

### Bolivia: Bolivian Highlands

Tour code: LAB

Revised: Nov 05

See brochure for departure dates in 2006

**This tour encompasses some of Bolivia's most stunning high altitude scenery, featuring three dramatically different parts of the Bolivian highlands.**

We start in La Paz, Bolivia's de facto capital and the logistical hub for our wanderings. The city is unusual for the way it juxtaposes a very strong Aymara Indian identity and bustling Indian markets, with its high-rise downtown buildings. La Paz is also, famously, the highest capital city in the world. We take the train south through stark Altiplano landscapes to the small 'one-llama town' of Uyuni, our gateway to the surreal landscapes of the Salar de Uyuni salt plains. These we explore by four-wheel-drive vehicles over the following few days. The next phase of our trip takes us to the northern Altiplano and Lake Titicaca, highest navigable lake in the world, where we stay on the beautiful Island of the Sun, mythical birthplace of the Inca Civilization. From here we venture to the northern snow peaks of the Cordillera Real and embark on a challenging four-day trek through the heart of Condoriri National Park.

**You may wish to extend your stay with a five-day Extension to the Bolivian Amazon (dossier LAM)**

#### Grade of difficulty

This trip and its trek have been graded "C", and in order to get the most out of it, you should be in reasonably good physical condition. We have classified the six-day trek as moderate to strenuous.

The trek's high point is 5,100 metres, and we will be walking up to eight hours per day, with several long, steep ascents and descents. Experience of hill walking and camping would be beneficial.

On the trek all personal belongings other than a daypack are carried for us by donkeys and meals are prepared by our local cook.

#### Climate

Highlands: May to October, generally sunny days and chilly evenings.

Best time for walking in the mountains. (Average day/night temperature in La Paz 18°C/1°C, but at higher altitudes temperatures drop well below freezing at night. The sun is very strong).

December to March, rainy season.

#### Outline Itinerary

The following itinerary is intended as a working guide only and is subject to variation as a result of local conditions, weather and government restrictions.

We reserve the right to alter (lengthen or shorten) the trek at any time if necessary.

1000m = 3281ft. 1km = 0.62 miles

Day 1 Join tour in La Paz. This is one of the world's most dramatically located cities, situated in a deep canyon at the foot of the giant snow-covered mountain of Illimani (6,440m). The city has a high proportion of indigenous Indians and is a fascinating place to wander about, with many street markets, museums and plenty of opportunity for shopping.

At 3,600m you'll notice the altitude in La Paz, so take it easy and drink plenty of water while you acclimatise. (1 night hotel)

Day 2 Leaving La Paz early in the morning we travel by bus southwards to the mining town of Oruro where we connect with the train to Uyuni. An eight hour journey takes us across the high altitude plain

known as the altiplano, home to Bolivia's Aymara speaking Indians, who scrape a living from farming small plots or herding their flocks of sheep, alpaca and llamas. (1 night hotel)

Day 3-6 we embark on our 4-day jeep expedition through the starkly beautiful landscapes of southern Bolivia. This is Bolivia's poorest region where the land is inhospitable and sparsely settled; survival for the few inhabitants is a daily battle. The scenery is wild and dramatic with salt lakes, volcanic peaks and windswept high desert landscapes.

On the first day we cross the world's largest salt lake, the Salar de Uyuni. The salt lake of Uyuni is immense, covering an area of 11,000km<sup>2</sup> at 3,650m. It stretches in a blinding white haze as far as the eye can see, with shimmering seemingly floating islands and in the far distance, conical volcanoes. We may stop at Colchani to see salt being processed. The whole town survives on this small industry. Out on the Salar itself you may see local people digging up the salt and packing it into large sacks to take back to be processed. The first night is spent in one of the scattered adobe villages on the altiplano.

Accommodation is either camping or in small local houses in bunk beds with basic facilities, such as running water and blankets provided.

The following day we drive on through the beautiful desert landscape, stopping to look at salty lagoons full of flamingos, past the still active volcano of Ollagua to Laguna Colorada, situated inside the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa. The contrast of the red-coloured laguna filled with feeding birds, the banks of sharp white salts around the water and hazy mountains behind are unique.

The typical, though sparse, vegetation of the reserve is the very slow-growing *yareta* in distinctive bright green hard clumps, and the red-barked *queñua* tree.

Both of these plants have been endangered because of over use by miners of borax. The plants are burnt to dry out the borax.

The local birdlife is also threatened by people stealing eggs and feathers to sell. If we're lucky we may catch sight of viscachas, vicuña and ñandú, native fauna of this high altitude desert. On the third day of the tour we reach Sol de la Mañana, spouting geysers and steaming, bubbling mud pools, continuing to Laguna Verde backed by the volcano of Llicanbur on the Chilean border. On the fourth and final day of the jeep tour we drive back to Uyuni. We then travel back to La Paz on the overnight train. (3 nights camping or simple huts all meals included, hotel in La Paz)

Day 7 We has a free day in La Paz, with the option of a city tour. (1 night hotel, breakfast)

Day 8 We travel by bus across the altiplano to Copacabana and Lake Titicaca, the snow-capped peaks of the Cordillera Real a dramatic backdrop to our journey.

Lake Titicaca is a truly amazing sight, a huge inland sea with an area of over 8,500 square kilometres, 176km from end to end and on average 50km from one side to the other. At 3,810m in the Peruvian and Bolivian altiplano lake Titicaca is divided by a narrow strait into two bodies of water. The smaller in the southeast is called Lago Huiñaimarca, the larger in the northwest is Lago Chucuito.

From the northeast shore of the lake some of the highest peaks of the Andes, the Cordillera Real, rise to over 6,000m. The lake averages 100m in depth, the bottom tips sharply towards the Bolivian side. More than 25 rivers empty into the Lake but only one small river flows out at the southern end, the Desaguadero. There are forty-one islands, some of which, like the Island of the Sun, are densely populated.

Archaeological remains around the shores attest to the many ancient civilisations that have thrived here. The ancient tribe of the Uros, the influential Tiahuanaco, Pucaras, and Kollas, and their descendents who live their lives around the lake today. The Aymara Indians still practice their

ancient farming methods on the stepped terraces that pre-date the Incas.

They grow quinoa and the potato, endemic crops, and graze llamas and alpaca. Lake Titicaca itself is still highly respected and worshipped as the giver of life, the sacred mother, Mama Qota, the provider of fish and birds. Overnight Copacabana.

(1 night hostel, breakfast)

Day 9 This morning a small boat takes us to Pilcokaina on the Island of the Sun, legendary birthplace of the first Incas, Manco Capac son of the sun, and Mama Oclla daughter of the moon. We explore the island, hiking past the Inca Garden and the Inca Spring, to the village of Challa. In the afternoon we walk to the most impressive ruins on the island, Chincana and the Labyrinth, returning to Challa for the night. (1 night camping or basic hut, all meals)

Day 10 Leaving the Island of the Sun, we stop off on the Island of the Moon before returning to Copacabana and on to La Paz for the night. (1 night hotel, breakfast and lunch)

### **Llama Trek**

This four-day trek takes us through the heart of the Cordillera Real. We walk beneath the 13 dramatic peaks of the Condoriri massif, peaks between 5,100m and 5648m, the highest of which is Cabeza del Condor. As its name suggests this peak has a condor like form and is a prominent feature on the Cordillera real skyline.

The highlights of the trek are the remote Aymara speaking highland communities, herds of grazing llamas, awe-inspiring mountain scenery, and mountain lakes often with flamingos feeding and stunning Andean views. There is also a possibility of seeing soaring Andean condors and the rabbit like viscachas. We use llamas to carry all our camping equipment.

Day 11 Leaving La Paz we head to Qhothya in the Cordillera Real, to start our trek. Today we'll walk for around 4 hours, 10 km, starting at 4,150m and climbing to 4,650 metres. We leave the Kharakhota Valley and, after a few hours, enter the Suriquiña Valley, then continue on above

the Garganta de Kullucachi. Our destination is Lake Ajwani (4,650m), on whose shores we camp. There is often abundant bird life around the lake, humming birds, Andean gulls, flamingos and various species of ducks. Hopefully we'll see condors soaring above us. (1 night camp, all meals)

Day 12 After the initial climb from camp, we walk into Janchallani Valley, and then climb over a ridge to the Jurikhota Valley. We walk for 6 hours, 12 kms approximately. Camp next to the beautiful Jurikhota Lake. (1 night camp, all meals)

Day 13 Today's trek is strenuous as we climb to a 5000m pass, from where we have superb views of the whole of the Condoriri massif. The route takes us across a boulder field and then we descend steeply to Laguna Chiarkhota (4,600 m).

Our camp is on the lakeshore. 6 hours walking, 11 kms approximately. (1 night camp, all meals)

Day 14 Today we see some of the most breathtaking mountain scenery in Bolivia. We cross the last 2 passes of our trek (5,100m and 4,800m), both located on the northeastern flanks of Huayna Potosí. The views of the jagged peaks from the passes are unsurpassable. We then trek to Lago Liviñosa (3850 m). After some 7 hours of walking, we reach Ancoma, where it is a pleasure to be back amongst lush valley vegetation after the stark high mountain scenery. We continue to the hydroelectric plant of Botijlaca, where we rendezvous with our vehicle for the drive back to La Paz and a welcome hot shower and cold beer.

8 hours walking, 20 km approximately. (1 night hotel, breakfast and lunch)

Day 15 Tour ends La Paz. Fly home.



## **Practical information.**

Small groups mean flexibility and informality. Your tour leader will be on hand to iron out any problems and give informed advice on things to do, where to eat etc. In towns we use clean, comfortable hotels. On Island of the Sun we stay one night in basic local accommodation in little-visited wilderness areas, accommodation is simpler. When camping we use two person tents. On trek, all equipment is transported for us and our local cook prepares meals.

## **Fitness and experience:**

In order to get the most out of the tour you should be in good physical condition. It is not easy to grade the fitness level required for the trek, since this is a subjective matter. However, we have classified this trek as moderate / strenuous. We will be walking at high altitudes up to eight hours per day, with several long, steep ascents and descents. Experience of hill walking and camping in remote places would be beneficial.

On the trek all personal belongings other than a daypack are carried for us by llamas and meals are prepared by our local cook.

## **Altitude**

For most people, arriving at La Paz (3,630m) from sea level is a bit of a shock to the system, with some shortness of breath being quite normal on arrival. For the first couple of days you should try to avoid unnecessary physical exertion. Within a few days, you should be well on the way to full acclimatization.

The highest point on the trek is 5,045m.

## **Visas**

Australian passport holders should check with the Bolivian Consulate office about visa requirements.

UK citizens visiting Bolivia do not currently require a visa, but your passport should be valid for at least six months after your date of travel.

All requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

## **Vaccinations:**

Up to date diphtheria and polio, also tetanus booster. These three are effective for ten years.

Yellow fever if you are going to jungle areas (not effective until ten days after inoculation; not recommended for pregnant women). This is also effective for ten years.

Anti-malarial protection (if going on a jungle trip below 1,500 metres; not needed for high-altitude treks).

It is important that you seek medical advice about all necessary medications and that you follow the prophylactic regime carefully. In the UK phone the Malaria Reference Laboratory (tel: 0891 600 350) for the latest information. North Americans should contact the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, tel: 404 332 4559.

Ensure that you consider avoidance of bites too and pack repellent and long, loose clothes.

Havrix for Hepatitis A. The course of two injections protects you for ten years. Gamma globulin is cheaper but less effective.

Some doctors recommend typhoid vaccine although it will not provide total protection and being careful about what you eat and drink is your best defence. It is given in two shots, four weeks apart and lasts for three years.

Unless at exceptional risk, people over the age of 35 who have received four or more courses of typhoid immunisation need no more.

A pre-exposure rabies vaccination is worth considering if you are going to be in contact with animals or more than 24 hours away from a reliable source of vaccine.

Hikers are at some risk from rural dogs, certain of which carry rabies, and those visiting rainforest areas could be exposed to rabid bats.

**Please check with your doctor or travel clinic for latest advice as requirements are subject to change.**

### **Personal expenses:**

We recommend you carry most of your funds in US dollars cash (mixed denomination, unmarked and undamaged bank notes) and some US dollar traveller's cheques, which can be changed in larger towns and typically, incur a 3% commission. Cash cards are also useful as ATM machines are available in La Paz. Credit cards can be used in some restaurants and for obtaining cash in certain banks.

The cost of the tour includes all meals while on the jeep expedition, the Island of the Sun and on trek, and all breakfasts elsewhere. You will need money to cover: other meals, snacks and drinks (approximately 40-60% cheaper than Europe); handicrafts; airport tax (\$25 international); optional excursions; extra entrance fees; tips; laundry etc.

Tipping is a normal part of life in Latin America. Local staff on trekking and jungle expeditions often look to group members for recognition of their services. For this tour, we recommend you allow approx US\$25 for tipping.

### **Insurance**

You must have insurance to cover you against medical expenses and repatriation. Please ensure your insurance covers all the activities you will be participating in, including trekking, mountain biking, white-water rafting and roped climbing if applicable. Please send us a copy of your policy as soon as possible if you are not taking our insurance.

### **Luggage & Equipment:**

Bring a main piece of lockable luggage to be stored in the La Paz hotel while you are trekking. For your trek, re-pack into a kit bag, holdall or rucksack. This will contain your sleeping bag, torch, toiletries, changes of clothes, spare footwear etc. Llama will transport it for you. You will also require a day-pack of approximately thirty litre capacity, to carry camera, water, waterproofs, sun protection, first aid kit, etc.

### **Included**

Where indicated a return flights UK/La Paz (or your own flight arrangements from Australia), services of a local guide/tour leader, trekking guide on Illampu Circuit trek, all accommodation and transport as per itinerary, all meals on Uyuni expedition, Island of the Sun and Illampu Circuit trek and all breakfasts elsewhere, non-personal equipment and pack animals to transport luggage while on trek.

### **Not Included**

Other meals, other than breakfasts (budget AU\$14 per meal without drinks), any extra entrance fees or optional excursions, any personal spending, airport tax (\$20 international), passport, visa, insurance, immunization fees.

### **Flights**

We normally use scheduled flights to La Paz with American Airlines. We can also quote you a land only price if you travel to Bolivia independently

### **Books**

Of the guidebooks, the Footprint Bolivia Handbook by Alan Murphy is one of the best all-round guides. A guidebook packed with fascinating insight into Bolivia's culture, history etc, is the Insight Guide: Bolivia. Peru and Bolivia The Bradt Trekking Guide, by Hilary Bradt and Kathy Jarvis, is very good for descriptions of treks, while Yossi Brain's Trekking in Bolivia (Cordee, 1997) is very useful for those wanting to spend longer exploring Bolivia's trails. Yossi Brain was the acknowledged expert on Bolivian mountaineering. His A Climber's Guide to Bolivia (The Mountaineers, 1996) includes Bolivia's four main Cordilleras. Che Guevarra: A Revolutionary Life by John Lee Anderson (Bantam Press, 1997) covers Che Guevarra's time in Bolivia. Tristan Jones, The Incredible Journey (Futura Publications) recounts Jones's eight-month cruise on Lake Titicaca. Peter McFarren's An Insider's Guide to Bolivia (Fundacion Cultural Quipus, 1992) is a good historical background to Bolivia, including an article by Johann Reinhard about arqueological discoveries in Titicaca.