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TRAVEL TIPS TO BOLIVIA AND SOUTH AMERICA

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BOLIVIA

Bolivia is one of the least known countries in South America and yet one of the most intriguing. The size of Texas and California combined, the country enjoys a variety of climates and landscapes. Bolivians, more than 50% of whom are of pure Indian blood, are a rugged and hospitable people with a strong spirit. Bolivia's people are as varied as its terrain. The Aymara and Quechua inhabit the highlands while the Guaranie, Ayoreo, Chimane and many other ethnic groups live in the tropics. The official language of the country is Spanish. When the Spaniards arrived in Peru in the mid-1500s, the highlands of Bolivia, the altiplano, were part of the Inca Empire. Before then, there had been a range of ancient civilizations. The most powerful centered around the city of Tiwanaku or Tiahuanaco near Lake Titicaca and probably extended as far as Ecuador. The Tiwanaku culture is considered more advanced than the Inca and its decline remains a mystery. It was already in decline when the Inca began expanding from Cusco in the 1440s. The impressive remains of this civilization stand today. The government is a representative constitutional democracy (the current president is a former coca grower). The two chamber congress has 27 senators and 130 federal deputies.

VISAS AND PASSPORTS (New in 2008)

To obtain a passport, participants will need to have two passport photos (a nice color photo is best) and a certified birth certificate. **NEVER SEND YOUR PASSPORT VIA U.S. MAIL, ONLY VIA UPS OR FEDEX.** Four weeks' time or longer should be allowed for processing. Travel Leaders, Chippewa Valley Travel Service is a full-service travel agency that can help participants with all of their travel needs. You can also go directly to the U.S. Passport Center at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html. Always carry a photocopy of the first two pages of your passport (may also want to put driver's license and other ID on same sheet) at all times while in a foreign country. Put your original passport and airline tickets in one of the hotel's safety deposit boxes as soon as you check into the hotel.

Bolivian visas are now required to enter Bolivia. The new visa requirements are:

- A passport valid for 6 months beyond date of arrival into Bolivia
- An official size passport photo
- Official document validating your Yellow Fever shot
- A copy of the front of a current credit card or your bank statement
- A copy of your airline itinerary
- A confirmation of your hotel reservation
- Completed form "Sworn Statement for Visa Application".
- \$100 Money Order made out to the Bolivian Consulate

IMMUNIZATIONS

Yellow fever vaccination is now required to enter Bolivia. This requirement may be waived by your physician for medical reasons. This vaccination is not available from all physicians and is good for ten years. Participants are advised to be current on all their routine shots such as tetanus. Hepatitis A & B vaccination would be advisable for those who will be working with patients. You and your physician should make the final decision. NOTE: During our 2009 trip the authorities did not check for Yellow Fever vaccinations.

ALTITUDE

Cochabamba is 8,304 feet above sea level. At higher altitudes, many individuals have less energy and should expect to be able to do less physical labor than they are accustomed to doing. "Soroche" is the Spanish name for altitude sickness and can be a problem for a couple of days. Soroche pills can be purchased in cities with high altitudes. There is a pharmacy near the Hotel Diplomat where most pharmaceuticals can be purchased without a prescription. If not available, aspirin with caffeine taken with a cup of coca tea or Coke every 6-8 hours will help. Eat lightly your first day and rest. Participants should check with their physician for individual advice. One beer in Cochabamba equals two in Wisconsin.

WEATHER AND CLOTHING

The average daytime temperature in Cochabamba is in the 70's and at night in the 60's (a cool streak can lower this by 10 degrees). The rainy season is usually over in February. Cochabamba claims to have the nicest climate in the world. Bring lightweight warm clothing. Dress is casual but there are times when a sport coat and/or dress clothing would be appropriate. LaPaz can be quite cold while the Chapare is often hot and humid. Bring a hat and adequate sun protection. If you plan a side trip to LaPaz or Machu Picchu you will need warm clothing.

MONEY, TRAVELERS CHECKS, AND CREDIT CARDS

One hundred-dollar bills are the best form of carrying cash. **Be sure they are in good condition and not torn or badly worn.** A cloth money-holder that wraps around the abdomen or hangs from your neck is advisable (a metal fastener will be detected in security). U.S. dollars can be traded easily at the Hotel Diplomat. Traveler's checks are becoming less popular with the wide availability of ATM machines. Credit card usage is well accepted, but VISA seems to be the most widely accepted. Pickpockets in crowded places are common in most countries, so caution is advised.

FOOD, MEDICINE AND THE PREVENTION OF ILLNESS

Water is often a source of illness and for best protection participants should drink bottled or boiled water and avoid eating foods that are not peeled, cooked or bottled. All food in the Hotel Diplomat should be safe. The food in Bolivia is good and includes chicken, pizza, and excellent steaks. Lettuce salads, jello, and shellfish should be considered suspect. One of the best measures for preventing illness is taking two Pepto Bismol tablets (they now make capsules) four times a day during the entire trip. Intestinal bugs are the greatest cause of illness to our group. For this most Bolivian physicians give their patients Bactrim Forte taken twice daily for three days (like Septa DS, a sulfa based drug). Cipro is a higher level broader antibiotic and may be the antibiotic recommended by your physician. Use Imodium only if absolutely necessary. If you become dehydrated you can purchase at the Cochabamba drug store "sales de rehidracion" to build up your metabolites. You can also bring with you powdered electrolytes to mix with water for re-hydration (like Gatorade). You and your physician should make the final decision.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES WHEN IN COCHABAMBA

If there is a serious illness or injury take the person to Centro Medico Quirurgico Boliviano – Belga. This medical clinic is the best resource for us for all trauma except burns. The telephone numbers are 4231403, 4229407, and 4250928. Go by taxi. One of the medical staff will be able to speak English. The clinic has two entrance doors. The one on the left is the one we use for emergencies. The one on the right is for patients with scheduled doctor's appointments. Go in the left door and then to the right into the door marked "Emergency". A doctor and resident are there 24 hours. They will treat your problem and collect from you afterward. They take Visa cards and cash. You will get a complete itemized account to take to your own insurance company. Some sample costs are \$95 for exam, lab work and prescription for severe GI problems. \$800 for a simple broken arm, and \$11,000 for bypass heart surgery.

IF YOU TRAVEL TO THE LA PAZ AREA or MACHU PICCHU

Bring warm clothes that you can wear in layers. It can get quite cold and damp. Prepare for the high altitude by doing things slowly. Take medications for altitude as mentioned above.

INTERNET COMMUNICATIONS

Most cities now have Internet cafes where you can get inexpensive Internet service. The Hotel Diplomat has wireless connections in most rooms. Be careful to always log off from web sites where you have sensitive information. Laptop computers work very well when traveling but a slight inconvenience when going through security checks. Be sure your anti-virus and spyware is current.

IF YOU GO TO THE CHAPARE FOREST

The Chapare is a warm, tropical and humid region. Bring two changes of clothing for each day and your swimming suit. Since it is a rain-forest, rain-proof clothing and water resistant shoes are advisable. It is important to have a good mosquito repellent (DEET). Mosquitoes are normally not a problem during the day but can be a nuisance in the evening. Sand fleas are common in sandy areas and therefore you should put repellent around your ankles and lower legs. Bring a flashlight. This is a great experience but is only possible if the local conditions are appropriate at the time.

STREET SENSE

As in any large city in the United States or abroad, care should be taken for the prevention of personal assault and pick-pocketing. Do not wear expensive jewelry and check valuables including passport and airline tickets in the hotel security deposits as soon as you arrive. Carry only as much money each day as you may need. Never travel with anything that you are not willing to lose. Walk in groups of two or more especially at night and in unknown areas. Don't carry so many things that you lose track of your belongings, especially in crowded areas. Do not bring a purse and avoid large camera bags. Hold on to your belongings when on buses, trains or boats. Be aware of other people and your surroundings. We never take our groups into areas of known danger. Bolivia is considered by many tourists and diplomats as one of the safest countries in South America and most people feel safer on the streets of Cochabamba than many areas in the U.S. There have been some recent incidences of teenage boys grabbing people's watches, purses and necklaces.

MEALS AND HOTELS

Participants will be staying in a nice four-star hotel in Cochabamba. The staff and service have always been exceptional. Pillows are often hard, so you may want to bring your own. A nice buffet breakfast will be served at the hotel each morning. Other meals are on the participants' own except where indicated, the guides will be glad to offer suggestions. The hotel is always a nice comfortable place to eat.

ELECTRICITY

Bolivia's and most of South America's electrical current is 220 volts and 50 cycles. Converters can be used for 110-volt personal care appliances although dual-voltage hair dryers, etc. seem to work better. You should have an adapter that goes from our 3 prong to a 2-hole round 220 volt prong. Some hotels (including the Hotel Diplomat) have 120-volt outlets. Please be careful with the dental equipment that operates on 110 volts. It will be instantly ruined if it gets plugged into a 220-volt outlet. We have transformers for the 110-volt equipment that is used in the clinics.

THINGS TO BUY

Cochabamba has the nicest selection and quality for most of the things that Bolivia has to offer but as always, if you see something you like, buy it as you may never see it again. Pewter at Artesanias MAYA, Alpaca sweaters (Fotrama Wool Factory), custom-made leather jackets (Cardela Leather Store), (bring a photo of what you want made, average cost is \$150), eye glasses at Optica Colon, wood carving, gold jewelry (Bolivianita jewels), paintings, rugs, and weavings, and stuffed bears are some of your selections. You can even get great hair styling and manicures at Ramiro Coiffeur. Travel light and use your second suitcase to carry supplies down to the children and purchases made back to your homes. When buying clothing as gifts, relate the sizes to yourself before you leave home.

BAGGAGE AND AIRLINE ARRANGEMENTS

Baggage restrictions vary between Aerosur (our official airline to Bolivia) and the domestic carriers that we fly to and from our hometowns. Northwest Airlines and several others have now reduced the domestic (U.S., Canada, Caribbean, Mexico) free weight allowance for passengers' checked luggage from 70 pounds to 50 pounds per piece. Any piece of luggage weighing over 50 pounds will be assessed excess luggage charges depending on weight. Luggage weighing between 50 and 70 pounds will be assessed \$25 per piece on most airlines. Luggage weighing over 100 pounds will not be accepted as checked luggage. The maximum total linear dimension (length plus width plus height) per piece of checked luggage is 62 inches (158 cm). When carry-on luggage is carried on-board U.S. aircraft, it must be of a size and shape to allow for storage in aircraft overhead compartments, or underneath the seat in front of the passenger. Each person is allowed to carry on-board the aircraft one piece of luggage. This piece of luggage must not exceed 45 linear inches (9 inches by 14 inches by 22 inches) and also must not exceed 40 pounds. In addition to this one piece of carry-on luggage, customers may also carry on-board a purse or briefcase or laptop computer. In addition, each passenger may carry a coat, umbrella, or other "special" items. On Aerosur each of our group is allowed one carry-on and two checked pieces weighing a maximum of 70 pounds each. Keep the pieces to a minimum and weights to the maximum. We will hopefully receive an additional waiver from Aerosur this year. Linda at Chippewa Valley Travel will provide participants with special luggage tags for all of the group bags. **DO NOT CHECK BAGS FROM YOUR HOMETOWN TO SOUTH AMERICA - PICK THEM UP IN MIAMI AND RE-CHECK THEM WITH AEROSUR. THE REVERSE IS TRUE WHEN RETURNING.** Some participants will be asked to carry down some supplies in their second suitcase or container. Consolidate everything so we have as few pieces as possible. Smaller containers can be plastic wrapped together at the

MIA Airport. Weigh your luggage, plan carefully, and be prepared to pay extra if the situation arises. You may also want to consider shipping excess baggage by other means and retrieving it before you go to the airport in Miami.

TIPPING

Porters in the U.S. now expect a minimum of \$2 per bag. The customary tips in Bolivia are less than in the U.S. Porters at the airport and in the hotel in Cochabamba expect one dollar per bag (your tips are prepaid for the group arrival into CBB and group departure). Due to the tax system in Bolivia, the waiters in the hotel and restaurants much appreciate cash left at the table and not included in room or credit card charges. Tips to tour guides are customary.

HOTEL AMENITIES

Most Latin American hotels do not provide washcloths although the Hotel Diplomat provides them to our group. You may want to bring some extra soap and shampoo if going on an overnight side trip.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Please be sensitive to the shy and superstitious nature of many Latin American Indians when taking their picture. When photographing people you will get better pictures if you use your fill flash. There is a photo processing store adjacent to the Hotel Diplomat that can print digital or film. The police and military people do not want their photos taken.

LAUNDRY

There are good laundry facilities at the Diplomat Hotel. Participants should mark their name on clothing to be sent out for laundering. Same day service is normal.

OUR GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

This project has been planned to foster international peace through understanding of other cultures and to promote better lives for the Bolivian people by our humanitarian Rotary efforts. Latin Americans have a much different standard of organization and timeliness and we may at times have to adjust to a standard of organization different than we are accustomed to. Even though we have done the most to prepare for our trip and have used our past experiences for planning, there will be unexpected hassles that can be somewhat frustrating. Expect the unexpected and enjoy the experience. As they say in Hawaii, "Hang Loose". If you are a guest of others, you will need to coordinate your own schedule with our group activities.

TIPS ON TRAVEL AND JET LAG

Traveling is fun, exciting and adventuresome, but it can upset the circadian rhythms of your body. Traveling eastward across time zones is most difficult although traveling westward and across the equator also affects body chemistry. Even leaving your own home and bed requires adjustments. Some things you can do to help yourself through such transitions include:

1. Pack your own pillow with a distinctive pillowcase (so the maids know it is yours).
2. Drink plenty of clean water in flight (6 ounces per hour) and at your destination.
3. Mentally set your watch a day or so before departure to the time at your destination and start adjusting your daily routine to it. Cochabamba Bolivia is 2 hours ahead of Central Standard Time.

4. Avoid alcohol or caffeine and do not eat big meals just before sleeping on the airplane. 5. A neck pillow and darkening eye covers will help you sleep on the airplane. The pillow we like has a silk like cover, very flexible, and feels like it is filled with soft sand particles.
6. Place the airline pillow behind the small of your back and cover your legs with the blanket.
7. Walk around and stretch often when on the airplane. An aisle seat works well for this but a window seat allows for better sleeping. Exit row seats give the most legroom but are sometimes draftier and the seat may not recline. Sometimes the seat in front of exit rows and the very last row of seats do not recline. Wear tie shoes that can be loosened or removed during flight. Most people's feet swell a little during a long flight.
8. During layovers of two or more hours you may want to take a free shuttle to the nearest hotel. They have more comfortable lounges to rest and nice restaurants. The Miami Airport Hotel in the terminal is a great place to rest and you can rent a room for a half-day.
9. Some people like to take a sleeping pill just prior to departure on overnight flights. Some people use Ambian.
10. If you plan on taking any shorter side trips, you may want to pack a small duffle bag or tote to use instead of toting larger bulkier suitcases.
11. Give yourself plenty of time to arrive at the airport and check-in. Flying is probably now safer than ever, but the security checks can often be time consuming. Review current TSA requirements for carrying on liquids and lotions.
12. Stay current with changing airline and security regulations. Today this means packing your bags differently, overweight charges, and avoiding certain objects in your carryon. Carryon size is being enforced more now.
13. When arriving in cities with high altitude follow the acclimation guidelines for a comfortable adjustment.
14. Taking a bath, laying in a pool or getting a massage are also good ways to help your body adjust. In past years a massage therapist was available at the Hotel Diplomat.