TOUR CODE

VRSA

ADVENTURESABROAD

URUGUAY, PARAGUAY, ARGENTINA & BOLIVIA

With Victor Romagnoli

21 days

Updated 09/05/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in La Paz*

Today is an arrival to the city of La Paz, one of the world's highest major cities located at 3686 m (12,090 ft) above sea level. La Paz is situated in a bowl-shaped canyon in the Cordillera Real (Royal Range) of the Andes. As one travels across the Altiplano, the ground suddenly drops away 400 m (1,312 ft) to reveal the city hidden in a bowl in the mountains. We suggest that you take it easy today in order to acclimatize to the high elevation (if your flight arrives late today, you might consider arriving a day early in order to rest).

This evening you may like to enjoy a 'pena', a traditional Bolivian folk music performance (optional; subject to availability). The music is played on typical Andean instruments such as quenas, zamponas pan pipes and charangos, small, banjo-like instruments, the bodies of which are traditionally made from armadillo shells.

Overnight in La Paz. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *La Paz: City Tour*

The mountains surrounding La Paz soar to an average of 5500 m (18,040 ft) above sea level. The most spectacular views of the city come on a clear evening when one can see the twinkling lights of the city stretching up the hillsides, under the the snow-capped triple peak of Mount Illimani at 6402 m (20,999 ft).

Today will explore the Spanish colonial quarter of the city and visit the Archeological Museum of Bolivia, which has a special exhibit dedicated to the site of Tiahuanaco . We also experience the colourful markets of La Paz. The markets are a great place to observe the colourfully-dressed native Quechua and Aymara-speaking people. The women wear many layers of petticoats covered by a colourful dress, and over their shoulders they sling a multi-coloured striped blanket called a 'phulla' in which they carry their groceries or babies -- or both! On their heads they wear a bowler hat (which always appears to be too small) at a jaunty angle. The British brought the bowler hat to Bolivia when they were building the railway and somehow it became part of the everyday dress of Andean women.

We finish our day with a visit to a great place to buy some of the handicrafts, such as colourful sweaters woven from sheep's wool or from the light-weight, very warm wool of the native Andean animals. We finish at the unusual Mercado de los Brujos, better known as the Witches' Market, where you will see all sorts of potions, herbs and folk remedies used to guard against evil spirits.

Overnight in La Paz. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *La Paz - Sucre*

Today we fly to Sucre, the most beautiful city in Bolivia.

Call it Sucre, La Plata, Charcas, or Ciudad Blanca, the city of Sucre has a rich, varied history and a wealth of historical

architecture deserving of the selection as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Sucre shares capital city status with La Paz, the legislative and administrative capital. Sucre, the constitutional capital and home of the Supreme Court, is also a university city, with many cultural attractions. Home to a large indigenous population who maintain their traditional clothing and customs, and sell their crafts and goods available in the markets and fairs, Sucre is more than a charming colonial city.

Our tour of the town will take us through several colonial and republican monuments, including museums, convents, churches, and monasteries. Among the more notable are the National Congress, the House of Liberty, the complex of Recoleta, the Church of San Lazaro Santo Domingo, the Convent of San Felipe de Nery, the Church of La Merced, and the General Cemetery.

Overnight in Sucre. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Sucre - Potosi*

Today we visit a realtively new attraction -- dinosaur tracks, discovered just a decade ago in a cement quarry 10 km (6 mi) from the city. The tracks are almost 70-million years old, from the Cretaceous era. The city is quite obviously very proud of the site, since a statue of a dinosaur now greets tourists in the airport!

This afternoon we travel by road to Potosi (+/- 3 hours).

The discovery of ore in silver-rich Cerro Rico (rich hill) by Indian, Diego Huallpa, in 1544 prompted the foundation of the city of Potosi on April 10th, 1545 at the foot of the hill. In 1672, a mint was established to coin silver and water reservoirs were built to fulfill the growing population's needs. At that time more than eighty six churches were built and the city's population increased to nearly 200,000, making it one of the largest and wealthiest cities in Latin America and in the world. Potosi sits at an altitude of 4,090 meters (13,500 ft) above sea level, and claims to be the highest city in the world. The area is well-known for its cool weather and sometimes freezing rain!

Overnight in Potosi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Potosi Area*

Early this morning we'll visit the mining market in Calvario. Afterwards we will visit one of the private mines of the Sumaj Orkjo. From here we'll also have a spectacular view of the city.

We also tour Potosi itself, including the the Royal Mint House, one of two built to mint the silver coins used by the Spanish empire. This impressive facility operated until 1953, or lasted for 400 years of continuous coinage. There are other important building open to visitors, including the
Santa Teresa Convent (still occupied), the San Francisco Monastery, and the Potosi Cathedral.

Most of the silver shipped through the Spanish Main came from Potosi. According to official records, 45,000 tons of pure silver were mined from Cerro Rico from 1556 to 1783. Of this total, 7,000 tons went to the Spanish monarchy. In Spanish there is still a saying, valer un potosi, "to be worth a potosi" (that is, "a fortune"). One theory holds that the mint mark of Potosi (the letters "PTSI" superimposed on one another) is the origin of the dollar sign.

Overnight in Potosi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Potosi - Uyuni*

We depart Potosi and drive by 4WD to Uyuni to experience the highest and largest salt lake in the world (10000 sq km), surrounded by an impressive panorama. On its edge, visitors can see the local inhabitants extracting salt with using ancient methods. En route we visit the villages of Chaquila and TikaTika.

After a lunch break, we visit the old railway depot in Uyuni. We continue to Colchani to see the artisans working on iodized salt. After dinner you can stroll in the surroundings of the hotel and enjoy the stars in the unpolluted and cloudless skies.

We continue to our hotel, a regular facility with rooms, beds, a lobby and a dining room. Only one thing sets this hotel apart -- it's entirely made out of salt! Please don't lick the walls.

Overnight in Uyuni. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Uyuni - Isla Pescado - Potosi*

We return to Potosi via the great salt flats to "Isla Pescado," an oasis where you can find unique flora and fauna, which was completely isolated for thousands of years by a vast plain of salt. We can walk about and admire the huge cacti. The salar (salt flat) is unendingly white and the upthrust mass of the island provides welcome relief to the eyes. This afternoon we arrive back in Potosi.

(Today a box lunch is available for purchase).

Overnight in Potosi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Potosi - Sucre - Santa Cruz*

Today we drive from Potosi back to Sucre and connect on flights to Santa Cruz.

If time permits upon our arrival we will have a brief look at Santa Cruz. Located in the eastern part of Bolivia and sitting just over 400 meters above sea level, Santa Cruz enjoys year-round warm temperatures, thanks to a semi tropical savanna climate. Rich in oil and natural gas, forest products and agriculture, the city enjoys a dynamic economy and alone generates over 35% of Bolivia's GDP.

Overnight in Santa Cruz. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Santa Cruz, Bolivia - Asuncion, Paraguay*

Today we leave Bolivia behind and fly to Paraguay. Depending on our flight schedule we may fit in some sightseeing in Santa Cruz this morning or accomplish some Asuncion sightseeing upon arrival.

Asuncion was founded on August 15, 1537 -- the Feast of the Assumption, or Asuncion in Spanish. Take a step back and you'll see traces of the city that was once the colonial capital of southern South America. Asuncion is one of the oldest cities in South America and the longest continually inhabited area in the Rio de la Plata Basin; for this reason that it is known as "Mother of Cities." It was from here that the colonial expeditions departed to found other cities, including the second foundation of Buenos Aires and of other important cities.

Overnight in Asuncion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Asuncion: City Tour*

Today we spend a full day exploring one of South America's oldest capitals. The city still displays a definite colonial aspect with colourful patios and red tiled roofs. From the river's east bank, the city spans out into gentle hills that look like large rectangular blocks overlooking the bay; beautiful flowering trees, native fauna, and lush gardens are spread throughout the city.

We start with a look inside the Casa de Independencia. Built in 1772, the building housed the secret meetings that led to the 1811 declaration of independence from Spain. Our tour will take in the Barro Museum; this creative oasis houses a world class collection of indigenous folk art. We stop at the Government Palace before visiting the Pantheon of National Heroes, pausing to reflect on the extremely turbulent history of this country. We will also stop at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Asuncion and the Teatro Municipal.

Overnight in Asuncion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Asuncion: The Golden Circuit*

Today we have a full-day tour out of the capital district to the villages and towns located on the shores of nearby Lake Ypacarai. The capital is surrounded by many smaller satellite cities and towns, many of which are nicely-preserved historic towns set along a route known as "The Golden Circuit."

We will see the neo-gothic church in San Lorenzo, a handicraft exposition in Ita, and the Franciscan temple at Yaguaron. Paraguari and Piribebuy are known for their mountain views and clear streams. We visit the spiritual capital of Caacupe with its basilica, and travel the picturesque road to Tobati. We will also make a brief stop at San Bernardino on the shore of the legendary Ypacarai Lake.

Return to Asuncion.

Overnight in Asuncion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Asuncion - Encarnacion*

Today we head south and drive to the city of Encarnacion. Often called the "Pearl of the South," Encarnacion holds the title of being the most beautiful city in all of Paraguay. Although Encarnacion is Paraguay's third largest city, it has only 70,000 inhabitants. We make our base here for two nights in order to explore the nearby ruins of Trinidad.

(Depending on space availability we may choose to overnight in nearby Bella Villa).

Overnight in / near Encarnacion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Encarnacion - Trinidad - Encarnacion*

We have a day trip to the biggest attraction of Encarnacion, the Jesuit ruins of Trinidad, the best-preserved in the country, rising out of a beautiful natural setting. These haunting ruins are testament to an earlier age when the Jesuits commanded considerable power in these parts. Ruins of Jesuit missions are today spread out across Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia.

Rarely does one find a UNESCO World Heritage Site with so few visitors, but that's only part of the attraction. A walk around the atmospheric red-brick hilltop ruins allows you to absorb a sense of what once made these 17th and 18th century colonies so powerful that the Spanish crown had them abolished.

Later this afternoon we will return to Encarnacion.

Overnight in/near Encarnacion. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Encarnacion, Paraguay - San Ignacio Mini, Argentina*

Today we leave Paraguay and cross into Argentina over a bridge spanning the Parana River. We proceed to the city of Posadas and continue towards the smaller town of San Ignacio Mini, located approximately one hour north.

San Ignacio is a large archeological site where, starting in 1609, the Jesuits established one of the largest and most significant religious centres in all of South America. Because of the constant attacks of the Portuguese Bandeirantes, the mission first moved in 1632 and didn't settle in its current location until 1696. It was called San Ignacio Mini to distinguish it from its bigger counterpart, San Ignacio Guazi (great).

Overnight in San Ignacio Mini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *San Ignacio Mini Area*

Today we spend a full day exploring the UNESCO World Heritage sites located in the area. The mission in San Ignacio Mini was once home to over 140,000 people before the Jesuits were expelled in 1767. The ruins we will visit today testify to a society that some historians have called the most organized social and economic structure of its time anywhere in the world. Once the Jesuits were expelled, the cities were attacked by Spaniards and Portuguese and the native inhabitants fled. The abandoned ruins of a once thriving religious order were simply overgrown with dense jungle. Only in the late 19th Century were they rediscovered, and not until the 1940s did any reconstruction begin. By 1984 the best of the ruins were put on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

These mission ruins are the most complete of those in Argentina and impress for the quantity of the carved ornamentation still visible, and for the amount of restoration done. No roofs remain, but many of the living quarters and workshops have been re-erected.

Overnight in San Ignacio Mini. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *San Ignacio Mini - Buenos Aires*

Today we drive to Posadas and depart by air to Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. Our flight schedule will determine if we have time to do some sightseeing in this fabulous city. Many of you will have been here before and we will offer an optional Tango Dinner show tonight at one of the best venues in the city. Dinner not included this evening.

Overnight in Buenos Aires. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 17 *Buenos Aires, Argentina - Punta del Este, Uruguay*

Today we fly from BA to Punta del Este, Uruguay. Uruguay is the smallest country we visit on our tour -- slightly smaller than the US state of Washington. It is surrounded by the two giants, Brazil and Argentina, and is blessed with a long Atlantic shoreline. Home to just over 3.4 million inhabitants, Uruguay is an important agricultural country and its human population is vastly outnumbered by cattle, sheep and horses.

Depending on the timing of today's flight, we may embark upon our sightseeing program upon arrival.

Overnight Punta del Este. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Punta del Este*

This morning we tour Punta del Este, Uruguay's most famous resort town on the Atlantic coast, often called the 'St.Tropez of South America.' Famous for its beach life, fancy restaurants, beautiful promenades, friendly people and expensive yachts, Punte del Este is a resort town like no other on the continent. We spend two nights here and, over the course of our time here, we will include a city tour and a free afternoon.

Our tour takes us on a scenic drive through Punta del este's most fashionable and impressive neighborhoods. We pass through the residential areas of Cantegril, San Rafael, Parque Golf and La Barra de Maldonado, known for its unique hanging bridges. We stop at Ralli Museum of Contemporary Art with its fine collection of paintings and sculptures by noted Latin American artists, and several pieces by Salvador Dali on permanent display. The attractive modern building is located in the Beverly Hills district. Our drive will take us past some of Punta's natural wonders -- its beaches. We have a photo stop at Punta Ballena for sweeping views up and down the coast; from here you will have a wonderful photo of Casapueblo, home and atelier of internationally renowned artist, Carlos Paez Vilaro.

Time at leisure.

Overnight Punta del Este. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Punta del Este - Estancia Visit - Montevideo*

Today we transfer from the Atlantic coast to the farming heartland of the nation where we will spend an informative day visiting one of Uruguay's estancias, or ranch.* With so many Uruguayans involved in farming, it is no surprise that the country is filled with ranches; some of them welcome travellers to visit learn about how they farm and of their way of life.

Later we continue to Montevideo, Uruguay's capital and by far its largest city. Montevideo is a vibrant, eclectic place with a rich cultural life. The historic heart of Uruguay's capital is an unspoiled tableau of 18th- and 19th-century colonial architecture; indeed, its most prominent skyscraper, the sail-like Torre de las Telecomunicaciones, lies round the coast overlooking Montevideo Bay.

* We plan to visit La Salamora - Posada de Campo (Country Lodge). Please see www.lasalamora.com for more information.

Overnight in Montevideo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Montevideo: City Tour*

Today we enjoy a tour of Montevideo.

The main points of interest are the Old City, Constitution Square, Cathedral, Colonial Town Hall, Solis Theatre, Independence Square, at the center of which stands a monument dedicated to national hero, Jose Gervasio Artigas and his Mausoleum. Facing the square the Government House (Museum of the Presidents). The main commercial street, 18 de Julio, is lined with shops, cafes and office buildings. We stop for a photo at the Congress Building, the pride of Uruguay. It was constructed between 1908 and 1925 with 52 kinds of local marble and 12 types of wood. We drive past Prado neighbourhood, one of the oldest parks in the city, which hosts the famous sculpture La Diligencia (The Stage Coach), and ther monument to the last Charruas indians.

Next is Batlle & Ordonez Park, the Obelisk, La Carreta (Covered Wagon) monument, and the Soccer Stadium. We'll stop at Plaza Virgilio and a monument dedicated to the Fallen Soldiers of the Navy, from which we have an excellent view of the city. Our return route takes us along the coast and beaches.

Overnight in Montevideo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Departure*

Departure from Montevideo.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.