not always clearly labeled, Plugging into the wrong voltage may not only give you a shock but could also burn your appliance to a crisp.

If you wish to take an 110V appliance with you to Bolivia such as an electric shaver or tooth brush, you'll need to purchase a converter and an adapter set. The converter should be a step down type that converts 220V to 110V. The adapter kit is a set of plugs with different shaped prongs (round and flat) to fit various electrical outlets. Don't expect all step down converters to work with heavy load appliances such as hair dryers.

Gratuities, Tips, and Taxes

Travelers are expected to tip airport baggage handlers as well as hotel porters. The going rate is approximately \$1 USD for a couple of bags. Waiters can be tipped up to 10 percent based on quality of service. Many patrons leave just small change, \$5 BS or so. Taxi drivers

usually keep the change of a peso or two. Remember to leave something for the hotel maid service. The amount of \$5 BS for each night stayed is about right.

Taxes are an almost unnoticeable nuisance for tourists in Bolivia. There is an airport departure tax of \$15 BS for domestic flights and \$25 USD for international flights. The fee must be paid, and your ticket or boarding pass stamped accordingly, before you are allowed into the boarding area.

Finally, a 15 percent, value-added tax is tacked on to airline tickets, restaurant checks, and hotel bills.

Health Matters

Health is your most important asset at home or on the road. But on a trip, poor health can absolutely ruin what otherwise would be a uniquely enjoyable and productive time. A few simple precautions before your departure will contribute to a healthful and happy visit to Bolivia.

Immunizations

The following vaccinations are recommended for adults by medical agencies such as the Health Unit of the U.S. Embassy in La Paz and Kaiser Permanente Travel Clinics in the USA via their subcontractor, TRAVAX. Of course, not all visitors to Bolivia need all of the recommended immunizations.

Cholera: No longer recommended.

Hepatitis A: Initial shot and two boosters at three and six month intervals.

Hepatitis B: Series of 3 shots. This form of Hepatitis is transmitted by blood, contaminated needles, and through sexual contact.

Influenza: Annual vaccinations especially for individuals older than 50 years and those with compromising medical conditions.

Malaria Prophylaxis: Strongly recommended to those who plan to spend time in the rural eastern lowland areas of the *Oriente* of Bolivia.

Measles: Recommended for those travelers born after 1957 without a history of the disease.

Pneumonia: Recommended for adults over 65 years and those with a chronic disease or compromising medical condition.

Polio: One booster per lifetime for adults immunized initially as children.

Rabies: Pre-exposure application for those in close contact with animals that are known carriers.

Tetanus/Diphtheria: A booster every 10 years. A reapplication is recommended after a contaminated wound occurs after a period of more than 5 years beyond the most recent booster.

Tuberculosis: Skin test recommended annually but certainly after international travel.

Typhoid: An injection or 4 oral capsules every 5 years.

Varicella: Commonly known as Chicken Pox. A vaccination should be considered for long-term travelers with no history of the disease.

Yellow Fever: Required every 10 years.

Notice Regarding Yellow Fever

At this time, the only immunization required by the Bolivian and U.S. immigration services is the Yellow Fever vaccination. Technically, this is required if you visit infested areas. Yellow Fever immunizations must be administered at least ten days before travel.

We advise you to share this list of recommended vaccinations with your personal physician. Your doctor, based on your current health conditions, will advise you of the best course of action.

Yellow Card

Vaccinations should be registered on the International Certificate of Vaccination form known as the "Yellow Card". This document is approved by the World Health Organization and should be kept with your passport.

In the USA, Yellow Cards can be obtained from the U.S. Government Online Bookstore (<http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>), Tel. (866) 512-1800 (Toll-free), Superintendent of Documents, Post Office Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954. The cost is \$1.25 each. Request form PHS-731 (Rev. 11-91), Stock No. 017-001-00483-9.

Medications

If currently taking a prescription medication (Rx), make sure you bring a sufficient supply to cover the duration of your trip.

Additionally we recommend that you bring along at least the following over-the-counter items:

- Aspirin or equivalent pain reliever
- Sun block (SPF of 15+ recommended)
- Chap stick
- Insect repellent
- Antibacterial cream and band aids
- Imodium or equivalent
- Hygienic cleansing towels
- Tissues (Kleenex type)

In addition you might want to consider contact lens supplies, eye drops, skin lotions, and other cosmetics.

High Altitude

A majority of travelers have some physical reaction to the high altitude of places such as La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí. Bouts of shortness of breath and insomnia are common during the first few days at altitudes greater than 8,500 feet. In fact, many travelers suffer from altitude-induced headaches and intestinal discomfort. Remember, in the high altitude less oxygen is circulated in the blood stream. The brain and intestines, lacking the normal allocation of this essential element, function at a sub par level.

There are several things you can do to lesson the symptoms. Drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol and caffeine. Eat lightly for the first few days, especially in the evening. During this initial period, avoid strenuous activity. Locals claim that coca tea or *mate de coca* is a good remedy for *soroche* or mild mountain sickness. Ironically, younger people, from the ages of 18 to 30 tend to experience altitude effects more severely than healthy older adults.

The U.S. Embassy Health Unit in La Paz notes that some travelers are able to reduce altitude effects with a medication such as Diamox (Acetazolamine), which is known to facilitate adjustment. Again, check with your personal physician before you travel.

If you have any health condition that might be aggravated by the high altitude, make sure that you consult your physician well before travel. You might also consider a multi-day stopover in Cochabamba (approximately 8,000 feet) before coming to La Paz and other highland locations. Take note, the airport in El Alto de La Paz surpasses 4,000 m (12,000 feet).

Hotel Reservations

Because most airline and hotel chains no longer pay commissions for bookings, many travel agencies do not handle hotel arrangements for individual travelers. Tour agencies will book hotels and other services for you as part of a “package” deal but in some cases, at relatively steeper prices.

For example, many tours charge as much as \$50 USD per person for “transfers” to and from the airport. Yet a taxi ride with luggage may cost the average traveler less that \$15 USD per carload (3-4 people). You can probably book a four star hotel in Bolivia for less than \$80 USD while the same room may cost as much as \$120 USD as part of a tour. If you do book a tour, ask for an itemized breakdown of costs and then deselect expensive items where you think you can get a better price on your own.

We recommend the following steps to obtain confirmed hotel reservations at a fair price:

- A. Contact the hotel of interest, preferably by e-mail or, if necessary, by FAX to request a quote for the type of accommodations you require on your projected dates of travel. If you do not get a prompt response (within 48 hours) and are still interested in the particular hotel, call on a weekday between the hours of 7:00 to 17:00 Eastern Standard Time.
- B. Once you determine that the room rate and type of accommodation are acceptable and available, proceed with the reservation. Make sure to request that a written confirmation be sent to you via email or FAX.

- C. Avoid paying a deposit if possible. If the hotel requires a credit card number to confirm a reservation, guarantee only the first night of your stay. If you are required to provide a credit card number, submit it over the telephone or via FAX. Never transmit your number via e-mail since this mode of communication is not secure.

A final tip on making hotel reservations in Bolivia, some properties provide the opportunity to make arrangements online, either at their own Web site or at a generic travel consolidator's site. While these Web sites are secure enough to complete the transaction, there are other problems. Sometimes the hotel's Web site will not offer the best rates or the information may be out dated. However, if you do decide to make an online reservation in this fashion, follow up with a call or e-mail directly to the hotel on the next day and request a written confirmation.

There are exceptions to this rule, The Radisson Plaza Hotel in La Paz and the Best Western House Inn in Santa Cruz are franchises of USA hotel chains. Their Web sites are well maintained and the chains reliably offer their lowest prices online.

Immigration Procedures

Citizens of the USA and many other countries who travel to Bolivia for leisure purposes for a period of less than 90 days need only a Visitor's Card Entrance (*Entrada*) Permit. If you are entering Bolivia by air, the flight attendants will ask you to complete a Visitor Card application during the trip. If you are entering by land, you will be asked to fill out the form at the border station. In either case, when you pass through immigration, the Servicio de Migración authorities will stamp your passport and insert the receipt from the application. Collectively, these constitute your Visitor Card Entrance Permit or *Entrada*. Keep the document safe. It will be collected by immigration when you leave Bolivia.

The permit is alternatively valid for 30, 60, or commonly, 90 days. If you are planning an extended stay, request the 90-day *Entrada*. Otherwise you will end up making a visit to the Servicio de Migración to renew your *Entrada*. At the present time, there is no charge for an extension.

One requirement of the *Entrada* is that foreign visitors pre-purchase their outbound plane ticket or have sufficient funds available to cover bus or train fare out of the country.

Technically, foreigners are required to keep their passport on their person at all times. When carrying your passport, consider placing it in a particularly safe location such as in your money belt. It is a good idea to make a photocopy of all key passport pages and other immigration documents (Yellow Card and *Entrada*, etc). Stow away one copy and carry another around with you. In fact, copies may be requested when purchasing an airline ticket or exchanging large sums of money at a bank or *casa de cambios*.

If you are traveling to Bolivia for business, study, or for purposes other than leisure, you should probably check with the nearest Bolivian consulate or embassy in your home country before traveling. This is also true if you are not traveling with a USA passport. In some cases, you may be required to apply for a different category of visa. This type of transaction could take anywhere from a minimum of 30 to 60 days.

Canada

Bolivian Embassy of Canada
130 Albert Street, Suite 416
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5G4
Tel. (613) 236-5730
FAX (613) 236-8237
bolivianembassy@bellnet.ca

Bolivian Consulate General
2010 Russet Way
Vancouver, BC V7V 3B4
Tel. (604) 922-3474
FAX (604) 922-3432
colivian-vancouver@shaw.ca

There are also Bolivian consulates located in Montreal (418-688-3063), Quebec (514-421-0033, and Edmonton (780-447-1177).

USA

Bolivian Embassy
3014 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C 20008
Tel. (202) 483-4410
FAX (202) 328-3712
<http://www.bolivia-usa.org/>

Bolivian Consulate General
2120 L Street, NW, Suite 335
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel. (202) 232-4827
FAX (202) 232-8017
consulgeneral@bolivia-usa.org

Bolivian Consulate General
1101 Brickell Ave., North Tower, Ste 1103
Miami, FL 33131
Tel. (305) 358-6303
FAX (305) 358-6305
consbolmia@attglobal.net

Bolivian Consulate General
211 East 43rd Street, Suite 702
New York, NY 10017
Tel. (212) 687-0530
FAX (212) 687-0532
coliviannyork@verizon.net

Bolivian Consulate General
3701 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1065
Los Angeles, CA 90010
Tel. (213) 388-0475
FAX (213) 384-6272
cbolivia@sbcglobal.net

Internet Connectivity

While in Bolivia, the easiest and most economical means to communicate with friends, family, and office is through the Internet. Access to computers and the Internet is readily available throughout all the larger cities and towns in Bolivia. Look for signs that say Punto Entel, Punto Cotel, Viva or simply Internet. For approximately \$.50 USD cents you can spend an hour checking your e-mail, surfing the net, or writing a letter. Some cyber locations even provide net-to-phone service.

If you don't have an e-mail account that can be accessed from a remote computer, just sign up for a free e-mail account with a service such as Yahoo.Com or Hotmail.Com. You can do this before or during your trip.

Home Contact Information

Don't forget to bring a list of important telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. These may be needed in an emergency. Also consider bringing some pre-addressed mailing labels. These come in handy when sending postcards and letters back home.

Language and Culture

While Spanish is used as the language of wider communication in Bolivia, Quechua, Aymara, and Guarani are also official languages. In the larger cities, with the exception of El Alto, almost everyone speaks Spanish or is at least bilingual to some extent. In the rural areas, travelers are more likely to encounter monolingual speakers of indigenous languages.

Since approximately 80 percent of Bolivians have an indigenous heritage, this means that most are speaking Spanish as their second language and that, in addition, they are speaking in a dialect or variety of Spanish associated with the Andean highlands. Very few have had any significant exposure to English. Except for workers in the tourist industry (e.g., hotel clerks and taxi drivers), it is rare to find a Bolivian who is accustomed to using "foreigner talk" when communicating with international visitors.

For many travelers, a Spanish-English dictionary will help bridge language barriers. Another possibility is to use a phrase book. These types of publications focus on the typical communication needs of travelers. A particularly good choice is Lonely Planet's **Latin American Spanish Phrase Book**. It informs readers of the varieties of Spanish spoken in the Americas.

Remember also that indigenous cultures differ in many ways from mainstream Spanish-American heritages, which are more Europeanized in nature. The Indians tend to be reserved, less assertive, and less direct in their communication style. In an effort to please strangers, they may answer in the affirmative even if they know it is not the most accurate response. Be patient when attempting to communicate and of course, always be polite.

Luggage Issues

Airline Allowances

American Airlines permits each passenger to bring three pieces of luggage on flights to and from Bolivia, two checked bags and a smaller carry-on. Each checked piece must not weigh more than 50 lbs and nor have total dimensions (height + width + length) that exceed 62 inches. The carry-on bag should not have dimensions greater than 45 inches nor weigh more than 40 lbs. Check for updates at www.aa.com before traveling

LAB also permits one carry-on and two checked bags but the dimensions vary. Between Bolivia and the USA, a passenger (tourist class) may take one carry-on bag not to exceed 7 kg and 115 centimeters. Two checked bags are permitted up to a total of 60 kg as long as an individual piece does not weigh more than 30 kg. The dimensions of a bag may not surpass 158 centimeters. Check for updates at www.labairlines.com.

Packing Your Bags

Besides your regular clothing and personal items, what else should you bring on your trip to Bolivia? Consider the following:

- A comfortable pair of hardy, skid resistant walking shoes
- A rain coat or waterproof windbreaker
- Flip flops for use in the shower
- A small Spanish/English travel dictionary
- If planning on an outing to the rural areas, a warm sleeping bag
- A small flashlight
- A travel alarm clock
- A stylish hat
- A couple of hand towels
- A camera with an ample supply of film and an extra set of batteries
- Ear plugs (if a light sleeper)
- A few large zip lock bags for dirty cloths and souvenir purchases.

Money Matters

This is one area of your trip that requires careful attention. During your stay in Bolivia you will need to have access to cash to cover the costs of food, lodging, transportation, and shopping. Following are some recommendations regarding the options available to access your funds in Bolivia.

ATM Cards

Make sure you take an ATM card that is linked to either the VISA or MasterCard networks. ATMs (called *Cajeros Automáticos*) are located plentifully in every major city in shopping areas, at banks, and in some major hotels. The ATM exchange rate (USA dollars to *pesos bolivianos*) is the best available. Most ATMs are bilingual and dispense cash in \$USD or \$BS (dollars or *pesos bolivianos*). The maximum withdrawal is limited at approximately \$200 USD per day or \$1,600 BS.

The issuer of your ATM card will assess a service charge of between \$ 1 USD to \$2.50 USD or more for each transaction. Banks seem to charge the most and credit unions and savings and loans slightly less. Because of these transaction fees, you may want to make larger but fewer withdrawals.

Cash and Money Belt

It's not a bad idea to bring along several hundred dollars in cash. This is the simplest form of having readily exchangeable funds on hand. The problem of course is safety. While money and other valuables can be locked in a suitcase or placed in a hotel safe, most visitors will want to keep a tidy sum on their person as a convenience. Petty crime is a problem in Bolivia, and pick pocketing and purse snatching of foreigners are not uncommon. It is a good idea to purchase a money belt that can be worn under a sweater, blouse or shirt.

Travelers' & Personal Checks

It is extremely difficult to cash a personal check in Bolivia; however, we recommend you bring a few along in case of an emergency.

Some banks, money exchanges (*casas de cambio*), and some hotels accept travelers' checks. Most agencies charge a one to four percent commission for cashing traveler's checks into dollars but may waive or reduce the commission if you request *pesos bolivianos*. We recommend that you take several hundred dollars worth of traveler's checks as a reserve source of funds.

Credit Cards

Use your credit card for larger expenses with major businesses. For example, a credit card is useful for paying hotels, car rental agencies, and airlines or travel agents. Again, because of transaction fees overseas, credit cards are less useful for paying smaller amounts such as shopping purchases and restaurant bills.

Make sure you have a pin number so that you can also use your credit card for cash advances at an ATM if needed in an emergency. You can also obtain a cash advance in person with a credit card at some branches of major banks (e.g. Banco de Santa Cruz). In this case, the bank officials will ask to see your passport. In most cases, there are significant (\$5 USD or more) USA bank charges for international cash advances. Remember to pay off your cash advance in the following month. Credit card interest on cash advances is on of the highest rates around.

Small Change, Torn Bills, and Freelancers

Small change is a minor crisis in Bolivia. Small businesses such as taxis, stores, and restaurants rarely have sufficient change on hand

Watch out. We are not talking about centavos but rather, small peso notes. Five, ten, and even twenty peso notes are a premium. Try to keep as many on hand as possible. Banks, hotels, supermarkets, larger restaurants, and the post office are much more likely to break larger bills and return the exact change whenever you make a significant purchase. Many vendors and businesses will not accept bills in poor condition (torn, ripped, and tattered). This is usually just an inconvenience however. Larger businesses and banks will usually accept worn bills.

Around the main plazas of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, you will notice freelance moneychangers on the street corners. Generally there is no problem with these human ATMs. They provide competitive rates. But there may be a few in the bunch who are unscrupulous and may attempt to short change you or try to pass off counterfeit bills. It's safest to stick to ATMs, banks, and *casas de cambio*.

Financial Emergency Telephone Numbers

For any urgent issue related to an ATM or credit cards in Bolivia, call 800-10-3060 or as a backup try MasterCard at Tel. 800-10-0172 or Visa at Tel. 800-10-0188.

Readings and Research

You will enjoy and benefit from your visit to Bolivia much more if you learn something about this Andean country before you travel. Armed with some background knowledge of Bolivia, once you arrive in-country, you will be able to appreciate the sights and sounds much more profoundly.

Our directory, *Instant Bolivia*, is a good starting point. This chapter as well as the others contained in our directory will provide you with much of the information you will need to have an enjoyable, safe, and affordable trip to Bolivia. Still, it would be unprofessional of us to ignore the value of other guidebooks. **Lonely Planet**, **Footprint**, and **Rough Guides** produce excellent publications with considerable background information on Bolivia. We suggest that you review at least one of these guides before you travel to Bolivia. You can obtain a copy at your local library or order a used or new edition over the Internet. These guides are comprehensive in their coverage of the history of Bolivia, background notes, and things to see and do. They are especially valuable if you plan to spend a week or more in country. *Instant Bolivia* makes an excellent adjunct to any of the major guidebooks.

In addition to the material contained in travel guides, we recommend that you learn something about the historical, social, and contemporary political conditions in Bolivia. For that purpose, we recommend *Bolivia: the background, the issues, the people* by Oxfam International and *A Concise History of Bolivia* by Herbert S. Klein. Both of these publications identify the most relevant topics and present them in a very understandable and readable manner. All of the publications mentioned in this section are available at Amazon.Com.

Responsible Tourism

As a pro-social organization, Bolivia Today makes every effort to promote the well being of Bolivia and Bolivians. In this context, we tend to practice the following:

- Work with other travel professionals who have a pro-social orientation.
- Tend to be mindful of how the travel industry affects the ecology and economy of Bolivia.
- Promote whenever possible the economic development of Bolivia's poorest people, the rural and urban indigenous populations.
- Respect and support Bolivia's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.
- Support and promote eco-friendly and indigenous-run micro-enterprise business initiatives.
- Donate at least 10 percent of our proceeds to economic micro-enterprise development targeting indigenous groups.

Visitor Participation

As a visitor to Bolivia, there are several things you can do to support good works in the country.

First, pay attention to the companies we recommend. Many of the travel businesses are involved in or supporters of ecological initiatives. Secondly, almost all of the *artesanías* (handicraft stores) listed in our guide are established as coops that are operated by or practice fair trade with indigenous groups. Patronize these types of businesses whenever possible.

Try to be conscious of authentic assistance. While walking the streets of any Bolivian city or around the plaza of a rural village, you will likely encounter beggars of the most desperate kind. While your heart will tug at you, resist giving money to them, especially if they are children. Sometimes, family members or con men send out youngsters (kids who should be

in school) to beg for *limosnas* (*donations*) from foreigners. Instead, make up your mind to do something more constructive. As a thank you to the Bolivian people for the opportunity to travel in their country, reward them in general by making a donation to one of the organizations listed in this guide, organizations that make a significant difference in the current lives and future prospects of Bolivia's poor.

Our favorite organization is Amigos de Bolivia y Perú (www.amigosdeboliviayperu.org/kantuta.htm), an association of returned Peace Corps Volunteers from these Andean countries. The Amigos organization sponsors Kantuta Projects as an independent adjunct to Peace Corps' developmental priorities in the Andes.

Telecommunications

As recently as a few years ago, a call between Bolivia and USA required the assistance of an operator and cost well over \$1 USD per minute. The situation has improved greatly but there are still a few tricks to this trade.

When calling from the USA you must first enter 011 to obtain an international line. Then dial 591, the country code for Bolivia. Next you must enter the city code (e.g., 2 for La Paz, 4 for Cochabamba, and 3 for Santa Cruz). Finally enter the seven- digit landline number or eight-digit cell phone number. For example, to call La Paz enter:

011 – 591 – 2 – Seven digit local number

International Plans

If you are a customer of MCI, AT&T or other major telephone service providers in the USA, Canada, the UK, Japan, and some other countries, you can sign up for an international plan that will allow you to call between Bolivia and your home for as little as \$.33 USD cents a minute. Calls from Bolivia to other locations in your home country are a bit more (e.g., \$.46 USD cents per minute in the USA). Plan operators in Bolivia can be reached at the following toll-free numbers:

AT&T	800-1111
Canada Teleglobe	800-0034
MCI	800-2222
Sprint	800-3333
UK-BT	800-0044
Japan KDD	800-0081



Calling Cards

Based on our research the best telephone rates for calls to and from Bolivia can be obtained through the purchase of a calling card. Cards can be purchased from a number of companies. One of the best choices is the **Enjoy Prepaid Cards** by Nobel Cards (www.enjoyprepaid.com).

Calls to Bolivia

The charge per minute for calls from the USA to Bolivia is incredibly cheap, around \$.10 USD cents. You can purchase various cards with differing conditions (rounding off and

maintenance rates) with assessments between \$.08 USD cents and \$.12 USD cents per minute. Cards are sold in various denominations and can be refilled over the Internet or telephone.

The procedure to call Bolivia is simple.

- Dial the calling card access number. This is usually a toll free number.
- Then enter a PIN given to you at the time of purchase of your card.
- Finally, enter the international access codes, country code, city code, and then the seven-digit land line or eight-digit cell phone number. For instance to call Bolivia Today's office in La Paz from the USA you would enter:

011-591-2-706-58608

Calls from Bolivia

To call the USA or other countries from Bolivia using a calling card, the procedures are different but similar. The rates however, are much higher, around \$.60 USD cents or higher per minute.

- First dial the card company's access number in Bolivia
- Wait for a tone and then enter your PIN
- Then enter the international code, country or area code, and seven-digit number. For example, to call Bolivia Today's USA office the sequence would be:

1-916-743-7512

Because of the significant expense many travelers keep calls from Bolivia to a minimum and even then, very brief. One way to do this is to buy a calling card and share the PIN number of the card with friends and family. Ask them to call you periodically. You can also call them from Bolivia and ask them to immediately call you back using the calling card for both calls. This will save you a bundle. You can easily monitor and manage your calling card via the Internet.

Enjoy Prepaid by Nobel

To purchase an Enjoy Prepaid Card, go to the Nobel Calling Card Website at www.nobel.com or www.enjoyprepaid.com.



Bolivian Carriers

The major public telephone service providers in Bolivia are ENTEL, VIVA, and COTEL. You may make local and international telephone calls and send FAX messages from any central phone office or smaller franchised kiosks that are located conveniently throughout the major cities and larger towns. ENTEL sponsored kiosks are called *Puntos ENTEL*. Many telephone kiosks also provide Internet access.

Simply inform the clerk of the type of call you wish to make and he/she will direct you to a booth. There, the time and amount of charge of your call will be clearly displayed on a monitor. Expect to pay around \$.50 to \$.80 USD cents per minute to call the USA.

To call from one city to another within Bolivia, dial 0 for an interurban line, then the single-digit city code, and finally the seven-digit landline or eight-digit cell phone number you are calling.

City	Code
Bermejo	4
Caranavi	2
Cobija	3
Cochabamba	4
Guayaramerín	3
La Paz	2
Oruro	2
Potosi	2
Riberalta	3
Santa Ana	3
Santa Cruz	3
Sucre	4
Tarija	4
Trinidad	3
Villazón	2
Yacuiba	4

[Telephone Codes – Major Bolivian Cities]

Time

In Bolivia, the 24-hour clock is used, mainly in writing. Newspaper announcements, government notices, and signs will show afternoon and evening times as 13:00 hours (1:00 p.m.) through 24:00 (midnight). Thus, a movie marquee might indicate the evening showing to be scheduled at 18:30 hours instead of 6:30 P.M. The majority of tourist related businesses begin operations around 9:00. Government offices open as early as 8:00. A few stores start serving the public as late as 10:00.

Recently, some government offices and a few businesses have placed their workers on what is called "*horario continuo*" or uninterrupted schedule. These establishments serve the public from opening throughout the day until closing time around 17:00 hours or 18:00 hours. Other businesses follow the more traditional Spanish custom of *siesta*. These agencies shut down between 12:30 and 15:00 in the afternoon, then reopen until 19:00 in the evening.

The reality is that some government agencies and businesses tend to follow a somewhat erratic schedule. If time is critical to you, call ahead to confirm operating hours.

Weather and Climate

The weather in Bolivia tends to be influenced primarily by the altitude.

La Paz has an Alpine climate with typically cool to moderate days and cool to cold nights. Potosí and Oruro are even colder. Between May and September, the highlands can experience extremely cold periods, especially at early morning and at night.

Cochabamba, at 8,500 feet above sea level, has a dry climate with typically warm days and cool evenings. Sucre and Tarija have similar climates.

Santa Cruz is located in the Amazon basin and accordingly has a subtropical climate. Expect warm sticky days and nights throughout most of the year. In the winter months of June to September, Santa Cruz experiences occasional southerly storms called *surazos*, which can lower day and evening temperatures into the cool to cold range. Between September and April, the eastern lowlands can experience very uncomfortable heat waves, very hot, and humid.

Remember, the seasons in the Southern Hemisphere are the opposite of those in the north. Winter in Bolivia occurs from June to September and summer takes place from December to March. The summer is the typical rainy season in La Paz and Cochabamba while rain can occur year-round in Santa Cruz although even here, the summer is the wettest season.

About Instant Bolivia

Instant Bolivia is published by Bolivia Today. This directory is provided free of charge to all persons interested in travel to Bolivia. In order cover expenses Bolivia Today requests that users of the directory consider a donation to our organization. To send a donation, you may mail a check or money (made out to Diversity Reviews) at 9 Nautilus Court, Sacramento, CA 95831-1413.