

This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



Cordillera Real

- **Simply the best trekking in Bolivia**
- **Lake Titicaca and 'Island of the Sun 'warm up'**
- **Sound acclimatisation and rest days**
- **Trek amongst the highest peaks of the Cordillera Real**
- **High passes, blue lakes, scattered settlements**

Bolivia

Land locked Bolivia nestles between the larger countries of Peru and Brazil. Over 70% of the territory is sparsely populated and undeveloped with a population that has the highest percentage of indigenous Indian peoples in South America. The country boasts great natural diversity, with mountains, barren highland plains, grassland, lush valleys and tropical rain forest. The mountains rise from the altiplano to over 7000m and are permanently snow-capped. Bolivia has almost 1000 peaks over 5000m, from the spiky Apolobamba and Cordillera Real ranges in the north to the great isolated volcanoes stretching south almost into the Atacama Desert. To the east lies the Amazon jungle, accessed by steep zigzag roads via the sub-tropical Yungas.

We begin in La Paz, the world's highest capital city at 3600m and visit Lake Titicaca, South America's highest and largest fresh-water lake. It is thought by archaeologists to have been much larger in the past when, it is believed, it was the centre of the Tiahuanaco culture. Titicaca

maintains a great spiritual significance for the local population, many of whom still adhere to their age-old customs and beliefs.

Bolivia is also one of Latin America's poorest countries. Since its independence in 1825, it has lost a number of territorial wars, the most painful loss being its Pacific coastline to Chile in the 'Wars of The Pacific' in the late nineteenth century. It never really recovered and with almost annual coups and power struggles was, by the mid 1980's in economic chaos. Recently a period of more secure government has produced several years of sound economic growth and more recently to the relief of everyone, has enjoyed some political stability. There are few countries that offer such wonderful trekking and climbing opportunities within easy reach of its capital city yet with a genuine feeling of remoteness.



Bus ferry to Copacabana. Photo Pam Nutting

The Cordillera Real trip

Landing in La Paz, the highest capital city in the world at 3632m, one is soon aware that **altitude** is a serious factor in Bolivia and good acclimatisation is crucial. We gain this with relaxed hiking around the shoreline of Lake Titicaca and the Island of the Sun, the legendary birthplace of the sun and the moon and the first Inca. A network of trails connects Inca terraces and Inca stonework and with the deep blue of Lake Titicaca always in the background, it is an ideal prelude to our trek. As the closest mountain range to La Paz, the Cordillera Real is perfect for trekking, managing to escape to the wild beauty of the Andes without the need for travelling long distances. Over eight days we trek around the 2nd and 3rd highest peaks in Bolivia, Illampu (6368m) and Ancohuma (6427m).

It is a majestic and demanding circuit with high passes, blue clear glacier lakes, breathtaking views and sparse scattered Andean settlements. We begin the trek in Sorata which nestles at the foot of the Cordillera Real, a really relaxing town at a pleasant (for Bolivia) altitude of 2695m.

The trekking day

On trek we are supported by a cook team, arrieros (donkey drivers), and a guide. We camp in roomy two person tents. A typical day would be to wake around 7am with a cup of tea in the tent, breakfast in the mess tent and away before 9am. A lunch stop is around 12.30pm with arrival time in camp mid-afternoon ready for afternoon tea and a brief siesta. Dinner, the main meal of the day will be around 6.30-7pm.

On most trekking days we walk for an average of 5 to 8 hours and cross three passes over 4500m with the highest, the Calzada Pass at 5045m. The compensation for the hard work is to be rewarded with some of the best views in the Andes.

Altitude

Above 3000m, the air is thinner, the pressure is lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Acclimatisation is the process by which the body adapts to these conditions. The key to acclimatisation is a good itinerary with a gradual initial height gain, walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable above 3000m. Some people may have minor side effects from altitude, such as headache, nausea or

general lassitude. The optional use of 'Diamox' has proved useful for some people, as this drug can reduce these symptoms. You will be given more information on 'Diamox' with your Final Information, between 8 and 10 weeks before departure.

Climate

La Paz remains about the same temperature all year round - usually about 17-19°C - but it is much cooler at night. We visit in the dry season and although it may not rain at all, rain gear is essential. On the altiplano (highlands) and in the mountains, it is much cooler with daytime temperatures of between 12 and 18°C. It is likely to dive below freezing at night.

Accommodation

In La Paz we stay in a good hotel situated near the centre of the city. Hotels in Bolivia vary enormously. In the towns we stay in mid-range hotels, with en-suite rooms when available though in Sorata and Yumani the hotel is more basic but comfortable. On trek we use two person tents. There is usually a communal dining tent for eating and socialising in the evenings.

Transport

Because of the distances involved and for convenience, we use our own transport wherever we can. This will usually be by jeep but at times we will use a combination of buses and boats.

Food

Whilst on trek all meals are provided. We take as much fresh meat and vegetables as we can and we are happy to cater for vegetarians. In main towns we provide breakfast only. This gives you the chance to try local restaurants and both La Paz and Sorata have plenty of options. We will often eat together and advise on the best places. A meal in a good local restaurant should cost about US\$10, and the better restaurants in La Paz, in the region of US\$25.

Health and hygiene

Being ill in Bolivia can be avoided. Initial contact with salads and street vended food should be resisted. Water should always be regarded with caution and treated if considered necessary. On both treks we boil all drinking water and provide facilities for hand washing before all meals. In camp we will use a toilet tent.

Baggage

While trekking, you will only need to carry what you might use that day: rain gear, spare sweater, camera, water etc. The rest of your kit will be carried by the burros (donkeys) or mules, so you will need a durable trek bag. You can leave some items in the hotel prior to the trek and a lockable bag is recommended if you are leaving valuable items.



Inca Stonework, Tiahuanaco. Photo Grant Newton

Safety

Care must be taken in the streets and shops of La Paz. It is always a good idea to be discreet carrying valuable items and in how you use your camera. Think how you can look less like a tourist! A lockable kit bag is recommended to leave spare gear in hotels.

Language and people

The official language of Bolivia is Spanish, but as 70% or more of the population are Indian, Quechua or Aymara is also widely spoken. Spanish is generally considered an easy language to learn and a few words will certainly make your trip more enjoyable.

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

This trip is 18 days ex LA PAZ. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival in and departure from LA PAZ and may not be the days you depart from or arrive back home.

DAY 1 Arrive early in La Paz, the highest capital in the world, (3600m/12,000 ft), with the first views the Cordillera Real mountains from the airport. It will almost literally take your breath away and the rest of the day is for relaxing and coming to terms with the altitude. We can begin the acclimatisation process as we walk around the city, wander through the steep cobbled streets and visit the boisterous 'Witches Market' and some of the magnificent colonial churches. (B)

DAY 2 But let us get out of the city! We drive to the lakeside town of Copacabana on Lake Titicaca, our take-off point for the Island of the Sun. Copacabana is a lively and attractive small town in a magnificent location on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Still acclimatising to the time difference and the altitude, it's good to take things easy. (B,L)

DAY 3 An easy walkaround day in Copacabana! It is only a small town and is dwarfed by it's Cathedral, the Basilica of Our Lady. It also has a busy local daily market and a relaxing Plaza de Armas in which to sit and mix with the locals. Lots of tourists in town nowadays but they tend to be of the independent backpacker type and with local and 'gringo' run bars, cafes, bookshops and small restaurants, the town has a comfortable 'laid back' feel. Sunset has to be seen from the hill overlooking the town, a steady 40 minute climb up a final staircase to the Station of the Cross viewpoint. (B)

DAY 4 A pleasant 5-hour walk takes us to the end of the Copacabana peninsula to the small village of Yampupata. From here it is only a few minutes in a small boat across to 'The Island of the Sun'- in legend the birthplace of the sun, the moon and the first Inca. We climb the 300 steps Inca stairway passing the Inca spring 'Fuente del Inca' and stay in the village of Yumani where there are several comfortable hostals. (B,L,D)

DAY 5 We hike the main trail which traverses the entire backbone of the Island all the way down to the other small settlement of Challapampa. There are striking views out across the lake and we can see easily the beckoning snowy peaks of the Cordillera Real in the distance. En-route we visit other Inca ruins and sacred sites but this is no Machu Picchu and the ruins appear modest.



La Isla del Sol: feet and hooves

There is time to appreciate the peace and tranquillity of Challapampa before a return boat ride along the coast back to Yumani. Hostal. (B,L,D)

DAY 6 Our boat takes us directly back to Copacabana, a steady 2 hours and after lunch we head off to Sorata and the start of our trek. Approx 3 hours drive. (B,L)

DAY 7 Sorata. - at 2695m is one of the finest locations in Bolivia with a pleasant climate and even palm trees in the square! We have a rest day here - it is warm and comfortable and easy to relax. Its dramatic setting guarded by two of Bolivia's three highest mountains, Illampu and Ancohuma, is exhilarating. (B)

ILLAMPU & ANCOHUMA TREK

DAY 8 A scenic drive from Sorata for a little over an hour to the small village of Lakhathiya where our trek begins with a 2-3 hour walk to camp higher up the valley. (4040m) There should be time for an afternoon walk from camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 9 Quite a long day as we climb up to our first unnamed pass at 4700m with fine views .We descend along the valley towards Ancohuma and camp a short distance up toward the Corahuasi pass at around 4030m. 7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 10 A steady climb becomes steeper as it reaches the pass of Corahuasi (4430m). and on the other side there is an energetic 1000m descent to the village of Cocoyo. We walk past the village and camp near the bottom of the Sarani pass at 3700m. 6 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 11 A gradual ascent to the Sarani pass (4500m) and then an easier descent to camp at 4200m. 6 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 12 Steady progress today. We are moving towards the Calzada Pass, the highest point on the trek. The remoteness is emphasised as condors patrol the heights looking for squirrel-like viscachas dodging around the rocks. 4800m. 5 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 13 The Calzada Pass, (5045m). The best scenery today and the nearest point to the Illampu and Ancohuma massifs meet, surrounded by lakes, glaciers, and ice capped mountains. We stay high after the pass crossing another 5000m+ ridge before dropping down to Laguna San Francisco where we camp near a small settlement at 4450m.7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 14 Rest day. This may be taken at a different time during on the trek. (B,L,D)

DAY 15 From Laguna San Francisco we head towards our roadhead at Milipaya heading upwards to nearly 5000m again to reach the trail across the altiplano and a campsite near the village of Lohina. 4-5 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 16 An easy morning descent down to the busy village of Milipaya. Our transport should be waiting and before long we are heading towards La Paz (3 hours drive). On arrival we should be fully attuned to the thin air of Bolivia and ready to celebrate the trip in true Bolivian style! (B,L)

DAY 17 Our last day! Tiahuanaco is Bolivia's most important archaeological site and should feature on any trip to Bolivia and La Paz. Less than 2 hours drive from the city, the stone ruins of Tiahuanaco not only predate the Incas but arguably most other civilisations known to man. There remain unanswered questions as to the origins and mechanics of the immense stonework and its construction. We can see the monumental stone figures, courtyards and the impressive Gate of the Sun,

part of an elaborate observatory that is believed to have functioned as a solar calendar dating back to 600B.C. An early start should leave us time for a final unrushed visit to the 'witches market' (B)

DAY 18

Depart La Paz or continue with your own arrangements. (B)



La Paz Market. Photo Pam Nutting

BL/4/11