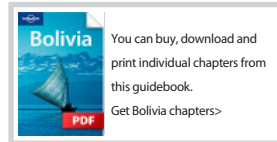


# Getting Started



Travelers can no longer be smug about ‘discovering’ Bolivia; it’s well and truly on the traveler’s map for those who visit South America. Having said that, most stick to the more accessible and well-worn route and don’t give it the attention it warrants. This means that the more curious and motivated traveler will be quickly stimulated if they venture off the tourist track – and this is easy to do. Travelers will be delighted by the multilayered, rich and varied cultures, stunning natural beauty, and unforgettable experiences and characters. Adventure nuts will be well sated: there are plenty of opportunities for outdoor action with a wide variety of luxury levels and travel choices on offer. The going isn’t always easy, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

## WHEN TO GO

Travelers will encounter just about every climatic zone, from stifling humidity and heat to arctic cold. Summer (November to April) is the rainy season when overland transportation becomes difficult if not impossible in some areas. The most popular, and arguably most comfortable, time for exploring the whole country is during winter (May to October) with its dry, clear days.

Most of Bolivia lies as near to the equator as Tahiti or Hawaii, but its elevation and unprotected expanses result in unpredictable weather. Bolivia’s two poles of climatic extremes are Puerto Suárez with its overwhelming heat, and Uyuni for its icy, cold winds. But there are no absolutes; there are times when you can sunbathe in Uyuni and freeze in Puerto Suárez.

Summer (rainy season) in the lowlands can be utterly miserable, with mud, high humidity, biting insects and relentless tropical downpours. However, washed-out roads necessitate an increase in river transportation, making this the best time to hop on a cargo boat. Winter in the Altiplano means extreme heat during the day, and freezing winds and subzero temperatures at night. The highland valleys are refuges, having a comfortable climate with little rain year round.

## DON’T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT

- Checking the visa situation (p377)
- Checking travel advisory warnings (p369)
- Proof of vaccination for yellow fever (p395)
- A copy of your travel insurance policy details (p372)
- Plug adaptor for your camera battery recharge (p367)
- Binoculars for watching wildlife
- Sunscreen and hat for clear skies at 4000m
- First aid kit (p391)
- Ear plugs for disco nights you want to sleep through
- A pack lock or other luggage security for peace of mind
- Your sense of humor – patience and courage will be tested in queues and on bus rides

See climate charts (p368) for more information

## TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

August is the most popular month of the high tourist season, which runs from late June to early September. High season sees the most reliable weather and coincides with European and North American summer holidays. It’s when most of Bolivia’s major festivals take place, so many Bolivians and South Americans also travel at this time. This can be an advantage if you are looking for people to form a travel group, but prices are generally higher than during the rest of the year.

## COSTS & MONEY

Overall, prices are slightly lower here than in neighboring countries. The biggest cost in any trip to Bolivia will be transportation, especially getting to the country (and, to a lesser extent, getting around, as the distances involved are great).

While ultrabudget travelers can get by on less than US\$15 per day, most people will spend between US\$25 and US\$50. Visitors who want to enjoy the best Bolivia has to offer can easily travel comfortably for US\$150 a day (this would include hire of private transportation). All prices in this book are quoted in US dollars (US\$).

Avoid over-bargaining with local people for goods and services just for the sake of it. While Bolivians themselves might bargain among their friends at markets, bargaining is not a common cultural practice. In any case, be realistic about how much you are actually saving. A few Bolivians can be worth a great deal more to the locals than for you. If you feel uncomfortable about pricing issues, ask locals for a ball-park idea of what you can expect to pay for something, including taxis. Always agree on food, accommodations and transportation prices beforehand to avoid any unpleasant situations.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Sitting at the top of the South American travelogue list is the humorous and well-written *Inca-Kola*, by Matthew Parris. It follows the meanderings of several Englishmen on a rollicking circuit throughout Peru and parts of Bolivia.

*Marching Powder*, by Rusty Young, is the author’s account of his four months inside the San Pedro Prison, La Paz, interviewing a British inmate accused of drug smuggling.

## HOW MUCH?

Dorm bed US\$2-5  
 Set lunch US\$1-2  
 Internet per hour US\$0.25-3  
 Hotel room (double) US\$20  
 City taxi fare US\$0.75-1.20

See also the Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

## TOP TENS

### Festivals & Events

Thanks to their rich culture, imbued with tradition, Bolivians are big on celebrating. There's almost always something fascinating going on, from saints' days in small villages to nationwide events. The following is a list of our favorites. See p370 for more details of festivals and events throughout the country.

- El Gran Poder (La Paz), May/June (p81)
- Carnaval (nationwide, p370; best in Oruro, p173, and Tarija, p282), February/March
- Phujllay (Tarabuco), March (p253)
- Fiesta de la Cruz (Lake Titicaca), May 3 (p113)
- Fiesta del Santo Patrono de Moxos (San Ignacio de Moxos), July 31 (p346)
- Fiesta de San Bartolomé (Chu'tillos; Potosí), August (p267)
- Fiesta del Espíritu (Potosí), June (p266)
- Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña in Quillacollo, August 15–18 (Cochabamba; p225)
- International Theater Festival (Santa Cruz), April (p300)
- International Festival of Baroque Music (Santa Cruz), April (p300)

### Extreme Adventures

Bolivia's rugged landscape and outgoing, knowledgeable tour guides offer innumerable and thrilling adventures. Whether you want to hang off a precipice or walk on the wild side in the jungle, Bolivia's got the hot spots.

- Hike the Mapiiri Trail, a demanding but superb walking trek (p153)
- Do the tandem mountain bike and raft trip from Sorata to Rurrenabaque (p52)
- Tackle the remote Quimsa Cruz range – not to be missed if you're a serious climber (p165)
- Shoot the rapids from Class II-V in the Yungas (p132)
- Float the Río Mamoré through pristine Amazon jungle (p349)
- Conquer the 6088m Huayna Potosí (p157)
- Soak in hot springs at the base of Nevado Sajama (p179)
- Go wild by heading upriver to a jungle-based community ecodge (p342)
- Trek the Trans Cordillera route from Sorata to Huayna Potosí and Illimani (p148)
- Head to the most remote of remote national parks, Noel Kempff Mercado, for an awesome nature experience (p354)

### Mouth-watering Eats

There are some excellent countrywide eateries, as well as must-try local Bolivian specialties. To tantalize your taste buds, try the following five eateries and five taste sensations.

- El Huerto, Sucre – a classy garden-party eating experience (p251)
- La Estancia, Cochabamba – for lovers of meat, this is hard to beat (p227)
- Casa Típica de Camba, Santa Cruz – for authentic Bolivian eats and atmosphere (p301)
- La Comedie Art-Café Restaurant, La Paz – French/Bolivian fusion cuisine with a touch of class (p88)
- Nayjama, Oruro – renowned for serving the local Oruro specialty, boiled sheep's head (p176)
- *Salteñas* - heavenly pastry parcels filled with chicken, beef and vegetables (p55 and p89)
- *Anticuchos* (grilled cow heart on skewers) – a way to reach the heart of the culture, usually served at markets and street stalls (p55)
- *Tamales* – those from the Tupiza market are especially scrumptious (p200)
- *Sopas* (soups) – follow the locals to make sure you add the right condiments (p56)
- *Trucha* (trout) – the famed (and now farmed) Lake Titicaca trout satisfies any fish cravings (p114)

Other travel books that are worth noting include *Chasing Ché – A Motorcycle Journey in Search of the Guevara Legend*, by Patrick Symmes, and *The Incredible Voyage: A Personal Odyssey*, by Tristan Jones, which follows the intrepid sailor's journey through landlocked Bolivia on Lake Titicaca and beyond. An offbeat historical character is portrayed in *Lizzie – A Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, compiled by Anne Rose from the letters of Lizzie Hessel, who lived in the Bolivian Amazon settlement of Colonia Orton during the early 20th-century rubber boom. *Exploration Fawcett*, by Percy Fawcett, is a fabulous jungle travel book from the early 20th century.

Less travelogue and more history book is the comprehensive synthesis of recent Bolivian political history, *Bolivia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, by Pete Good, which provides the most up-to-date commentary on Bolivia. You can find copies for sale in many travel agencies and hotels in La Paz. *The Fat Man from La Paz: Contemporary Fiction from Bolivia*, a collection of short stories edited by Rosario Santos, is a widely recommended read.

Some good suggestions for books in general are available on the excellent website [www.libreriaboliviana.com](http://www.libreriaboliviana.com) (in Spanish).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Bolivia.com** ([www.boliva.com](http://www.boliva.com), in Spanish) Current news and cultural information.

**Bolivia web** ([www.bolivaweb.com](http://www.bolivaweb.com)) A good starting point, good cultural and artistic links.

**Boliviacontact.com** ([www.boliviacontact.com](http://www.boliviacontact.com)) A thorough, searchable Spanish-language index of Bolivian sites.

**GBT Bolivia** ([www.gbtbolivia.com](http://www.gbtbolivia.com)) A good commercial site with travel links.

**Librería Boliviana** ([www.libreriaboliviana.com](http://www.libreriaboliviana.com), in Spanish) An excellent place to look for books on all subjects.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Succinct summaries of travel in Bolivia, and the Thorn Tree forum for gleaming travel tips.

**National Institute of Statistics** ([www.ine.gov.bo](http://www.ine.gov.bo), in Spanish) Contains an excellent summary of the most recent Bolivian census of 2001.

**South America Explorers Club** ([www.samexplo.org](http://www.samexplo.org)) Interesting trip reports and travel bulletins.

**Visit Bolivia** ([www.visitbolivia.com.bo](http://www.visitbolivia.com.bo)) The tourist office's official website with some good information.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### SOUTH-CENTRAL CIRCUIT

#### Two to Three Weeks

Stimulate your senses around the streets of **La Paz** (p63) before heading by bus to **Sucre** (p240). It's worth going via **Cochabamba** (p211), a great place to eat and get your cultural fill. Sucre is *the* place to visit churches and museums, and offers fascinating short sojourns to nearby villages, famous for their craft-works; try **Tarabuco** (p253). From here, head by bus to **Potosí** (p258), a starkly beautiful Unesco World Heritage city, situated at 4070m. Visit and learn about the cooperative mines, still in operation. You can thaw your chills in the nearby **hot springs** (p274). Jump on an overnight bus to **Tupiza** (p197), former territory of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Here, there's a choice of hikes and bike rides among the colored rocks of the surrounding *quebradas* (ravines). Join a tour from here to head to **Uyuni** (p184) and to cruise your way around a three- or four-day Southwest Circuit tour of the **Salar de Uyuni** (p191) and **Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** (p191). From Uyuni make your way up to **Oruro** (p169), famed for its Carnaval. Alternatively, from Tupiza head to **Tarija** (p277) and its surrounds, a relaxing town and region and Bolivia's heart of paleontology and viticulture. From Tarija you can fly or bus to La Paz; from Oruro it's an easy three-hour bus ride.

For those who love a mix of culture and action, Bolivia has it all. A visit to colonial towns, craft centers and mining regions will tantalize your traveling taste buds. You can skate across salt plains one day, and dance with the devils the next.



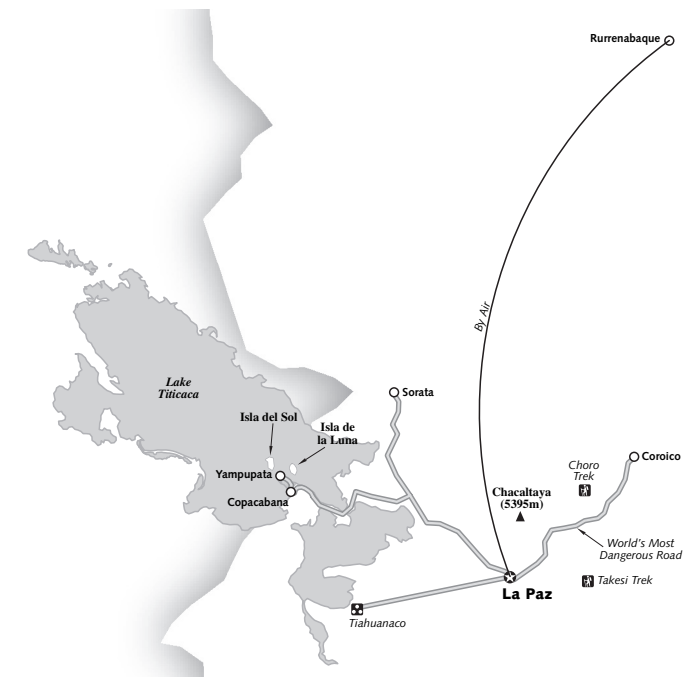
### FROM HIGH TO LOW

#### Two to Three Weeks

The most popular way to enter Bolivia is to come in overland from Peru. This follows the exciting tourist path, with a developed tourist infrastructure. Enjoy the views of Lake Titicaca from white-washed **Copacabana** (p108), eat the local trout dishes, and get some R&R. After a day or two, hike to the tiny port of **Yampupata** (p116) visiting the villages along the way for a reed boat ride. From Yampupata (or nearby villages) or Copacabana you can take a boat across Lake Titicaca to tranquil **Isla del Sol** (p118). Walk from the island's north to south and explore the Inca ruins. Marvel at Illampu in the distance over Isla de la Luna and head back to the mainland.

Back on the mainland, jump on a tourist bus for a trip across the stunning Cordillera Real toward **La Paz** (see p63). For a side trip to the remarkably tranquil **Sorata** (p147), catch another bus at the Sorata turn-off. Chill in this oasis or do some serious hiking or downhill mountain biking. Once in La Paz, spend a few days acclimatizing and absorbing the smells and sights in the hectic markets, fascinating museums and top-class restaurants and cafés. Take a day out at **Tiahuanaco** (p102) or **Chacaltaya** (p100), the world's highest developed (although now seasonal) ski-slope.

From here, the adventurous can take on the **Takesi** (p138) or **Choro Treks** (p135), or ride a bike (or bus) down the **World's Most Dangerous Road** (p78) to **Coroico** (p129) in the Yungas. Alternatively, you could fly to **Rurrenabaque** (p336) and spend a few days chilling in a hammock and exploring the surrounds (add on an extra five to seven days for this to allow for 'plane delays' and jungle visits).



The area around La Paz is jam-packed with highlights and activities, including the sun-filled Lake Titicaca, ancient Inca ruins and tranquil oases. Two weeks will give you a brief taste of adventure and relaxation, and the opportunity to experience a diverse range of environments.

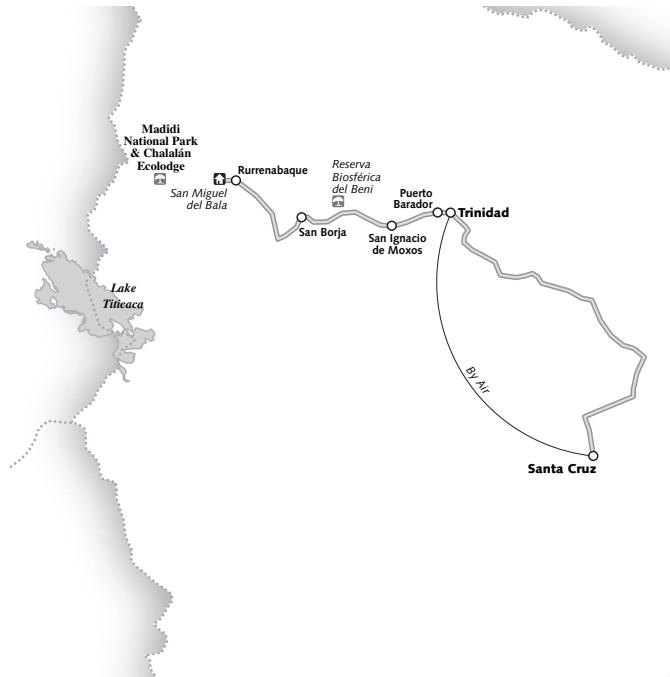
## ROADS LESS TRAVELED

### AMAZONIAN ADVENTURE

10 Days to Two Weeks

A wonderful way to get off the beaten tourist track (but still enjoy an element of comfort) is to start in **Santa Cruz** (p295), a sophisticated and cosmopolitan city with a dreamy (sometimes steamy) climate and tropical atmosphere. From here, fly or catch the overnight bus to **Trinidad** (p347), a sleepy town with a pretty plaza. After whirling around on a *moto*, take a side trip to **Puerto Barador** (p352) for a local fish meal, a visit to a museum or two and a much-needed siesta or three – it gets hot. A three-hour bus ride will take you to the Jesuit mission village of **San Ignacio de Moxos** (p346) – plan your trip around the town's colorful, not-to-be-missed festival in July. Take a side trip into **Reserva Biosférica del Beni** (p344) and then make the long slog via **San Borja** (p344) to **Rurrenabaque** (p336), hammock country, from where you can set out for a couple of days on a jungle or pampas tour. Alternatively, get your jungle fill at the **San Miguel del Bala** (p342) ecoresort, just up-river from Rurrenabaque. Whatever you do, don't miss a trip to **Madidi National Park** (p341), a wild little-trodden utopia and a must for wildlife-watchers. Finally, leave enough time to travel to and stay in the highly regarded, community-run **Chalalán Ecolodge** (p342).

The sights and sounds of the jungle make for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Start sophisticated and go wild, with a tour from the city to the remote reserves. After a few rough, but adventurous, trips, you can laze away the days in a hammock in tropical temperatures.



### JESUIT MISSIONS CIRCUIT

Six Days

The Oriente's vast expanses are underestimated by the traveler; some of the country's richest cultural and historic accomplishments are found within the seven-town region known as **Las Misiones Jesuíticas (the Jesuit Missions)**; a Unesco-listed World Heritage site. For those with an interest in architecture or history, it's one of Bolivia's most rewarding circuits. The region's magnificent, centuries-old mission churches have been restored to their original splendor. The circuit can be undertaken in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction between **Santa Cruz** (p295) and **San José de Chiquitos** (p324). Mission towns in between include **San Javier** (p320), the region's oldest mission town; **Concepción** (p321), the center of mission restoration projects; and **San Ignacio de Velasco** (p322), the commercial center of the missions. **San Miguel de Velasco** (p323) boasts one of the most accurately restored missions; **Santa Ana de Velasco** (p323) is in a tiny and fascinating Chiquitano village; and **San Rafael de Velasco** (p324) features the first of the country's mission churches.



Unesco declared this region a World Heritage site in 1991. Following many years of painstaking restoration work, the churches can be easily accessed and enjoyed by all. Architectural buffs and culture vultures will find this one of Bolivia's most rewarding experiences.

## TAILORED TRIPS

### NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

Bolivia has protected 18% of its territory in 66 national parks and reserves. From **Reserva Biológica Cordillera de Sama's** (p287) slice of the Altiplano and **Kaa-Iya's** (p327) vast chunk of the Gran Chaco, to the inundated savannas of the remote, but spectacular, **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** (p354), flora and fauna fans will be in their element. Although some of these protected areas can be difficult to access, not all are difficult, and the following places are worth every ounce of the effort they take to reach.



**Parque Nacional Sajama** (p179) with its vicuñas, soaring volcanoes (including Bolivia's highest peak) and heavenly hot springs was Bolivia's first reserve. **Parque Nacional Madidi** (p341) is possibly now the best known, encompassing one of the most biodiverse habitats in the world and numerous protected species.

**Parque Nacional Carrasco** (p334) and **Parque Nacional Tunari** (p230) are two of the more accessible, middle-altitude cloud forests, while **Parque Nacional y Área de Uso Múltiple Amboró** (p307) is a prime place for bird-watching.

**Área Natural de Manejo Integrado Nacional Apolobamba** (p162) is one of the least visited national parks, while the most popular, **Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** (p191), receives tens of thousands of visitors per year and is part of the Southwest Circuit.

### PLANES, TRAINS & CAMIONES

In Bolivia, getting there is an important part of the travel experience, and often half the fun! The means of transportation can be the highlight (okay, and sometimes lowlight) of your adventure.

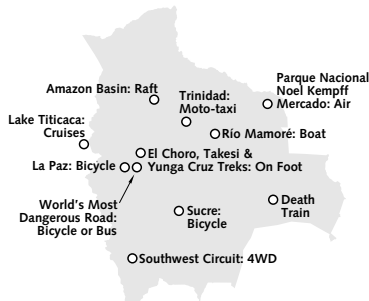
From the sluggish **Death Train** (p304) to the most remote **river journeys** (p349), you're spoiled for choice when it comes to mobility options.

Foolhardy adventurers shouldn't pass up the chance to conquer the **World's Most Dangerous Road** (p78) or **single track pistes** around **La Paz** (p77) and **Sucre** (p247). **Flying** in a small plane into remote **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** (p358) will satisfy the most snap-happy traveler. Piling yourself and your gear

on to a chauffeured **moto-taxi** in **Trinidad** (p351) is as much fun as renting one independently.

Several days of bumping around in a **4WD** across the **Southwest Circuit** (p190; including the Salar de Uyuni) is worth it for the scenery alone. Romantic **reed-boat** journeys or **hydrofoil cruises** on **Lake Titicaca** (p108) provide a tranquil change of pace. Or, for those wanting a rush, you can head into the **Amazon Basin** on a **raft** (p333).

Let's not forget our humble feet, the best form of mobility in Bolivia. Awe-inspiring **trekking** includes via Inca trails to the **Yunga Cruz Trek** (p141). As for the inevitable travel on **buses** or **camiones** (flatbed trucks)? This can be as adrenaline-inducing as any mode of transportation, and you'll likely come out with a good travel story or three.



## Snapshot

Hear Bolivia, think Evo. Hear Evo, think flux. Bolivia is currently synonymous with former *cocalero* (coca grower) Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, who was elected in December 2005, having won 53.72% of the vote for the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party. Whirlwind changes at political, social and economic levels occur on a daily basis. In May 2006 Morales nationalized the country's gas resources in a stance against foreign exploitation. (Bolivia has the second-largest proven reserves in the region after Venezuela and much of its revenue is from gas.) While this process is more about renegotiating contracts than confiscating assets, it is causing ongoing problems.

In July 2006, Bolivian voters elected 255 representatives to the National Constituent Assembly, whose objective is to rewrite the country's constitution in less than one year. As of November 2006 the country was in an uproar over whether changes to the constitution should be decided via a simple majority (51%) or a two-thirds vote. MAS prefers the former; other parties the latter, as a simple majority would mean that MAS would wield power over voting results. Many people went on hunger strikes and marches in protest against the perceived lack of democracy and transparency.

On the whole, however, soccer-enthusiast Morales has a kind of sports-star status, at least among his faithful who are optimistic that he can make a positive change to the country. His attraction? His demand for indigenous equality, their improved status, and the opportunity for them to share in economic and political power, after centuries of domination by Spanish descendants who have historically controlled the country's wealth. At his inauguration he stated: 'from 500 years of resistance...we pass to another 500 years of power.' Meanwhile, many middle- and upper-class Bolivians are wary of Morales and his anticapitalist stance and socialist ideologies – including his siding with the Venezuelan and Cuban presidents – and more critical about the inexperience of his ministers, who have been hand-selected by Morales himself. Whether these ministers have the know-how to manage a bureaucracy and implement large-scale plans is yet to be seen. Already, several ministers have proposed radical reforms (such as withdrawing religious education from schools), but such plans have been shelved, not surprisingly, following outrage by the Catholic Church.

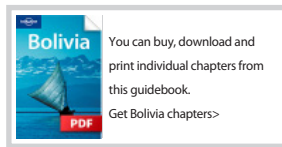
Discussion of coca eradication has taken a back seat, but Morales continues to tussle with the US. For Bolivia it's simple: coca – for spiritual uses, for chewing, for tea and other coca-based products – should be promoted and is legal in Bolivia, whereas cocaine, the chemical derivative is not. Morales has changed the eradication proponents' battle cry of 'coca zero' to 'cocaine zero' in an effort to distinguish between the plant and its positive uses and the drug derived from the plant. The US points the finger at the illegal excess crops grown by *cocaleros*, while Bolivia blames the US drug consumers.

Morales has other things on his political plate: he is fending off demands by the Santa Cruz department for autonomy; this rebellious state is rich in oil and agricultural lands and is tired of supplementing the country's revenue. At the time of writing, 16 miners had been killed after rival mining groups fought over concession rights. And Chile is still not forgiven for having usurped Bolivia's ocean access. On a positive note, in 2005 the IMF agreed to write off Bolivia's \$120 million debt.

Meanwhile, most Bolivians are giving Morales a chance, at least until the outcome of the Constituent Assembly in 2007. Cultural revolution or impending civil war? As the Bolivians themselves say, *vamos a ver...*

### FAST FACTS

Population:	8.9 million humans, 3 million llamas
Highest point:	Nevado Sajama 6452m
Average annual income:	US\$2900
Birth rate:	23.3 births/1000
Literacy rate:	87.2%
Population below poverty line:	64%
Merchant marines:	25 ships
Airports with unpaved landing strips:	1068
Annual military spending:	US\$130 million



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