Tour Code
BV1

ADVENTURESABROAD

BOLIVIA

La Paz, Lake Titicaca & the Altiplano

10 days

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Day 1 Arrival in La Paz, Bolivia

Welcome to La Paz, one of the world's highest capital cities at 3,686 metres (12,090 feet) above sea level. The city sits hidden in a dramatic bowl-shaped canyon carved into the Altiplano, invisible until the high plateau suddenly drops away 400 metres (1,312 feet) to reveal the sprawling cityscape below. This geological drama has shaped La Paz's character - neighbourhoods climb the canyon walls in tiers, with the wealthiest residents occupying the lower, oxygen-rich areas while poorer communities perch higher on the rim.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 La Paz: City Tour

After breakfast at the hotel, we explore La Paz's well-preserved Spanish colonial quarter. The city sits beneath mountains averaging 5,500 metres (18,040 feet), dominated by the snow-capped triple peak of Mount Illimani at 6,402 metres (21,000 feet). Our tour includes the Precious Metals Museum and the Murillo Museum before continuing to Plaza Murillo, where the Cathedral, Government Palace, and National Congress buildings cluster around the historic square.

Later we walk through the Mercado de los Brujos, the Witch's Market, where vendors sell potions, herbs, and folk remedies used to guard against evil spirits. Dried llama foetuses hang alongside medicinal plants - traditional offerings for Pachamama (Mother Earth) that builders bury in foundations for good fortune. The market offers a window into Andean mysticism and the daily life of the colourfully-dressed Quechua and Aymara-speaking people. The women wear layers of petticoats beneath bright pollera skirts, carrying groceries or babies in striped aguayo blankets slung over their shoulders. Their signature bowler hats - always appearing slightly too small and worn at jaunty angles - arrived with British railway builders and became part of traditional Andean dress.

We ride the city's cable car system, now the world's longest urban cable car network. The Mi Teleférico has transformed how paceños navigate their vertical city while offering visitors elevated views across the canyon. We finish at the Valley of the Moon, where erosion has carved the clay hillside into a landscape of spires and canyons that resemble the moon's surface.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 La Paz: Lake Titicaca & Isla del Sol

An early start takes us to Copacabana, a site of religious pilgrimage dating back to Inca times. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims travel from across Bolivia and Latin America for religious festivals here. The town's massive basilica houses the Dark Virgin of Copacabana, a 16th-century statue carved by indigenous artist Francisco Tito Yupanqui. Local legend warns that if the statue is ever removed, Lake Titicaca will rise up and flood the entire Altiplano.

After a brief visit, we board a catamaran to explore Lake Titicaca and Isla del Sol, the most sacred of the lake's islands. Lake Titicaca straddles the Bolivia-Peru border at 3,810 metres (12,497 feet) above sea level. The lake once extended far beyond its current 8,560 square kilometres (3,305 square miles) - the great city of Tiwanaku was built at the water's edge, but today sits more than 25 kilometres (15 miles) inland. This dramatic reduction transformed the Altiplano's climate over the past thousand years.

Our journey continues at the Inti Wata Cultural Complex, featuring exhibits on traditional medicine, living practices, and reed ship building.

We return to the catamaran for a buffet lunch on board before making our way back to La Paz.

NOTE: Due to our early start, large lunch, and possible early departure tomorrow, dinner is not included this evening.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 La Paz: Tiwanaku Ruins

Today we visit Tiwanaku, a UNESCO World Heritage Site located 72 kilometres from La Paz near the shores of Lake Titicaca. The Tiwanaku Empire dominated portions of southern Peru, northern Chile, and eastern Bolivia for approximately six hundred years (500-1100 CE). At its peak, Tiwanaku ranked among the world's largest cities, with perhaps 20,000 to 40,000 inhabitants thriving at altitudes between 3,800 and 4,200 metres despite frequent frosts and thin soils. The civilisation developed sophisticated raised-field agriculture and extensive trade networks that brought tropical goods from the Amazon and coastal products from the Pacific.

Around 1100 CE, the civilisation collapsed as a regional force. Evidence suggests climate change, including decreased rainfall and dropping groundwater levels, caused agricultural systems to fail throughout the empire. Whether environmental catastrophe alone explains Tiwanaku's end remains debated among archaeologists.

We explore the Kalasasaya Sun Temple, whose name means "standing stones" in Aymara, referring to the massive vertical pillars that once enclosed the temple platform. The semi-subterranean Earth Temple features walls studded with carved stone faces, each one unique. The Akapana Pyramid, though largely unexcavated, once stood seven terraces high. We also see the Gateway of the Sun, a single block of andesite weighing approximately 10 tons and covered with intricate carvings, including the central figure of the "Gateway God." Our visit includes the museum housing ceramic objects, tools, and textiles from Tiwanaku and earlier cultures.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 La Paz - Fly to Sucre - Parque Cretacico - Sucre

This morning we fly to Sucre, Bolivia's constitutional capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city's wealth of Spanish colonial architecture earned its designation. Sucre shares capital status with La Paz: Sucre houses the Supreme Court and serves as the constitutional capital, while La Paz functions as the seat of government. The city maintains an important university and a large indigenous population who preserve traditional clothing and customs.

We begin with a visit to Parque Cretacico, where dinosaur tracks discovered accidentally in 1994 reveal prints nearly 70 million years old. The tracks, preserved in what was once the muddy shoreline of a vast inland sea, belong to numerous species. The site contains one of the world's largest and most diverse collections of dinosaur footprints, with over 5,000 individual tracks identified across a massive limestone slab now tilted nearly vertical by tectonic forces.

After a break for lunch, we tour Sucre's colonial centre, visiting the Casa de la Libertad, where Bolivia's declaration of independence was signed in 1825. At the Museo del Tesoro, displays showcase Bolivia's precious and semi-precious stones. We also visit the Asur Textile Museum, which preserves remarkable indigenous weaving traditions. We view the exterior facades of San Lazaro and Santo Domingo churches, along with other historical monuments and Bolivar Park.

PLEASE NOTE: This will likely be a "painfully" early departure due to limited flight options (one morning, one late afternoon). Though not ideal, a morning flight serves our itinerary better than the alternative. The changeability of internal flight times over the next few days (up to and including our flight to Asuncion) could result in adjustments to the final itinerary.

Overnight in Sucre.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Sucre - Potosi - Colchani

This morning we travel by road to Potosi (approximately 3 hours), a UNESCO World Heritage Site sitting at 4,090 metres (13,500 feet) - among the world's highest cities. The 1544 discovery of silver in Cerro Rico prompted the city's foundation in 1545. Within decades, Potosi exploded into one of the world's largest and wealthiest cities, its population reaching nearly 200,000. More than eighty churches served this boom town, and the phrase "valer un potosi" entered Spanish as a synonym for unimaginable wealth.

This wealth came at tremendous cost. Hundreds of thousands of indigenous workers and African slaves died in the mines under the brutal mita system of forced labour. According to official records, 45,000 tons of pure silver were mined between 1556 and 1783.

On arrival we visit the city's principal sites, including San Lorenzo Church with its elaborate facade combining European and indigenous artistic traditions. We admire the exterior of the Arch of Cobija and browse the artisans' market.

At the Casa Nacional de la Moneda, we explore the massive facility that operated continuously for 400 years until 1953. Inside, we see the original minting machinery - enormous wooden presses turned by mules - along with galleries displaying colonial art. The mint mark of Potosi may have inspired the dollar sign, though this theory remains disputed.

After our tour, we continue to our hotel in Colchani, gateway to the Uyuni salt flats.

NOTE: We regret if our flight-driven itinerary changes closer to departure have us visiting places on a Sunday when some sites may be closed.

Overnight in Colchani.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Uyuni: Area Sightseeing

In the environs of Uyuni we experience the Salar de Uyuni, the world's highest and largest salt flat at 10,000 square kilometres, sitting at 3,656 metres (11,995 feet) above sea level. The salt flat formed when prehistoric lakes dried up thousands of years ago, leaving a thick crust of salt and minerals. On the flat's edge, we watch local inhabitants extracting salt using ancient methods - cutting blocks from the crust, piling them to dry, then processing the salt for iodisation. En route we visit the villages of Chaquila and TikaTika.

After lunch, we visit the old railway depot in Uyuni, where rusting locomotives sit abandoned - haunting reminders of Bolivia's 19th-century railway ambitions. British engineers built these lines to transport minerals from the Andes to Pacific ports. When mining declined, the railways were abandoned, and the desert's dry air has preserved the locomotives in their slow decay.

We continue to Incahuasi Island in the heart of the salt flat. This isolated outcrop is populated with giant cacti that can live over a thousand years, some growing up to 12 metres (40 feet) high. From the island's summit, 360-degree views reveal the salt flat stretching to the horizon in every direction.

Our hotel near Colchani village is entirely constructed of salt blocks - walls, floors, and furniture carved from compressed salt. After dinner you can stroll the surroundings and enjoy the stars in the unpolluted, cloudless skies.

Overnight in Colchani.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Salar Uyuni Area Sightseeing

Today's 4x4 excursion takes us to the north side of Uyuni Salt Flat to view the Coquesa Mummies, human archaeological remains in a small cave near Tunupa Volcano. Ceramic, gold and copper artifacts, and articles of clothing discovered at some sites indicate the presence of an advanced but little-known culture. Unfortunately, the sites' remoteness has left them vulnerable to amateur treasure hunters who have plundered items of archaeological value.

As our visit coincides with the dry season (April to November), the salt flat surface provides unique opportunities for perspective photography. The perfectly flat, white surface and clear horizon create optical illusions - distance becomes impossible to judge, allowing creative photos where people appear to stand in someone's hand or balance on bottles.

We return to Colchani for overnight.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Uyuni - Fly to La Paz

Today we fly back to the capital.

As some of your fellow travellers may be continuing to our tour of Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, this flight will occur without your Tour Leader. If so, you will be met on arrival by a local guide, who will also see to your departure arrangements tomorrow. Dinner on your own this evening.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 10 Depart

Departure from La Paz.

BUEN VIAJE!