

BOLIVIA AT A GLANCE

POPULATION: 11,138,234 (July 2017 est.)

LANGUAGES: Spanish, Quechua, Aymara

PREDOMINANT RELIGIONS: Roman Catholic

TIME ZONE: Same as Eastern Daylight Time (New York City)

TELEPHONE CODES: 591, country code; 42, Cochabama city code; 2, La Paz city code; 33, Santa Cruz city code

Bolivia is in the middle of South America. The geography of this landlocked country is highly diverse, ranging from towering mountains and high deserts to steamy lowlands. The Andes Mountains rise in the west. Bolivia is one of the few countries in the world with two capitals. Although Sucre is the judicial capital, most government and many business offices are in La Paz. Bolivia's main attractions include trekking the diverse landscape, Amazon jungle tours, local markets, bird-watching, Lake Titicaca, 17th-century Jesuit missions, the silver mines of Potosí, the indigenous culture and archaeological ruins.

COMPASSION IN BOLIVIA

Compassion's ministry in Bolivia began in 1975. Today, more than 58,490 children are served by more than 190 Compassion-assisted child development centers throughout the country. Compassion's church-based child development centers are places of hope for impoverished children in Bolivia. Under the guidance of caring Christian adults, children's pressing needs for nutrition and medical attention are met. Children also receive tutoring to ensure their academic success. Health and hygiene lessons teach them to care for their own physical well-being, and positive social skills are modeled and encouraged.



WEATHER

The best time to travel is May through November. Bolivia has no less than eight major climate zones, from tropical in the south to cool and sunny in the Altiplano and Andes. December through March is when most of the rain falls. La Paz is always very cool to cold (highs around 50-60 degrees F), so be prepared with sweaters and windbreakers. The eastern lowlands are invariably humid.

CURRENCY

The local currency is the *bolíviano* (BOB). It has been relatively stable. U.S. currency has been legal tender in Bolivia since 1985. Money changers (*cambistas*) are found in all major towns, usually at street corners, but are best avoided except in a pinch. If you must use one, bring a calculator and have your bills handed to you one by one, never in a roll. *Casas de cambio* (exchange houses), on the other hand, are quite fair and invariably offer better exchange rates than either the *cambistas* or local banks.

FOOD

The Altiplano is thought to be the place where potatoes were first cultivated, and Bolivians still eat plenty of them. Breakfast in Bolivia is usually nothing more than bread and coffee or tea. Lunch is the main meal of the day, and most restaurants offer a reasonably priced, fixed *almuerzo* (lunch) that includes soup, a main course, dessert and coffee or tea. Dinner is usually eaten after 7 p.m. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables before eating, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the water is unsafe (stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks).

SHOPPING

Among the best buys in Bolivia are sweaters made from llama, alpaca and/or vicuña (note the differences between handmade and machine-made items), placemats, hand-woven *chullos* (stocking caps with ear flaps), rugs, ponchos, inexpensive gold and silver jewelry, hammocks (in the lowlands) and native musical instruments.

In general, prices in Bolivia tend to be much better than in Peru, Chile or Argentina. Bargaining is still considered acceptable and even expected in the Altiplano and central regions, but much less so in the southeast and east. If you feel it is appropriate to bargain, be polite, patient and respectful, and never criticize.



ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

Voltage used in Bolivia is 115V, 220V and 230V. Electrical outlets accept plug type A or C. (For up-to-date information on plug and outlet types, check whatplug.info and click on your destination country.) You may also wish to take a universal plug adaptor, available in the luggage/travel sections of most big-box stores.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Don't** refer to Amerindians as *indios* or *campesinos* — call them *indigenos*, which means “indigenous people.” Locals are *campesinos* only in *el campo* (the countryside). Similarly, the word *camba* indicates people of the lowlands. The word *colla* (*COAL-ya*) specifies those from the highlands. Avoid using these terms, which carry a certain amount of animosity.
- **Do** ask before taking anyone's picture. Brightly dressed Aymara women often object to photos. You may find, however, that many Bolivians will change their minds if approached politely.
- **Do** bring gifts for children, who will inevitably approach you looking for handouts. Colored chalk, which brightens any surface, will be better than candy.

DRESS

Travelers to Bolivia should feel comfortable in just about any type of attire, extremes aside. Due to the heat (even in La Paz during the daylight hours), comfortable clothing is essential. Women may wear whatever they choose, within reason, without fear of recrimination — short-sleeved tops and sleeveless dresses are popular. In spite of the heat, shorts and sandals for men are rarely worn in the cities.

The clothes you bring should be governed for the most part by where in the country you expect to travel. Bring warm clothing for the windy highlands and very cool clothing for the lowlands. The sun is intense in the east, and a hat and sunglasses are essential if you'll be outside.

Women: Modest, loose-fitting tops (nothing form-fitting) are recommended; sleeveless tops are acceptable, but please cover your shoulders in places of worship; pants, capris, longer skirts and loose-fitting, casual dresses are recommended for women.

Men: Button shirts and polo shirts are recommended. T-shirts are allowed in casual settings. Long, non-denim pants are recommended for center visits and church services.

Both: Shorts are highly discouraged outside of beachside locations. A light jacket is recommended for cool evenings or rainy days.

Shoes: Closed-toe shoes are recommended during the day due to potential unsanitary or uneven terrain.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

The air in La Paz has about 20 percent less oxygen than the air at sea level. Drink plenty of liquids in La Paz, where humidity is low and you can easily become dehydrated. A tea made of coca leaves (*mate de coca*) is frequently served to visitors to help with the altitude adjustment. A medication called Diamox may be helpful as well. Ask your doctor about it before your trip. Be aware that altitude sickness has serious forms and can be fatal if the warning signs are ignored. If you plan to trek in high altitudes, it's imperative that you have a physical checkup.

Malaria is endemic in the lowlands, so ask your doctor about medication and bring insect repellent. La Paz and other major cities have adequate hospitals, but medical care is almost nonexistent in the countryside. Bring needed prescription medications with you.

GENERAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

Bolivia ranks as one of the safest countries in South America, if not the safest. Most tourist areas are relatively safe. Petty crime can be a problem in downtown La Paz and Santa Cruz, although it is generally limited to pickpocketing in crowded markets and on buses. One scam to be aware of: imposters identifying

themselves as undercover police (authentic police will always be uniformed and will not insist you get in a taxi with them). If approached by one of these imposters, refuse to show them your wallet or ID and go to the nearest police station.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, Social Security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; make visible only the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car or any other location. Stay alert and be cautious.

U.S. EMBASSY INFORMATION

Website: bo.usembassy.gov

Phone: 591-2-216-8000

Address: Avenida Arce 2780, Casilla 425, La Paz, Bolivia

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC (www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.

*All information taken from the World Factbook and
Compassion International.*

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The official language of Bolivia is Spanish. The country's secondary language is English. Some common Bolivian greetings include:

Hello	¡Hola!
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
Pleased to meet you	Mucho gusto
Very well, thank you	Muy bien, gracias
Goodbye	Adiós (or chou in Bolivia)
What is your name?	¿Cómo te llamas?
My name is ...	Me llamo (name)
How old are you?	¿Cuántos años tienes?
Yes	Sí
No	No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You're welcome	De nada
I do not speak Spanish	No hablo español
Do you speak English?	¿Usted habla inglés?
I don't understand	No entiendo
You can do it!	¡Sí, se puede!
I love you	Te amo or te quiero
I am praying for you	Estoy orando por ti

Jesus loves you

You are precious to God

God bless you

I believe in you

Tell me about your family

Good/OK

I need

How much?

Too expensive

Cheaper

Where is the bathroom?

Where is the church?

Where is the bank?

Where is the hotel?

Jesús te ama

Eres precioso(a) para Dios

¡Qué Dios te bendiga!

Creo en ti

Cuénteme de tu familia

Bueno

Necesito

¿Cuánto?

Demasiado caro

Más barato

¿Dónde está el baño?

¿Dónde está la iglesia?

¿Dónde está el banco?

¿Dónde está el hotel?

SPANISH TIPS

The h is silent in Spanish; therefore, *hola* is pronounced “ola.” The ñ is pronounced ny; therefore, *pequeño* is pronounced “pe-kenyo.”