

Bolivia

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lake Titicaca** – hop between islands on the sapphire-blue waters of the world's highest major lake (p205)
- **Amazon Basin trips** – penetrate deep into the lush pampas and rainforest of the Amazon lowlands on a riverboat (p248)
- **Carnaval** – join the revelrous crowds in Oruro and devour *la Diablada* and other dancing delights (p211)
- **Salar de Uyuni** – cruise through the eerie hallucinogenic salt deserts, and marvel at spurting geysers and colored lagoons (p219)
- **Off the beaten track** – stay in an ecolodge in Parque Nacional Madidi and marvel at the magical isolation and wildlife (p253)
- **Best journey** – trot, cycle and walk your way through the stunning quebradas around Tupiza on horse, bike and foot (p219)

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 1,098,580 sq km (France & Spain combined)
- **Best bargain:** *almuerzos* (set lunches)
- **Best street snack:** *salteña* (delicious meat and vegetable pasties)
- **Budget:** US\$15-25 a day
- **Capitals:** Sucre (constitutional), La Paz (de facto)
- **Costs:** La Paz bed US\$3-5, 1L bottle of domestic beer US\$1, 4hr bus ride US\$2.50
- **Country code:** ☎ 591
- **Famous for:** world's highest everything, being landlocked, *peñas* (folk-music shows), coca
- **Languages:** Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, Guaraní
- **Money:** US\$1 = \$8.03 bolivianos
- **Phrases:** *genial* (cool), *la bomba* (party), *mugre* (disgusting)
- **Population:** 8.8 million (2003 UN estimate)
- **Time:** GMT minus 4hr
- **Tipping:** 10% in better restaurants, small change elsewhere; don't tip taxis
- **Visas:** most North & South American & Western European citizens get a free 30-day tourist card (extendable for free for up to 90 days) upon arrival



TRAVEL HINTS

Take it easy at altitude. Visit a toilet before boarding buses. Request the *yapa* (the 'extra bit'; see p260).

OVERLAND ROUTES

Bolivia's border crossings include Guajar a-Mirim (Brazil), San Pedro Atacama (Chile), Desaguadero (Peru) and Fort n Infante Rivarola (Paraguay).

Bolivia is a country of superlatives. It's the hemisphere's highest, most isolated and most rugged nation. It's one of earth's coldest, warmest, windiest and steamiest places. It boasts among the driest, saltiest and swampiest natural landscapes in the world. Although the poorest country in South America, it's one of the richest in terms of natural resources. It's also South America's most indigenous country: over 60% of the population of 8.8 million claim indigenous heritage. Bolivia has it all...except, that is, for beaches.

This landlocked country boasts soaring peaks and hallucinogenic salt flats, steamy jungles and wildlife-rich grasslands. Unparalleled beauty is also reflected in its vibrant indigenous cultures, colonial cities, and whispers of ancient civilizations.

In recent years, it's hit the travelers' radar; opportunities for activities and off-the-beaten-path exploration have exploded.

Bolivia's social and political fronts are frequently shaky, thanks to an impotent economy, and a populace worn ragged by poverty, unemployment and disfranchisement. Protests, marches and demonstrations (mostly peaceful) are a perpetual part of the country's mind-boggling landscape. Put on your high-altitude goggles, take a deep breath (or three) and live superlatively.

CURRENT EVENTS

With the election of the country's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, a Constitutional Assembly sat for the first time in August 2006 to review the country's Constitution. They will meet for one year, after which a public referendum will be held. Bolivians wait with bated breath to see what changes will be made. Morales, a former coca grower and left-wing antiprivatization activist, quickly made his mark by nationalizing the country's gas reserves in April 2006. Protests and marches, a favorite pastime of Bolivians, are more common than ever, as people stress their demands to their new president. Bolivia remains landlocked, despite ongoing public disgruntlement and discussions with Chile about access to the ocean.

HISTORY

Pre-Gringo Times

Sometime around 1500 BC, Aymara people, possibly from the mountains of modern central Peru, swept across the Bolivian Andes to occupy the *altiplano* (high plain of Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina). The years between AD 500 and AD 900 were distinguished by imperial expansion and increasing power and influence of the Tiahuanaco (or Tiwanaku) culture. The society's ceremonial center near Lake Titicaca rapidly became the highland's religious and political center. In the 9th century AD, however, Tiahuanaco's power waned. Ongoing submarine excavations in Lake Titicaca are attempting to identify the cause of Tiahuanaco's downfall.

Before the Spanish Conquest, the Bolivian *altiplano* had been incorporated into the Inca empire as the southern province of Kollasuyo. Modern Quechua speakers around Lake Titicaca are descended from immigrants who arrived under an Inca policy of populating newly conquered colonies with Quechua-speaking tribes.

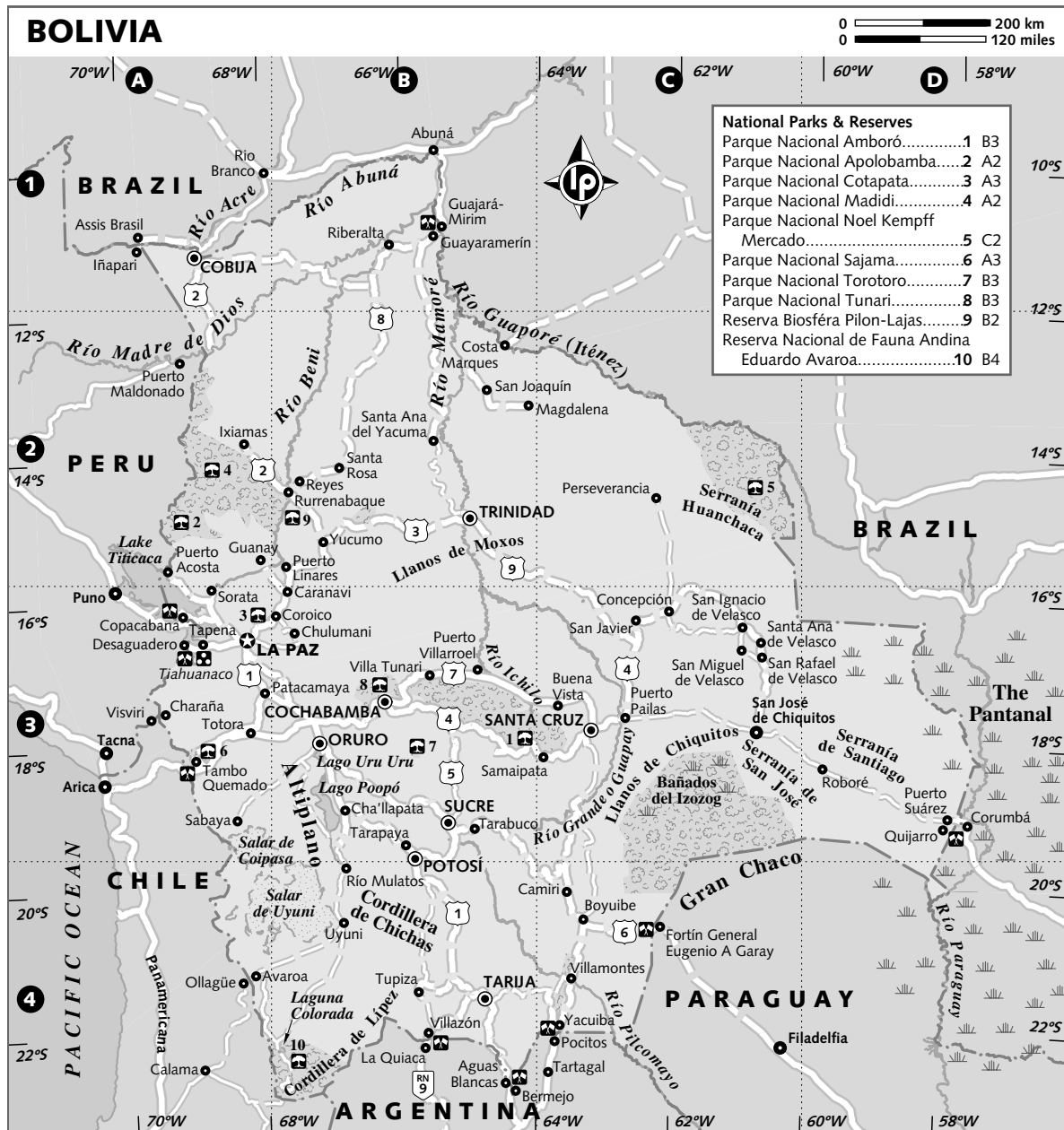
There's considerable speculation that ruins on the scale of Macchu Picchu, possibly the lost Inca city of Paititi, may be buried in the Bolivian rainforest.

Conquistadores

By the late 1520s, internecine rivalries began cleaving the Inca empire. However, it took the arrival of the Spaniards – initially thought to be emissaries of the Inca sun god – to seal the deal. The Inca emperor Atahualpa was captured in 1532, and by 1537 the Spanish had consolidated their forces in Peru and securely held Cuzco.

After the demise of the Inca empire, Alto Perú, as the Spaniards called Bolivia, fell briefly into the hands of the conquistador Diego de Almagro. Before long, Francisco Pizarro dispatched his brother Gonzalo to subdue the rogue, silver-rich southern province. In 1538 Pedro de Anzures founded the township of La Plata (later renamed Chuquisaca and then Sucre), which became the political center of Spain's eastern territories.

In 1545 tremendous deposits of high-quality silver were discovered in Potosí. The settlement grew into one of the world's richest (and highest) cities on the backs of forced labor: appalling conditions in the mines led



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to the deaths of perhaps eight million African and Indian slaves. In 1548 Alonso de Mendoza founded La Paz as a staging post on the main silver route to the Pacific coast.

In 1574 the Spaniards founded the granaries of Cochabamba and Tarija, which served to contain the uncooperative Chiriguano people. Then colonialism and Jesuit missionary efforts established settlement patterns that defined the course of Bolivian society.

Coups de Grâce

In 1781 a futile attempt was made to oust the Spaniards and reestablish the Inca empire. Three decades later a local government was established in the independence movement

stronghold of Chuquisaca (Sucre). Chuquisaca's liberal political doctrines soon radiated throughout Spanish America.

In 1824, after 15 years of bloodshed, Peru was finally liberated from Spanish domination. However, in Alto Perú, the royalist general Pedro Antonio de Olañeta held out against the liberating forces. In 1825, when offers of negotiation failed, Simón Bolívar dispatched an expeditionary force to Alto Perú under General Antonio José de Sucre. On August 6, 1825, independence was proclaimed, Alto Perú became the Republic of Bolivia, and Bolívar and Sucre became the new republic's first and second presidents.

In 1828 *mestizo* (a person of mixed Indian and Spanish descent) Andrés de Santa Cruz

took power and formed a confederacy with Peru. This triggered protests by Chile, whose army defeated Santa Cruz in 1839, breaking the confederation and throwing Bolivia into political chaos. The confusion peaked in 1841, when three different governments claimed power simultaneously.

Such spontaneous and unsanctioned changes of government continued through the 1980s in a series of coups and military interventions. At the time of writing, Bolivia had endured nearly 200 changes of government in its 181 years as a republic.

Chronic Territorial Losses

By the mid-19th century, the discovery of rich guano and nitrate deposits in the Atacama Desert transformed the desolate region into an economically strategic area. Since Bolivia lacked the resources to exploit the Atacama, it contracted Chilean companies. In 1879, when the Bolivian government proposed taxing the minerals, Chile occupied Bolivia's Litoral department, prompting Bolivia and Peru to declare war on Chile.

During the War of the Pacific (1879–83), Chile annexed 350km of coastline, leaving Bolivia landlocked. Though Chile offered to compensate Bolivia with a railway from Antofagasta to Oruro and duty-free export facilities, Bolivians refused to accept their *enclaustramiento* (landlocked status). The Bolivian government still lodges coastal claims; diplomatic relations with Santiago appear to be improving: the country's first indigenous leader, President Morales first met with Chile's leader in 2006.

Bolivia's losses continued. In 1903 Brazil annexed a huge chunk of the rubber-rich Acre region, which stretched from Bolivia's present Amazonian border to halfway up Peru's eastern border.

Between 1932 and 1935, Bolivia lost a third – and particularly brutal – war to Paraguay for control of the Chaco region (a total of 80,000 lives were lost). Foreign oil companies began (mistakenly) speculating about potential Chaco petrol deposits. A quarrel was sparked, with Standard Oil backing Bolivia and Shell siding with Paraguay. Bolivia had more firepower, but the Chaco's hellacious fighting conditions favored the Paraguayans. A 1938 peace settlement granted 225,000 sq km of the Chaco to Paraguay.

Revolution & Counterrevolution

Following the Chaco War, friction between disenfranchised miners and their absentee bosses escalated. Radicals, especially in Oruro, gathered beneath the banner of the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR). The turbulent 1951 presidential elections brought victory to the MNR's Victor Paz Estenssoro, but a military coup prevented him from taking power. The bloody revolution of 1952 forced the military to capitulate and Paz Estenssoro finally took the helm.

The new government spearheaded reforms aimed at ensuring the participation of all social sectors. Mining properties were nationalized and the sole right to export mineral products was vested in the state. The government introduced universal suffrage and an unprecedented policy of agrarian and educational reform, including a redistribution of estates among *campesinos* (farmers) and universal elementary education. For the first time since the Spanish Conquest, indigenous people felt that they had a voice in the government.

The MNR government lasted an unprecedented 12 years but had trouble raising the standard of living. Paz Estenssoro became increasingly autocratic as dissension in his own ranks percolated. Shortly after his second reelection in 1964, he was overthrown by his vice president, General René Barrientos, reviving Bolivia's political instability.

A series of repressive military governments ensued, starting with that of the right-wing general Hugo Banzer Suárez (1971–78). In 1982 a civilian government returned under Hernán Siles Zuazo and his left-wing Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), but the country suffered from labor disputes, monetary devaluation and staggering inflation.

Under the Bolivian constitution, a candidate must earn 50% of the popular vote to become president in a direct election. When no candidate emerges with a clear majority, congress makes the decision, usually via a backroom deal between the major candidates. In 1989 the right-wing Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN) made a deal with the MIR, and the MIR's leader Jaime Paz Zamora was appointed president. In 1993 MNR leader Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada ('Goni'; the Gringo) garnered the most votes, but had to ally with a *campesino* party

to secure the presidency. He embarked on an ambitious privatization program, notable because much of the proceeds were invested in a public pension program. The new economic policies were met with protests and strikes, while antidrug programs sparked more unrest.

In the 1997 elections, comeback king Hugo Banzer Suárez and his rightist ADN party won just 23% of the vote. Due to pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), neoliberal economic reforms were instituted, the currency was stabilized and many major industries were privatized. In August 2001 Banzer resigned due to cancer and handed over the reins to his vice president Jorge Quiroga Ramírez. With strong US backing, Sánchez de Lozada returned to power in the 2002 elections, only to face a popular uprising in February 2003 over the privatization of the gas industry ('The Bitter Gas War'), which forced him from office and into exile in the US. His deputy and successor Carlos Mesa held a referendum to permit Bolivia to export gas through Chile, but the questions were deemed complicated and the results uncertain. With this crisis and unrest on his hands, Mesa tried unsuccessfully to resign but Congress did not accept his offer. However, street demonstrations and unrest escalated,

and as thousands marched into La Paz in June 2005, his resignation was accepted.

Former leader Eduardo Rodríguez was appointed as interim president until the elections in December 2005. In these elections, Evo Morales won in a landslide, having promised to change the traditional political class and empower the country's poor majority. Indeed, he was quick to act, nationalizing the country's gas reserves in April 2006 (see p175). At the time of print, Morales was talking about ceasing the US coca-crop eradication, integral to the US War on Drugs program.

Although the GDP grew steadily in the 1990s, Bolivia remains the continent's poorest nation. In 2005 the G8 announced a debt-forgiveness plan to the tune of US\$2 billion over the next few decades to help reduce fiscal pressures. Infrastructure shortcomings and high unemployment rates continue to plague the country.

Coca Quandary

Coca has always been part of Bolivian culture: the Inca love goddess was represented holding coca leaves. Chewing the bitter leaf increases alertness and reduces hunger, cold and pain (see boxed text, below). It's believed that the Spanish conquistadores reaped the rewards

THE COCA CRAFT

Chewing coca leaves into an *akullico* – a soggy wad of golf-ball proportions – is an important ritual in Andean culture and is said to reduce fatigue, hunger and cold, as well as the effects of altitude. Most travelers try it, at least once. The following is a novice's guide to a good chew:

- Buy a good-quality leaf (*elegida* or *seleccionada*). 'Prime' leaves are moist, green and healthy.
- De-vein the leaves one by one and insert them into the side of your mouth, between your cheek and choppers. Start macerating – not chewing! – the leaves. (The Bolivians say *pijchar*.) Sufficient maceration can take up to 45 minutes or more.
- Resist the urge (or not) to spit out the bitter-tasting mass!
- When the leaves are sufficiently soggy and the mass resembles a 'ball,' add a pinch of the alkaline substance *llyipta* (also called *lejía*; these are plant ashes, normally from *quinua*) or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda). The easiest way is to crush the *llyipta* into a powder and add it to a leaf before putting it in your mouth. This alkaline substance helps release the leaves' alkaloids.
- Sense (or not) a strong tingling and numbing sensation in your cheek. (Resist the temptation to slap your face and declare 'I can't feel anything!' – like any anesthetic it wears off.)
- Enjoy a mild sensation of alertness, reduction of appetite and resistance to temperature fluctuations. (Coca leaves do not produce a rush or a 'high'.)
- Spit out when sated or before your mouth is the color of the Incredible Hulk. If imbibing is more to your taste, opt for a coca leaves tea.

of coca's lucrative regional trade. The world's (in)famous cola company incorporated derivatives into its 'secret' recipe, and some 19th-century patent medicines were based on coca. The raw leaf is neither harmful nor addictive and is said to be high in calcium, iron and vitamins.

But when its derivative – cocaine – became the recreational drug of choice (particularly in the USA), demand for Bolivian coca leaves rocketed. Since 1988, Bolivian law has permitted 12,000 hectares (30,000 acres) of coca to be cultivated for local (legitimate) use, but in reality, experts say that actual cultivation exceeds this limit.

In the '80s, in a desperate bid to curb Bolivia's status as primary producer of coca, the US sent its Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) squadrons into the primary coca-growing regions of Chapare and Beni to 'assist' in coca eradication. It also injected millions of 'development aid' into the regions to develop alternative agricultural industries. This program largely failed: the alternative crops grow slowly, profits were negligible and, as poverty increased among *cocaleros* (growers), they shifted their cultivation to other areas. There were reports of brutality and human-rights abuses initiated by the DEA against the *cocaleros*.

In Chapare, it was Evo Morales – a former coca grower and by then a union organizer – who led the resistance against the eradication policies. Soon after his recent election as president, Morales was quick to reinforce the slogan: '*coca sí, cocaína no*' ('coca yes, cocaine no'), an emphasis on solving the cocaine problem – at the consumer, not the *campesino*, end. He has also suspended eradication programs and wishes to increase cultivation, while seeking export opportunities for alternative coca-based products. In trying to appease both his constituents and the US, however, Morales could be playing with fire. At stake is the Bolivia–US trade agreement, crucial to the Bolivian textile producers, interestingly named the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Bolivian attitude varies widely depending on climate and altitude. *Kollas* (highlanders) and *cambas* (lowlanders) enjoy expounding on what makes themselves 'better' than the other. Lowlanders are said to be warmer, more casual

and more generous to strangers; highlanders are supposedly harder working but less open-minded. The reality is that seemingly every *camba* has a kind *kolla* relative living in La Paz and the jesting is good-natured.

Bolivians are all very keen on greetings and pleasantries. Every exchange is kicked off with the usual *buen(os) día(s)* (hello/good day), but also with a *¿Cómo está?* or *¿Qué tal?* (How are you?). Bolivian Spanish is also liberally sprinkled with endearing diminutives such as *sopita* (a little soup) and *pesitos* (little pesos, as in 'it only costs 10 little pesos').

Lifestyle

Day-to-day life varies from Bolivian to Bolivian, depending on whether they live in the country or city, their class and cultural background. Many *campesinos* live a largely traditional lifestyle in small villages, often without running water, heat or electricity, while those in the cities enjoy the comforts and modern conveniences and follow more Western practices. Clothing customs vary dramatically, from the women (Cholitas) of the *altiplano* in their pleated skirts and hats, to those who opt for the latest in designer wear.

Nevertheless, from ritual offerings to Pachamama (Mother Earth) to the habitual chewing of coca, Bolivia is long and strong in traditional culture. An entire canon of gods and spirits are responsible for bountiful harvests, safe travels and matchmaking. One especially unique tradition is the *tinku*, a ritual fistfight that establishes a pecking order, practiced during festivals in the northern Potosí department. The bloody, drunken battles (some fatal) go on for days, may feature rocks or other weapons and don't exempt women.

Population

Thanks to its amazing geographic diversity, Bolivia is anything but homogenous. Around 60% of the population claims indigenous identity. Many *campesinos* continue to speak Quechua or Aymara as a first language and some still live by a traditional lunar calendar. Miraculously, the frigid *altiplano* region supports nearly 70% of the populace.

Most Bolivians' standard of living is alarmingly low, marked by substandard housing, nutrition, education, sanitation and hygiene. The country has a high infant mortality rate (52 deaths per 1000 births); a birth rate of 2.85 per woman and a literacy rate of 87.2%.

Bolivia's economic landscape is bleak, but not completely dire, thanks to a thriving informal economy. The largest slice of the economic pie comes from coca exports, which exceed all legal agricultural exports combined.

SPORTS

Like in most of Latin America, the national sport is *fútbol* (soccer) and the national side typically fares quite well in *futsal* or *fútbol de salón* (five-versus-five minisoccer) world championships. Professional matches happen every weekend in big cities and it's easy to pick up impromptu street games. On the *altiplano*, liberated women have been playing more and more in recent years – in full skirts. Bolívar and Canada Strongest (both from La Paz) usually represent (albeit weakly) in the Copa Libertadores. Wrestling is becoming popular among a small but growing group of hardy *altiplano* females. Racquetball, billiards, chess and *cacho* (dice) are also huge. The unofficial national sport, however, has to be *festing* and *feting* – competition between dancers and drinkers knows no bounds.

RELIGION

Roughly 95% of Bolivia's population is Roman Catholic, with varying degrees of commitment. Particularly in rural regions, locals mix their Inca and traditional belief systems with Christianity, resulting in syncretism, an amalgamation of doctrines and superstitions.

Natural gods and spirits form the beliefs of these indigenous religions, with Pachamama, the earth mother, central to sacrificial offerings. The Aymara believe in mountain gods: *achachilas* are spirits of high mountains.

Talismans are also popular to guard against evil or bring good luck, as is Ekeko, a little elf-like figure and the Aymara household god of abundance, and the *cha'lla* (ritual blessing) of vehicles at the cathedral in Copacabana.

ARTS

Architecture

Tiahuanaco's ruined structures and a handful of Inca remains are about all that's left of pre-Columbian architecture in Bolivia. The classic Inca polygonal-cut stones that distinguish many Peruvian sites are rare in Bolivia, found only on Isla del Sol and Isla de la Luna (Lake Titicaca).

Some colonial-era houses and street facades survive, notably in Potosí, Sucre and La Paz.

Many existing colonial buildings are religious and their styles overlap several periods.

Renaissance (1550–1650) churches were constructed primarily of adobe, with courtyards and massive buttresses, such as that in Tiahuanaco. Renaissance churches with Moorish Mudejar influences include San Miguel (Sucre), and Copacabana (on the shores of Lake Titicaca).

Baroque (1630–1770) churches were constructed in the form of a cross, with an elaborate dome, such as the *Compañía* in Oruro, San Agustín in Potosí and Santa Bárbara in Sucre.

Mestizo style (1690–1790) is defined by whimsical decorative carvings including tropical flora and fauna, Inca deities and gargoyles. See the wild results at San Francisco (La Paz); San Lorenzo, Santa Teresa and the *Compañía* (Potosí).

In the mid-18th century, the Jesuits in the Beni and Santa Cruz lowlands went off on neoclassical tangents, designing churches with Bavarian rococo and Gothic elements. Their most unusual effort was the mission church at San José de Chiquitos.

Since the 1950s many modern city high-rises have been constructed. There are some gems: look for triangular pediments on the rooflines, new versions of the Spanish balcony and hardwoods of differing hues. In La Paz, chalet-type, wooden houses are all the rage and the more recent cathedral in Riberalta sings the contemporary gospel of brick and cedar.

Dance

Traditional *altiplano* dances celebrate war, fertility, hunting prowess, marriage and work. The Spaniards' European dances blended with those of the African slaves to evolve into the hybrid dances of Bolivian contemporary celebrations.

Bolivia's de facto national dance is the *cueca*, derived from the Chilean original and danced by handkerchief-waving couples, primarily during fiestas. The most colorful dances are performed at *altiplano* festivals, particularly during Carnaval: Oruro's *la Diablada* (Dance of the Devils) fiesta draws huge international crowds. The festival's *la morenada* reenacts the dance of African slaves brought to the courts of Viceroy Felipe III; dancers don hooped skirts, shoulder mantles and devilish, plumed masks.

Music

Despite motley, myriad influences, each of Bolivia's regions has developed its own musical styles and instruments. Andean music, from the cold, bleak *altiplano*, is suitably haunting and mournful, while music from the warmer lowland areas like Tarija has more vibrant, colorful tones.

Under the military regimes, *peñas* (folk-music shows) were a venue for protest; today, cities host *peñas*. Major artists to look for include *charango* masters Celestino Campos, Ernesto Cavour and Mauro Núñez (the recording is *Charangos Famosos*). Also sound out Altiplano, Savia Andina, Chullpa Ñan, K'Ala Marka, Rumillajta, Los Quipus, Wara, Los Masis and Yanapakuna.

The ukulelelike *charango* originally featured five pairs of llama-gut strings and a *quirquincho* (armadillo carapace) sound box that produced the pentatonic scale. Modern *charangos* are now usually made of wood. Tarija's stringed instrument, the *violín chapaco*, is a variation on the European violin.

Before the *charango*, melody lines were 'aired' exclusively by woodwind instruments. Traditional musical ensembles use the *quena* (reed flute) and the *zampoña* (pan flute). The *bajón*, an enormous pan flute with separate mouthpieces in each reed, accompanies festivities in the Moxos communities of the Beni lowlands.

Percussion sets the tone in most folkloric performances. Instruments include the *huankara*, a drum of the highlands, and Tarija's *caja*, a tambourinelike drum played with one hand.

Bolivia has its share of pop groups. Those in the mix include long-time Azul Azul, Octavia and Los Kjarkas. The last are best known for their recording of 'Llorando se Fue' which was lifted and reshaped (without permission) into the blockbuster hit *Lambada*. Inevitably, rap music has hit the scene, with some of the youngsters in El Alto catching on to its beat.

Weaving

Weaving methods have changed little in Bolivia for centuries. In rural areas, young girls learn to weave and women spend their spare time with a drop spindle or weaving on heddle looms. Before colonization, weavers used llama and alpaca wool, but today, sheep's wool and synthetic fibers are the cheaper options.

Bolivian textiles have wonderfully diverse patterns. The most common pieces include the *manta* or *aguayo*, a square shawl made of two handwoven strips, the *chuspa* (coca pouch), the *falda* (skirt) with patterned weaving on one edge and woven belts.

Each region boasts a different weaving style, motif and use. Zoomorphic patterns feature in weavings from Charazani country (near Lake Titicaca) and in several *altiplano* areas outside La Paz (Lique and Calamarca). Potolo, near Sucre, is renowned for its distinctive red-and-black designs. Finer weavings originate in Sica Sica, a dusty and nondescript village between La Paz and Oruro, while the expert spinning in Calcha, southeast of Potosí, produces an extremely tight weave and some of Bolivia's finest textiles.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Despite the loss of huge chunks of territory in wars and concessions, landlocked Bolivia is South America's fifth-largest country. Two Andean mountain chains define the west, with many peaks above 6000m. The western Cordillera Occidental stands between Bolivia and the Pacific coast. The eastern Cordillera Real runs southeast past Lake Titicaca, then turns south across central Bolivia, joining with the other chain to form the southern Cordillera Central.

The haunting *altiplano*, which ranges from 3500m to 4000m, is boxed in by these two great *cordilleras*. It is an immense, nearly treeless plain punctuated by mountains and solitary volcanic peaks. At the north end of the *altiplano*, straddling the Peruvian border, Lake Titicaca is one of the world's highest navigable lakes. In the bottom left corner, the land is drier and less populated. Here are the remnants of two ancient lakes, the Salar de Uyuni and the Salar de Coipasa, which form an ethereal expanse of blindingly white desert plains when dry, and hallucinogenic mirror images when under water.

East of the Cordillera Central are the Central Highlands, a region of scrubby hills, valleys and fertile basins. Cultivated in this Mediterranean-like climate are olives, nuts, wheat, maize and grapes.

North of the Cordillera Real, where the Andes abut the Amazon Basin, the Yungas form a transition zone between arid highlands and humid lowlands. More than half of

Bolivia's total area is in the Amazon Basin. The northern and eastern lowlands are sparsely populated and flat, with swamps, savannas, scrub and rainforest.

In the country's southeastern corner lies the flat, nearly impenetrable scrubland of the Gran Chaco, which extends into northern Paraguay.

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Wildlife

National parks and reserves comprise 35% of Bolivia's territory and harbor myriad animal and bird species. Several national parks and protected areas (Parque Nacional Amboró, for example) boast among the world's greatest densities of species concentration. The *altiplano* is home to camelids, flamingos and condors. The harsh Chaco hides jaguar, tapir and *javeli* (peccary). The Amazon Basin boasts an amazing variety of lizards, parrots, snakes, insects, fish and monkeys (the most recently discovered species of *titi* monkey is worth its weight in gold; it was named after an online Canadian casino – *Callicebus averi palatti*; Golden Palace – after the casino won an auction to raise money for environmental foundations). Bolivia has several rare and endangered species including giant anteaters and spectacled bears.

River travelers might spot *capybaras* (large rodents), turtles, caimans and pink dolphins. Anacondas exist in the Beni, as do armadillos, sloths, rheas and *jochis* (agoutis).

National Parks

Bolivia has 22 officially declared parks, reserves and nature areas under the National Park Service, Sernap. Areas that are accessible to visitors – albeit often with some difficulty – include the following:

Amboró (p248) Near Santa Cruz, home to rare spectacled bears, jaguars and an astonishing variety of birdlife.

Apolobamba Excellent hiking in this remote park abutting the Peruvian border beneath the Cordillera Apolobamba.

Cotapata Most of the Choro trek passes through here, midway between La Paz and Coroico in the Yungas.

Madidi (p253) Protects a wide range of wildlife habitats; home to more than 1100 bird species.

Noel Kempff Mercado (p248) Remote park on the Brazilian border; contains a variety of wildlife and some of Bolivia's most inspiring scenery.

Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve A continuation of Madidi Park offering stunning landscape and living cultures.

Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo

Avaroa A highlight of the Southwest Circuit tour, including wildlife-rich lagoons.

Sajama Adjoining Chile's magnificent Parque Nacional Lauca; contains Volcán Sajama (6542m), Bolivia's highest peak.

Torotoro Enormous rock formations with dinosaur tracks from the Cretaceous period, plus caves and ancient ruins.

Tunari Within hiking distance of Cochabamba; features the Lagunas de Huarahuara and lovely mountain scenery.

Environmental Issues

The 1990s saw an enormous surge in international and domestic interest in Amazonian ecological issues. Though environmental organizations have crafted innovative ways to preserve selected spots (including external funding), in other areas intensive development continues, often – in the past at least – with governmental encouragement. The jury is still out on how the Morales government will help the environmental cause. Contact the following nonprofit groups for information on countrywide environmental conservation efforts:

Armonía (☎ /fax 03-356-8808; www.birdbolivia.com; Lomas de Arena 400, Santa Cruz) Everything you need to know about Bolivian birding and bird conservation.

Conservación Internacional (CI; ☎ 02-279-7700; www.conservation.org.bo in Spanish; Calacoto Calle 13, No 8008, La Paz) Promotes community-based biodiversity conservation and ecotourism.

Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN; ☎ 03-355-6800; www.fan-bo.org) Branches in Santa Cruz and Samaipata. Working in Parques Nacionales Amboró and Noel Kempff Mercado.

Protección del Medioambiente del Tarija (Prometa; ☎ 04-664-5865; www.prometa.org; Carpio E-659, Tarija) Working in Sama and Tariquía reserves, Parque Nacional Serranía Aguaragüe and El Corbalán and Alarachi Private Reserves.

Servicio Nacional de Areas Protegidas (Sernap; ☎ 231-7742/47; www.sernap.gov.bo in Spanish; Edificio Full Office, btwn Camcho & Mariscal Santa Cruz) Bolivia's national park service manages all reserves and protected areas. Its website has a clear overview of each national park.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Only a few airlines are brave enough to offer direct services to La Paz' Aeropuerto El Alto (LPB), thus fares are as high as the altitude; flights to and from Chile and Peru are the cheapest. Many travelers land in Lima (Peru)

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax is charged for all domestic flights (US\$2) and all international flights (US\$25), payable after check-in. There is a 16% tax on all international airfares purchased in Bolivia.

or Santiago (Chile) and travel overland to enter Bolivia. Santa Cruz' Viru Viru International (VVI) is an increasingly popular entry point from western European hubs and for regional destinations not linked to La Paz.

Direct flights serve Arica (Chile), Asunción (Paraguay), Bogotá (Colombia), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Caracas (Venezuela), Córdoba (Argentina), Cuzco (Peru), Iquique (Chile), Lima (Peru), Manaus (Brazil), Río de Janeiro (Brazil), Salta (Argentina), Santiago (Chile) and São Paulo (Brazil).

Boat

The Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon frontiers are accessible via irregular riverboats. A more popular crossing is across the Río Mamoré by frequent ferry from Guajará-Mirim (Brazil) to Guayaramerín (see p255). From there, you can travel overland to Riberalta and on to Cobija or Rurrenabaque and La Paz.

Bus & Camión

Daily *flotas* (long-distance buses) link La Paz with Buenos Aires (Argentina) via Bermejo or Yacuiba; Salta (Argentina) via Tupiza/Villazón; Corumbá (Brazil) via Quijarro; and Arica and Iquique (Chile) via Tambo Quemado. Increasingly popular is the crossing to San Pedro de Atacama (Chile) as a detour from Salar de Uyuni tours (see p216). The most popular overland route to and from Puno and Cuzco (Peru) is via Copacabana (see boxed text, p209), but traveling via Desaguadero is quicker. Villamontes is the gateway for hearty souls attempting the Trans Chaco 'Highway', which now hits Paraguay at Fortín Infante Rivola (with customs at Mariscal Estigarribia in Paraguay) and rambles all the way to Asunción. Note: for those travelers going by car, the two Bolivian border posts are at Boyuibe or Ibibobo. Cheaper *camiones* (open-bed trucks) carry more contraband than passengers across borders, but they are useful for reaching obscure border crossings where there is little regularly scheduled public transport,

but check where you must get your entry and exit stamps on departure and arrival.

Car & Motorcycle

While most travelers enter Bolivia from adjoining lands by bus, train and/or boat, a few thrill seekers pilot their own vehicles. Motoring in Bolivia is certain to try your patience (and mechanical skills!), but will be a trip of a lifetime. Most rental agencies accept national driver's licenses, but if you plan on doing a lot of motoring bring an international license. For motorcycle and moped rentals, a passport is all that is normally required. See also p1085.

Train

Bolivia's only remaining international railway route detours west from the Villazón–Oruro line at Uyuni. It passes through the Andes to the Chilean frontier at Avaroa/Ollagüe then descends precipitously to Calama, Chile (see p218). Other adventurous routes dead end at the Argentine frontier at Villazón/La Quiaca (see the boxed text, p227) and Yacuiba/Pocitos and in the Brazilian Pantanal at Quijarro/Corumbá.

GETTING AROUND

You can get anywhere cheaply via bus, hitchhiking or camion. The most common (and locally popular) option is buses, which come in all shapes and sizes (as do their wheels) – and in all states of luxury or disrepair. Think twice about booking the cheapest ticket – a 24-hour-plus torture trip into the jungle at the end of rainy season (many stop operating during the rainy season). Boats, planes and trains are a much better choice when river crossings are high and unpaved roads have turned to mud. Trains are always the best option in the far south and in the north, moto-taxis will zip you around cheaply in every Beni town. Whatever your mode of transport, always take as a travel companion a stash of snacks, warm clothes, water and toilet paper.

Air

The national carrier **Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano** (LAB; reservations ☎ 800-10-3001, info ☎ 800-10-4321; www.labairlines.com in Spanish) and the private **AeroSur** (www.aerosur.com) are two long-standing airlines. At the time of research, AeroSur was a safer bet as LAB was experiencing cruising problems due to major debt issues.

A couple of no-frills domestic air services have hit the runways in recent years. They charge around the same fares and have a wide network with frequent flights and services to virtually everywhere you might wish to go. **Amazonas** (www.amazonas.com in Spanish) wings it from La Paz to Rurrenabaque twice daily. Note: services to Rurrenabaque are frequently delayed or cancelled. This is not (as many believe) always due to unreliable service, but to adverse weather conditions. The dirt runways turn to mud after heavy rains, so the planes will take off or land only when it is safe to do so. Always allow a couple of days to arrive or return at destinations such as Rurrenabaque.

The rough-and-ready military airline **Transportes Aéreos Militares** (TAM; ☎ in La Paz 02-212-1582/1585; tam@entelnet.bo) is a good alternative for Rurrenabaque and hard-to-reach places. Fares are cheap but seats are unreserved and flights are often late or canceled. AeroSur and LAB both offer four-flight, 45-day air passes (around US\$250) between any of the main cities. (LAB also offers a similar Vibol Pass; it can only be bought *outside* Bolivia; three to five flights US\$155 to US\$250. See www.labairlines.com.bo for conditions.) The only catch with all the passes is that you can't pass through the same city twice, except to make connections.

Boat

Half of Bolivia's territory lies in the Amazon Basin, where rivers are the main (and during the rainy season often the only) transport arteries. The region's main waterways are the Beni, Guaporé (Iténez), Madre de Dios and Mamoré Rivers, all Amazon tributaries. Most cargo boats offer simple accommodations (cheap hammocks and mosquito nets are available in all ports) and carry everything from livestock to vehicles. Patience and plenty of spare time are key to enjoying these off-the-beaten-path journeys.

Bus, Camión & Hitchhiking

Thankfully, the Bolivian road network is improving as more kilometers are paved. Unpaved roads range from good-grade dirt to mud, sand, gravel and 'only at own risk.' Modern coaches use the best roads, while older vehicles ply minor secondary routes.

Long-distance bus lines are called *flotas*. Large buses are called *buses* and small ones

are called *micros*. A bus terminal is a *terminal terrestre*.

To be safe, reserve bus tickets at least several hours in advance; for the lowest fare, purchase immediately after the driver starts up the engine. Many buses depart in the afternoon or evening, to arrive at their destination in the wee hours of the morning. On most major routes there are also daytime departures.

An alternative on many routes is a *camión*, which normally costs around 50% of the bus fare. This is how *campesinos* travel, and it can be excruciatingly slow and rough, depending on the cargo and number of passengers. *Camiones* offer the best views of the countryside. Each town has places where *camiones* gather to wait for passengers; some even have scheduled departures. Otherwise, the best places to hitch a lift will be the *tranca*, the police checkpoint at every town exit.

On any bus or *camión* trip in the highlands, day or night, layer well for the freezing nights (on and off the *altiplano*) and take food and water. Expect much longer travel times (or canceled services) in the rainy season when roads are challenging or impassable.

Taxi & Moto-taxi

Taxis are cheap but none are metered. Confirm the fare before departure or you're likely to be overcharged. Cross-town rides in large cities rarely exceed a couple of dollars (except to and from the airport which costs around US\$6) and short hops in smaller towns are less than US\$1. Fares are sometimes higher late at night, with excessive luggage (bargain hard!) and are always more for uphill runs. Full-day taxi hire is often cheaper than renting a car. Hourly moto-taxi rentals are common in balmy Beni towns.

Train

Since privatization, passenger rail services have been cut way back. The western network runs from Oruro to Uyuni and Villazón (on the Argentine border); a branch line runs southwest from Uyuni to Avaroa, on the Chilean border. Between Oruro, Tupiza and Uyuni, the comfortable *Expreso del Sur* trains run twice weekly. The cheaper *Wara Wara del Sur* also runs twice weekly between Oruro and Villazón. See www.fca.com.bo.

In the east, there's a line from Santa Cruz to the frontier at Quijarro, where you cross to the Pantanal in Corumbá, Brazil. An infrequently

used service goes south from Santa Cruz to Yacuiba on the Argentine border a couple of times a week.

Rail travel in Bolivia requires patience and determination. Most stations now have printed timetables, but they still can't be entirely trusted. In older stations, departure times may be scrawled on a blackboard. When buying tickets, take your passport. For most trains, tickets are available only on the day of departure, but you can usually reserve seats on better trains through a local travel agent for a small commission.

LA PAZ

 02 / pop 1.5 million (including El Alto)

La Paz is dizzying in every respect, not only for its well-publicized altitude (3660m), but for its quirky beauty. All travelers enter the city via the flat sparse plains of the sprawling El Alto, an approach which hides sensational surprises of the valley below; the first glimpse of La Paz will, literally, take your breath away. The city's buildings cling to the sides of the canyon and spill spectacularly downwards. On a clear day, the imposing, showy, snowy Mt Illamani (6402m) looms in the background.

The posher suburbs, with skyscrapers, colonial houses and modern glass constructions, occupy the city's more tranquil lower regions, but most of the daily action takes place further up the incline where a mass of irregular-shaped steep streets and alleys wind their way skywards. Here, locals embrace their frenetic daily life. Women, sporting long black plaits, bowler hats and vivid *mantas*, attend to steaming pots or sell everything from dried llama fetuses to designer shoes while men, negotiating the heavy traffic and its fumes, push overlaid trolleys.

La Paz must be savored over time, not only to acclimatize to the altitude, but to experience the city's many faces. Wander at leisure through the alleys and markets, marvel at the many interesting museums, chat to the locals in a *comedor* (basic cafeteria or dining room in a hotel), or relax over a coffee and newspaper at many trendy cafés. There is a happening night scene and outside of the city there are interesting day trips.

La Paz was founded by Alonso de Mendoza in 1548, following the discovery of gold in the Río Choqueyapu. Although gold fever

fizzled, the town's location on the main silver route from Potosí to the Pacific assured stable progress. By the mid-20th century, La Paz had grown rapidly as thousands of *campesinos* migrated from the countryside. Today it is the country's governmental capital (Sucre remains the judicial capital).


The sky-high altitude means that warm clothing, sunscreen and sunglasses are essential. In the summer (November to April), the harsh climate assures afternoon rainfalls and the steep streets are awash with water torrents. In winter (May to October), days are invigoratingly crisp. While the sun shines, temperatures may reach the high teens, but at night it often dips below freezing; see p1095 for advice on dealing with altitude sickness.

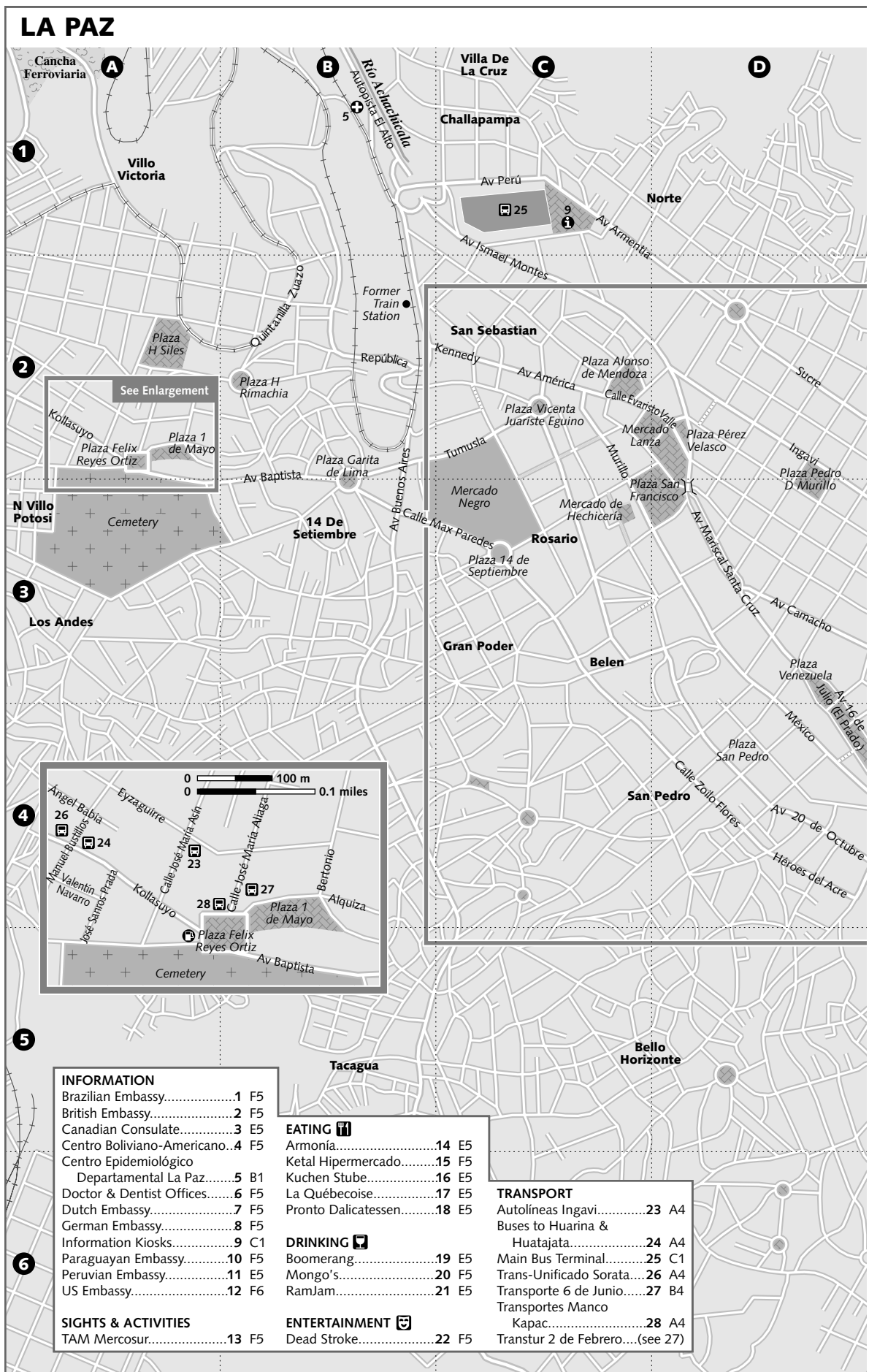
ORIENTATION

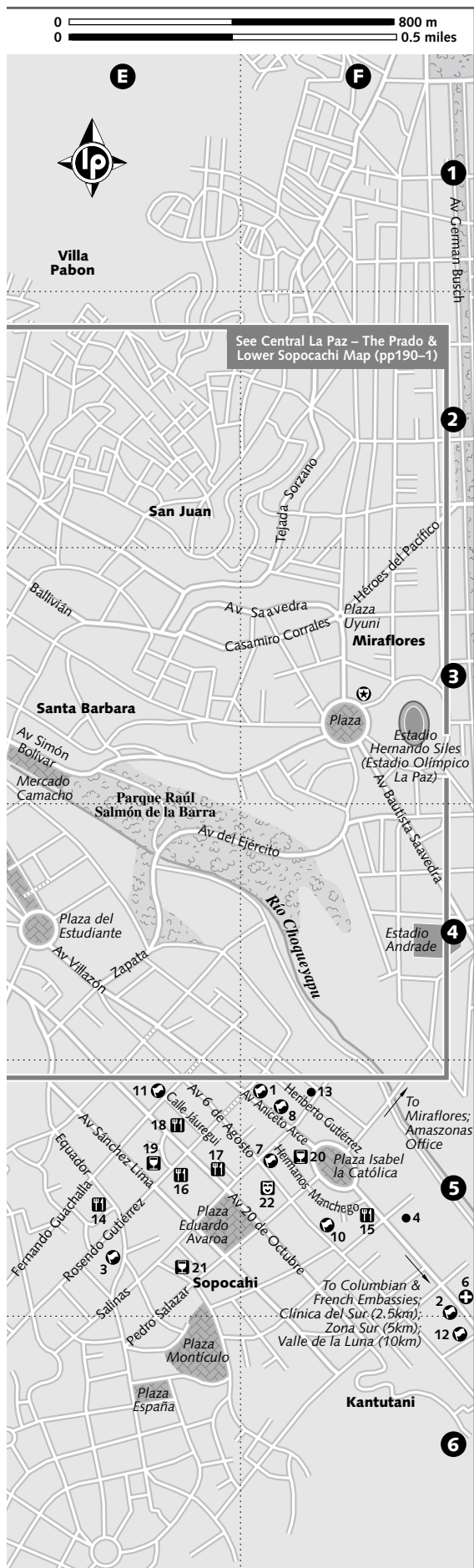
You are more likely to get winded than lost in La Paz. There's only one major thoroughfare, which follows the canyon of the Río Choqueyapu. Often referred to as the Prado, it changes names several times from top to bottom: Autopista El Alto, Av Ismael Montes, Av Mariscal Santa Cruz, Av 16 de Julio (the Prado) and Av Villazón. At the lower end, it splits into Av 6 de Agosto and Av Aniceto Arce. If you become disoriented and want to return to this main street, just head downhill. Away from this thoroughfare, streets climb steeply uphill, and many are cobbled or unpaved.

The city has a number of districts, including the Zona Central (the blocks around and down from Plaza Pedro D Murillo), Sopocachi (the upmarket commercial and residential zone around Av 6 de Agosto), Miraflores (climbing the slope east of Zona Central) and Zona Sur (the most expensive residential area, further down the valley). A handful of Zona Sur suburbs, including Obrajes, Calacoto and Cotacota, have clinics, government offices and other services of interest to travelers.

A free map of La Paz is available from any one of the information kiosks (Map pp186–7).

Instituto Geográfico Militar (IGM; Map pp190–1;  254-5090; Pasaje Juan XXII 100) publishes Bolivia's best topographical maps. The most popular maps are often only available as photocopies (US\$5 to US\$13 per map). It's located off Rodríguez between México/Murillo and Linares.





INFORMATION

Bookstores

Bookshops include the following:
Gisbert & Co (Map pp190-1; Calle Comercio 1270) Good stock of maps and Spanish-language literature.
Los Amigos del Libro (Map pp190-1; Mercado 1315) Widest selection of foreign-language novels and periodicals, plus a good selection of travel guides.

La Paz is the place for book exchanges with good English titles. If you don't have luck in some of the cheap hotels near Sagárnaga, then the following offer good selections:

Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking (Map pp190-1; Av 16 de Julio 1490, Edificio Av, No 10)
Oliver's Travels (Map pp190-1; Murillo 1014)
Sol y Luna Cafe Bar (Map pp190-1; cnr Murillo & Cochabamba)

Cultural Centers

Centro Boliviano-Americano (Map pp186-7; ☎ 234-2582; www.cba.com.bo in Spanish; Parque Zenón Iturralde 121) Language classes and current US periodical library.
Goethe Institut (Map pp190-1; ☎ 244-2453; www.goethe.de; Av 6 de Agosto 2118) Films, language classes and good German-language library.

Emergency

Tourist police (Policía Turística; Map pp190-1; ☎ 222-5016; Plaza del Estadio, Puerta 22, next to Disco Love City, Miraflores) To report a crime or file a *denuncia* (police report), contact the English-speaking tourist police.

Numbers for emergency services are the same in cities throughout the country:

Ambulance (☎ 118)
Fire department (☎ 119)
Police (Radio Patrol; ☎ 110)

Immigration Offices

For information on embassies and consulates in La Paz, see p258.
Immigration (Migración; Map pp190-1; ☎ 211-0960; Av Camacho 1478; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Extensions to length of stay granted here.

Internet Access

La Paz has nearly as many cybercafés as shoe-shine boys. Charges are from US40¢ to US75¢ an hour.
Internet Alley (Pasaje Irrturalde; Map pp190-1) Just off Av Villazón near Plaza del Estudiante. Fastest, cheapest connections in town.

GETTING INTO TOWN

The main bus terminal is 1km uphill from the center. *Micros* (US25¢) and minibuses (US30¢) marked 'Prado' and 'Av Arce' pass the main tourist areas but are usually too crowded to accommodate swollen backpacks. If walking, snake your way down to the main drag, Av Ismael Montes, and keep descending for 15 minutes past several plazas and street markets until you see San Francisco Church on your right, where Sagárnaga, the main tourist street, heads uphill.

Heading into town from El Alto Airport (10km outside the center) between 7:30am and 7pm, catch *micro* 212 (US50¢) directly outside the terminal, which will drop you anywhere along the Prado. A proper taxi from the rank to the center should cost no more than US\$5 to US\$6.50 for up to four people. If arriving by bus in Villa Fatima or the cemetery district, take particular care. At night, it's best to take a cab (US\$1), but approach an official driver and *never* share with other strangers. By day, frequent *micros* run to the center from both locations.

Tolomeo's (Map pp190-1; cnr Loayza & Calle Comercio; per hr US30¢; ☎ 8:30am-10:30pm Mon-Sat, 10:30am-6:30pm Sun) Warm and nonsmoking. Good machines; scanners and CD burning available.

Internet Resources

La Paz municipal (www.ci-lapaz.gov.bo in Spanish) Flash site with good culture and tourism sections.

Laundry

Lavanderías are the cheapest and most efficient way of ensuring clean (and dry) clothes in La Paz.

Illampu, at the top of Sagárnaga, is lined with laundries. Most *residenciales* (budget accommodations) offer cheap hand-washing services. For quick, reliable same-day machine wash-and-dry service (US\$1 per kilo), try the following:

Limpieza Laverap (Map pp190-1; Illampu 704; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Delivery to hotels with prepaid service.

Lavandería Maya (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga 339) At Hostal Maya.

Left Luggage

Most recommended places to stay offer inexpensive or free left-luggage storage, especially if you make a return reservation. Think twice about leaving anything valuable in deposit – on a short- or long-term basis – as there have been numerous reports of items, including cash, going missing. Always put a lock on your luggage items if possible.

Media

La Razon (www.la-razon.com in Spanish), **El Diario** (www.eldiario.net in Spanish) and **La Prensa** (www.laprensa.com.bo in Spanish) are the major daily newspapers in La Paz. National media chains **ATB** ([\[www.fidesbolivia.com\]\(http://www.fidesbolivia.com\) in Spanish\) and **Grupo Fides** \(\[www.fidesbolivia.com\]\(http://www.fidesbolivia.com\) in Spanish\) host websites with the most up-to-date news.](http://www.bolivia</p>
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Medical Services

After-hours *farmacias de turno* (pharmacies) are listed in daily newspapers.

24-hour pharmacy (Map pp190-1; Av 16 de Julio at Bueno) A good pharmacy on the Prado.

Centro Epidemiológico Departamental La Paz (Centro Pilote; Map pp186-7; ☎ 245-0166; Vásquez 122 at Peru; ☎ 8:30-11:30am Mon-Fri) Off upper Av Ismael Montes near the brewery. Anyone heading for the lowlands can pick up cheap antimalarials, and rabies and yellow-fever vaccinations.

Clínica del Sur (☎ 278-4001; Siles 3539, Obrajes) Frequently recommended by readers and embassies as friendly, knowledgeable and efficient. It's around 3km southeast of the center.

Dr Elbert Orellana Jordan (Unidad Medica Preventiva; ☎ 242-2342, 706-59743; asistmedbolivia@hotmail.com; cnr Freyre & Mujía) Gregarious English-speaking doctor makes emergency house calls around the clock at reasonable rates.

Dr Fernando Patiño (Map pp186-7; ☎ 243-0697, 772-25625; fpatino@entelnet.bo; Av Aniceto Arce 1701, Edificio Illimani, 2nd fl) Opposite the US embassy. American-educated, English-speaking high-altitude medicine expert.

Dr Jorge Jaime Aguirre (Map pp186-7; ☎ 243-0496; Av Aniceto Arce 1701, Edificio Illimani, 1st fl) Frequently recommended dentist, from routine cleaning to root canals.

Money

Watch out for counterfeit US dollars, especially with *cambistas* (street money changers), who loiter around the intersections of Colón, Av Camacho and Av Mariscal Santa Cruz. Outside La Paz you'll get 3% to 10% less for checks than for cash.

Casas de cambio (authorized foreign currency exchange houses) in the city center are quicker and more convenient than banks. Most places open from 8:30am to noon and 2pm to 6pm weekdays and on Saturday mornings. Outside these times, try the following:
Hotel Gloria (Map pp190-1; Potosí 909)
Hotel Rosario (Map pp190-1; Illampu 704)

The following places change traveler's checks for minimal commission:

Cambios América (Map pp190-1; Av Camacho 1223)
Casa de Cambio Sudamer (Map pp190-1; cnr Colón & Av Camacho) Sells currency from neighboring countries.

Cash withdrawals of US dollars and bolivianos are also possible at ATMs at major intersections around the city. For Visa and MasterCard cash advances (bolivianos only) with no commission and little hassle, try the following:

Banco Mercantil (Map pp190-1; cnr Mercado & Ayacucho) Has an ATM.
DHL/Western Union (Map pp190-1; ☎ 233-5567; Calle Juan Jose Perez 268) For urgent international money transfers. Outlets are scattered all around town.
Magri Turismo (Map pp190-1; ☎ 244-2727; www.magri-amexpress.com.bo; Capitán Ravelo 2101) This helpful representative does everything (including holding client mail) but doesn't change traveler's checks.

Photography

AGFA (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-7030; Av Mariscal Santa Cruz 901) Perfect for passport photos in a flash.
Casa Kavlin (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-6046; Potosí 1130) Good for one-hour slide or print processing.
Tecnología Fotografía (☎ 242-7402; www.tecnologiafotografica.com; 20 de Octubre 2255) For camera problems, Rolando's your man.

Post

Ángelo Colonial (Map pp190-1; Linares 922; ☎ 9am-7pm) Convenient, gringo-friendly branch with an outgoing-only service.
Central post office (Ecobol; Map pp190-1; Av Mariscal Santa Cruz & Oruro; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun) A tranquil oasis off the bustling Prado. Holds *lista de correos* (poste restante) mail for three months.

Telephone

You'll find convenient Punto Entels scattered throughout the city. Competitive communications companies include Cotel and Viva. Street kiosks on nearly every corner offer brief

local calls for B\$1. Hawkers with mobiles on a leash offer cellular calls for B\$1 per minute.

Internet Call Centers (Map pp190-1; cnr Sagárnaga & Murillo, Galería Doryan; ☎ 8am-8pm) Cheap worldwide internet-based phone calls.

Main Entel office (Map pp190-1; Ayacucho 267; ☎ 7am-10pm) Best place to receive incoming calls and faxes.

Tourist Information

Ángelo Colonial (Map pp190-1; Linares 922) Privately run tourist information office with a book exchange and notice board.

Information kiosk (Map pp186-7) Outside the main bus terminal.

Mirador Laikakota (Map pp190-1)

Tourism information office (Map pp190-1; ☎ 237-1044; ☎ 8:30am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1:30pm Sat & Sun) A map of the city is about as good as you'll get from here – but ask the helpful staff about the monthly calendar of events. It's on the north side of Plaza del Estudiante.

Travel Agencies

America Tours (Map pp190-1; ☎ 237-4204; www.america-ecotours.com; Av 16 de Julio, Edificio Av 1490, ground fl, No 9) Highly recommended English-speaking agency for help organizing trips to anywhere in the country. The environmentalist owners are especially good on new routes and community-based ecotourism projects.
Valmar Tours (Map pp190-1; ☎ 220-1499/1519; www.valmartour.com in Spanish) Sells International Student Identity Cards and has a few discounts for students. Best to talk to the English-speaking manager. Can also arrange some volunteering opportunities.

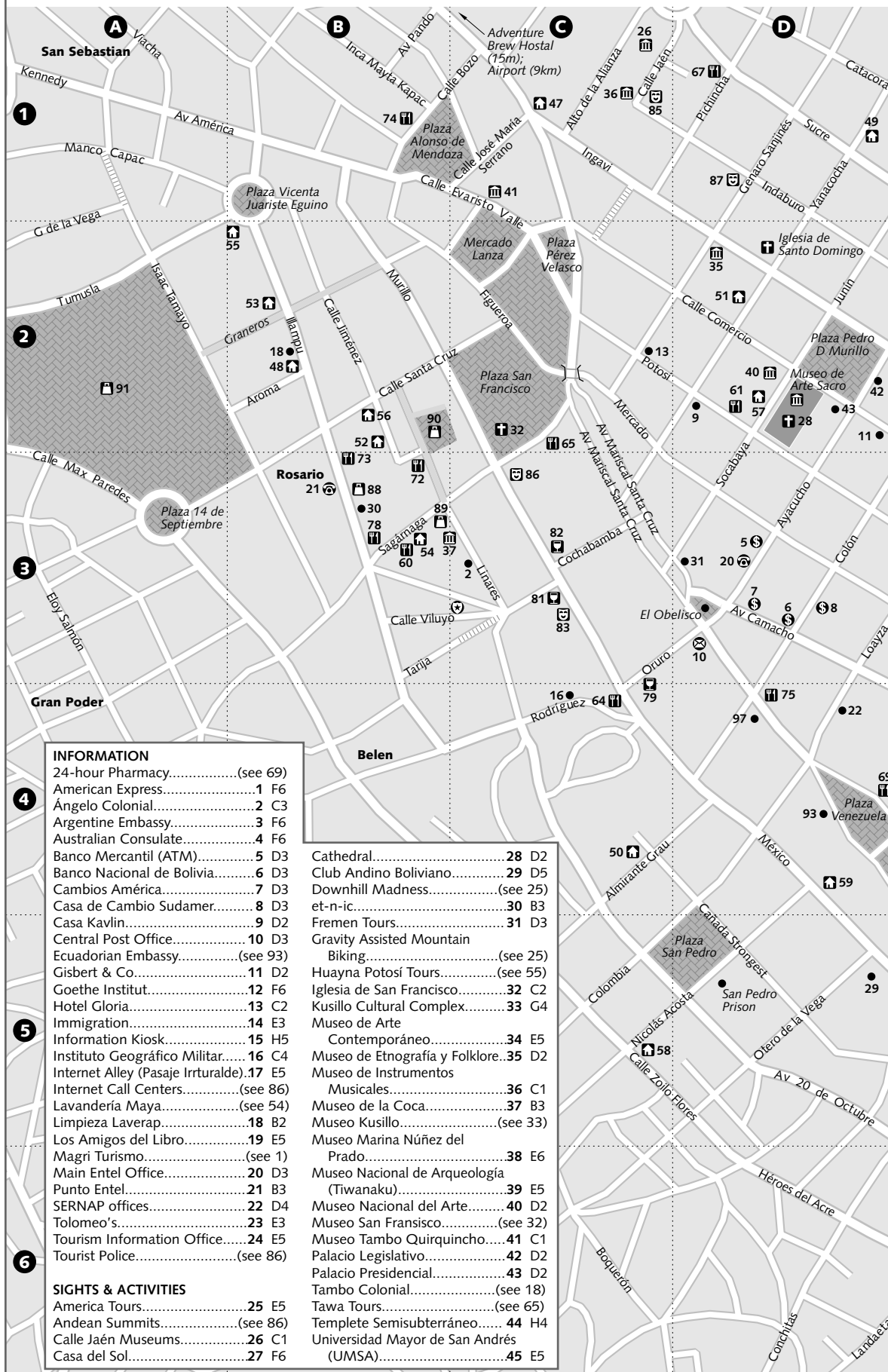
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While living the high life in La Paz is fun, it's important to take it easy, no matter how well you think you are feeling at nearly 4km above sea level. To avoid *soroche* (altitude sickness), take local advice '*camina lentito, come poquito...y duerme solito*' ('walk slowly, eat only a little bit...and sleep by your poor little self'), especially on the first day or two. More annoying than dangerous, ski mask-clad *lustrabotes* (shoeshine boys) hound everyone who wears footwear, but for US30¢ you can support their cause.

Scams

Sadly, La Paz seems to have caught on to South America's common ruses. Fake police officers and bogus tourist officials are on the rise. Note: authentic police officers will always be uniformed (undercover police are under

CENTRAL LA PAZ – THE PRADO & LOWER SOPOCACHI



BOLIVIA

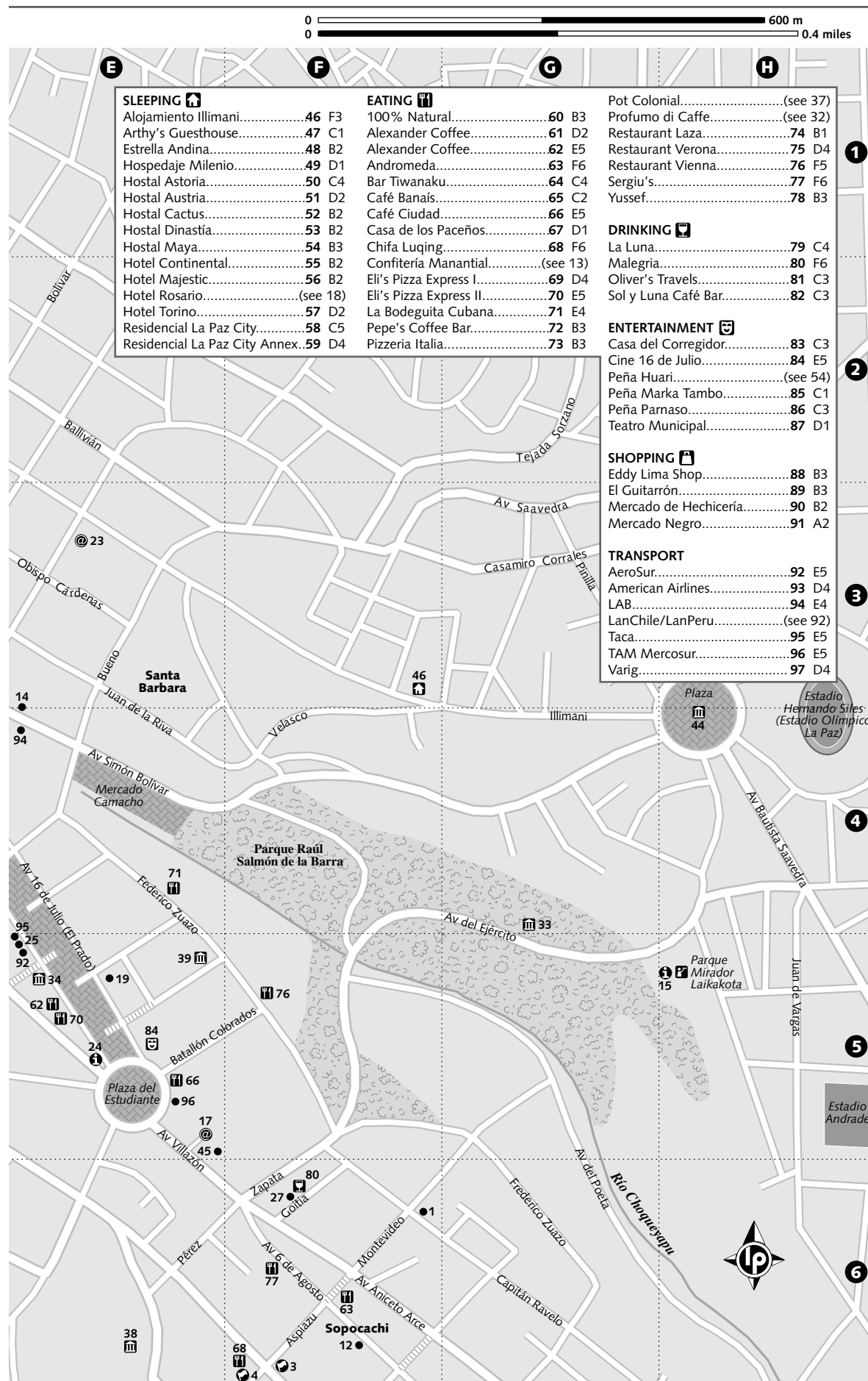
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Casa de los Paceños.....	67	D1
Chifa Luqing.....	68	F6
Confitería Manantial.....	(see 13)	
Eli's Pizza Express I.....	69	D4
Eli's Pizza Express II.....	70	E5
La Bodeguita Cubana.....	71	E4
Pepe's Coffee Bar.....	72	B3
Pizzeria Italia.....	73	B3

DRINKING 🍷

Pot Colonial.....	(see 37)	
Profumo di Caffè.....	(see 32)	
Restaurant Laza.....	74	B1
Restaurant Verona.....	75	D4
Restaurant Vienna.....	76	F5
Sergiu's.....	77	F6
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ENTERTAINMENT 🎭

Casa del Corregidor.....	83	C3
Cine 16 de Julio.....	84	E5
Peña Huari.....	(see 54)	
Peña Marka Tambo.....	85	C1
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Teatro Municipal.....	87	D1

SHOPPING 🛍️

Eddy Lima Shop.....	88	B3
El Guitarrón.....	89	B3
Mercado de Hechicería.....	90	B2
Mercado Negro.....	91	A2

TRANSPORT 🚗

AeroSur.....	92	E5
American Airlines.....	93	D4
LAB.....	94	E2
LanChile/LanPeru.....	(see 94)	
Taca.....	95	E5
TAM Mercosur.....	96	E5
Varig.....	97	D4

BOLIVIA

strict orders not to hassle foreigners) and will never insist that you show them your passport, get in a taxi with them or allow them to search your person in public. If confronted by an imposter, refuse to show them your valuables (wallet, passport, money etc), or insist on going to the nearest police station on foot. Of course, if physically threatened, hand over valuables immediately!

Another popular Bolivian bother is the bogus South American tourist who, on engaging you in conversation in English, is confronted by the aforementioned fake tourist police. The 'tourist' abides by an 'order' to show the policeman his bag/papers/passport, and 'translates' for you to do the same. During the search, the cohorts strip you of your cash and/or belongings.

Fake 'taxi drivers' are working in conjunction with gangs who steal from or – as has tragically been the case – assault or kidnap unsuspecting travelers (to extort ATM pin numbers). Beware of hopping into shared cabs with strangers or of accepting a lift from a driver who approaches you (especially around dodgy bus areas).

And finally, psst my friend! This popular scam involves a shyster spilling or spitting a phlegm ball. While you or they are wiping it off, another lifts your wallet or slashes your pack; the perpetrator may be an innocent granny or young girl. Similarly, don't bend over to pick up a valuable item which has been 'dropped.' You risk being accused of theft, or of being pickpocketed. (See p258 for more *en vogue* scams.)

SIGHTS

The steep city is a breathtaking attraction in itself, especially when the sun shines. The city's colorful and rowdy markets swirl to the beat of indigenous cultures. For a break from the hectic rhythm of everyday street life, head to the museums or wander through the cobblestone alleys and among the colonial buildings. Always keep your eyes peeled for fantastic glimpses of Illimani towering between the world's highest high-rises.

Plaza Pedro D Murillo Area

This plaza marks the formal city center, with various monuments, the imposing **Palacio Legislativo**, the bullet-riddled **Palacio Presidencial** (Map pp190–1) and the 1835 **cathedral** (Map pp190–1).

Just off the west side of the plaza, the **Museo Nacional del Arte** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-8600; cnr Comercio & Socabaya; admission US\$1.25; 🕒 9am-12:30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9:30am-12:30pm Sun) is in the superbly restored pink granite Palacio de los Condes de Arana (1775). The collection of indigenous, colonial and contemporary arts is small but rewarding.

Calle Jaén Museums

Five blocks northwest of Plaza Murillo, colonial Calle Jaén has four small **museums** (Map pp190-1; combined admission US\$0¢; 🕒 9:30am-12:30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) that can easily be appreciated in a few hours. The **Museo de Metales Preciosos Precolombinos** (☎ 228-0329; Calle Jaén 777) has dazzling gold and silver artifacts; **Museo Casa Murillo** (☎ 228-0553; Calle Jaén 790) displays items from the colonial period; **Museo del Litoral Boliviano** (Calle Jaén 789) laments the 1884 war in which Bolivia lost its Pacific coast; and **Museo Costumbrista Juan de Vargas** (cnr Calle Jaén & Sucre) has good displays on the colonial period.

A must for musicians is the impressive **Museo de Instrumentos Musicales** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 233-1075; Calle Jaén 711; admission US\$65¢; 🕒 9:30am-1pm & 2-6pm), with an exhaustive hands-on collection of unique instruments from Bolivia and beyond. If you don't happen on an impromptu jam session, check out museum founder and *charango* master Ernesto Cavour's Peña Marka Tambo (p198) across the street. Check out the *charango* and wind-instrument lessons here for around US\$5 per hour.

Other Central Museums

Travelers love the slightly worn but very interesting **Museo de la Coca** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 231-1998; Linares 906; admission US\$1; 🕒 10am-7pm), which gives an educational, provocative and evenhanded look at the sacred leaf and its uses. Written translations are available.

The cloisters, cells, the garden and roof (for views!) of the recently opened **Museo San Francisco** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 231-8472; Plaza San Francisco; admission US\$2.50; 🕒 9am-6pm) beautifully revives the history and art of the 460-year-old cathedral, the city's landmark.

Between the plaza and Calle Jaén, the free **Museo de Etnografía y Folklore** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-6692; cnr Ingavi & Genaro Sanjinés; 🕒 9:30am-12:30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9:30am-12:30pm Sun) explores the fascinating Chipaya culture and has an astounding exhibit of the country's finest textiles.

Adjacent is the **Museo Tambo Quirquincho** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 239-0969; admission US\$15¢; 🕒 9:30am-12:30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-noon Sat & Sun) is a former tambo (wayside market and inn) displaying old-fashioned dresses, silverware, photos, artwork and Carnaval masks. It's off Calle Evaristo Valle at Plaza Alonzo de Mendoza.

Near Plaza del Estudiante, the **Museo Nacional de Arqueología** (Map pp190-1; Tiwanaku 93; ☎ 231-1621; admission with guide US\$1.25; 🕒 9am-12:30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12:30pm & 3-6:30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) holds an interesting collection of Tiahuanaco (Tiwanaku) pottery, sculptures, textiles and other artifacts.

Miraflores features the **Templo Semisubterráneo** (Map pp190-1; Museo al Aire Libre, cnr Ilimani & Bautista Saavedra), a free, open-air reproduction of part of the Tiahuanaco archaeological site. Only merits a thought if you can't make it to the site itself (see p200).

The works of Bolivia's most renowned sculptor are housed in her former (stunning) mansion, **Museo Marina Núñez del Prado** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 232-4906; Ecuador 2034; admission US\$65¢; 🕒 9:30am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Fri, 9:30am-1pm Sat & Sun), in Sopocachi. Opening hours can be unreliable.

The private **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 233-5905; Av 16 de Julio 1698; admission US\$1.25; 🕒 9am-9pm) is more notable for its 19th-century mansion designed by Gustave Eiffel, with glass roof and stained-glass panels, than for its Bolivian art collection.

Parque Laikakota Mirador & Kusillo Cultural Complex

For great cityscape views, head to the **mirador** (lookout; Map pp190-1; admission US\$15¢; 🕒 9am-5:30pm) in a tranquil park setting overlooking La Paz. The nearby **Museo Kusillo** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 222-

6187; Av del Ejército; admission Tue-Fri US\$75¢, adult/child Sat & Sun US\$1.50/1.25; 🕒 10:30am-6:30pm Tue-Sun), is a hands-on interactive play space for kids.

To get there, walk 20 minutes east of the Prado along Av Zapata; this turns into Av del Ejército.

ACTIVITIES

Mountain Biking

For an adrenaline rush at altitude, head off on wheels with **Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 313-849; www.gravitybolivia.com; Av 16 de Julio 1490, Edificio Av, No 10). Two of the most popular full-day options (there are many others) are to zoom down from Chacaltaya to La Paz or from La Cumbre down the 'World's Most Dangerous Road' to Coroico. Many other outfits on Sagárnaga offer the La Cumbre to Coroico trip for a few bucks less but consider what corners are being cut before you go plunging downhill. Also, think twice before going with any of the agencies who offer these trips during the rainy season (January/February). Also see the boxed text, below. **Downhill Madness** (Map pp190-1; ☎ 239-1810; www.downhill-madness.com; Sagárnaga 339) is also recommended for the trip to Coroico.

Trekking & Climbing

Club Andino Boliviano (Map pp190-1; ☎ 231-2875; fecab@bolivia.com; México 1638) has a small lodge with café (per person US\$5), where you can stay the night. The Club organizes several day trips, including skiing outings (although this is seasonal – unfortunately, the glacier has retreated and skiing is no longer a year-round activity).

Many La Paz tour agencies offer daily hiking tours to Chacaltaya (US\$15), a fun and

DEADLY TREADLIES

Many agencies offering the La Cumbra to Coroico mountainbike plunge give travelers T-shirts plastered with: 'I've survived the World's Most Dangerous Road.' Keep in mind, the gravel road is just that: it's narrow (just over 3.2m wide) and has precipitous cliffs up to 600m...and there's traffic. At the time of research, eight people (higher figures sometimes quoted) have died doing the 64km trip (with a 3600m vertical drop) and readers have reported close encounters and nasty accidents. Most of these are due to little or no instruction and preparation, and poor quality mountain bikes (beware bogus rebranded bikes). In short, many agencies are less than ideal. Be aware of outfits which deflate prices – cost cutting can mean dodgy brakes, poor-quality parts and literally, a deadly treadly. Multilingual guides are necessary for coaching and control. Ask agencies for proof of rescue equipment (rope rescue, harnesses, belays, oxygen), and a predeparture briefing. Ensure a quality company on this spectacular route before you freewheel your life away.

easy way to bag a high peak. For rock climbing, mountaineering, paragliding and other extreme adventure possibilities, contact the Oruro-based **Club de Montañismo Halcones** (www.geocities.com/yosemite/gorge/1177), which has pioneered many routes around La Paz.

WALKING TOUR

A good starting point is **Iglesia de San Francisco (1)**, on the plaza of the same name. This imposing church was started in 1549 but went unfinished until the mid-18th century. Its architecture reflects the mestizo style, emphasizing natural forms. Watch for colorful wedding processions on weekend mornings.

From **Plaza San Francisco (2)**, huff up Sagárnaga, the main tourist strip, lined with weavings (ponchos, *mantas* and coca pouches), musical instruments, antiques, and 'original' Tiahuanaco artifacts. Turn right at Linares and poke around the uncanny **Mercado de Hechicería (3)**; Mercado de los Brujos or Witches Market; p198).

Heading up Calle Santa Cruz to **Plaza 14 de Septiembre (4)** and Calle Max Paredes, you'll find the **Mercado Negro (5)**; p198).

WALK FACTS

Start Iglesia de San Francisco

Finish Plaza Pedro D Murillo

Distance 2½ to 3km

Duration two to three hours

From here, wander downhill, (along Graneros and left onto Figueroa), north and east of the markets, through streets choked with people and *micros* to **Plaza Alonso de Mendoza (6)** – stay alert here. Visit the adjacent **Museo Tambo Quirquincho (7)**; p193).

Continue past the bustling **Mercado Lanza (8)**; p197) along pedestrian-only **Calle Comercio (9)** to end at **Plaza Pedro D Murillo (10)**; p192).

COURSES

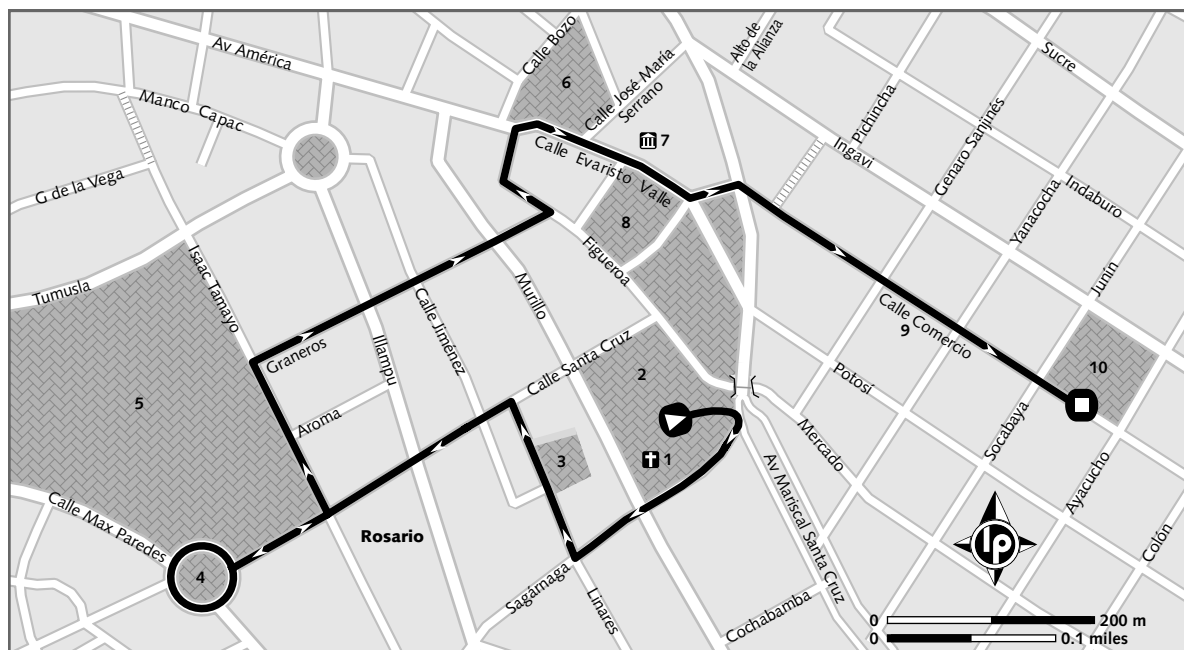
Spanish classes are offered by the Centro Boliviano-Americano (p187) and private teachers who charge around US\$5 per hour. **Isabel Daza Vivado** (☎ 231-1471; maria_daza@hotmail.com; Murillo 1046, 3rd fl) is frequently recommended for her professionalism.

For Bolivian-style guitar or *charango* lessons, stop by the Museo de Instrumentos Musicales (p192).

Casa del Sol (Map pp190-1; ☎ 244-0928; Goitia 127; class US\$3.20) offers yoga, tai chi and meditation classes. Monthly memberships (US\$30) and student discounts are available.

TOURS

There are many tour operators in La Paz, especially around Sagárnaga; others are based at the larger hotels and cater to individuals or tour groups. With four to six people, a half-day city tour costs around US\$10 per person and a day trip to Chacaltaya and Valle de la Luna or Tiahuanaco costs around US\$15 to US\$20, including entrance fees. Most companies offer much the same on the



more standard trips. Speak to travelers for recommendations.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Of the major festivals and holidays during the year, Alasitas (January 24), the festival of abundance, and El Gran Poder (late May to early June) are the most interesting to visitors. The Fiestas Universitarias take place during the first week in December, accompanied by riotous merrymaking and enough water-balloon bombs to sink the Chilean navy.

SLEEPING

Most backpackers beeline for Central La Paz to find a crash pad. The area west of the Prado between Plazas Mendoza and Murillo is chock full of cheap, popular places and all the services you'll need.

Also near here is the Witches Market (between Calle Santa Cruz and Sagárnaga), the true traveler's ghetto. Here you'll find scores of dives, hostels and some plusher digs all cheek by jowl with adventure-tour operators, gringo cafés and touristy *peñas*. If you want to stay closer to a wider array of restaurants and bars, consider staying further south in the Lower Prado, around Plaza San Pedro where there are a few choice cheapies. The area around the bus terminal boasts some excellent new additions.

In the cheapest accommodations, expect communal bathrooms, cold showers, no heat and lots of partying, although some impose a curfew. Spend a bit more if you need your sleep.

West of the Prado

Hostal Cactus (Map pp190-1; ☎ 245-1421; Calle Jiménez 818; r per person US\$3.15) This joint could do with a mild cleaning spell or two, but its location, smack in the middle of the Witches Market, makes up for the shabby student-style digs. The communal kitchen and rooftop 'terrace' appeal to those on a budget.

Hostal Maya (Map pp190-1; ☎ 231-1970; mayahostal@hotmail.com; Sagárnaga 339; r per person US\$6.90, with bathroom US\$8.20; 📺) Some rooms are as smoky and windowless as a witch's den; others, such as those with a front balcony, are more appealing, if a little noisy. A *charango*'s strum stumble away from Peña Huari. Breakfast included.

Hotel Majestic (Map pp190-1; ☎ 245-1628; Calle Santa Cruz 359; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$10.50/12.35/15) Its pink

bathrooms and smart parquet floors provide some distraction from its nondescript, yet clean surrounds in the heart of things. Excellent value.

Estrella Andina (Map pp190-1; ☎ 245-6421; Illampu 716; s/d US\$18/28) If you're suffering from altitude sickness, amuse yourself at this clean and well-run place. Each room has its own mural (or three) and cable TV. Good value for this price range.

East of the Prado

Alojamiento Illimani (Map pp190-1; ☎ 220-2346; Illimani 1817; s/d US\$3.15/6.30) The religious pictures on the walls of these stark rooms are the most blessed things in this out-of-the-way abode... except for the kitchen, which the friendly owner will let you use for a small fee.

Hostal Austria (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-8540; Yanacocha 531; r per person US\$3.15-4.40) This shabbily rambling number gets trotted out time and time again. Despite its 11pm curfew, short beds (some in windowless cells) and dicey shared bathrooms, this old place is a good place to meet and team up with people. Hot showers and cooking facilities available.

Hotel Torino (Map pp190-1; ☎ 240-6003; Socabaya 457; s/d/tr US\$6.30/10/19, without bathroom US\$3.80/5/7.50) 'Dark, cold and draughty' is one traveler's view of this modernized (in the '50s) rambling, colonial building. It's more popular for its services – restaurant, book exchange, luggage storage – than its comforts.

Hostal Dinastía (Map pp190-1; ☎ 245-1076; dinastia@yahoo.com; Illampu 684; r per person US\$4, with bathroom & cable TV US\$7) Shabby with slightly soiled semicarpeted rooms, but you're right in the middle of the action. Some rooms have cable TV.

Hotel Continental (Map pp190-1; ☎ 245-1176; hotelcontinental626@hotmail.com; Illampu 626; r per person US\$5, s/d with cable TV US\$10/14) This older, two-star HI-affiliate is clean, well located and popular among thrifty tour groups. It's hard to meet people due to its unsociable hotel-style design.

Lower Prado

Residencial La Paz City Annex (Map pp190-1; ☎ 236-8380; México 1539; r per person US\$3.80) Affiliated to Los Balcones Blancos, Residencial La Paz City Annex is also shabby, but has some OK rooms with balconies.

Los Balcones Blancos (Map pp190-1; ☎ 248-9471; Nicolás La Costa 477; r per person US\$5-7.55) A friendly

and faded digs. Ask for the nicer rooms in the newer extension.

Residencial Sucre (Map pp190-1; ☎ 249-2038; Colombia 340; r per person US\$7.50/10, s/d with bathroom & cable TV US\$10/15) The management is helpful and the rooms are around a secure and pleasant courtyard (good for cycle storage). It's handy to Plaza San Pedro.

Hostal Astoria (Map pp190-1; ☎ 215-4081; Almirante Grau 348; s/d US\$12/18) To avoid the traveler's ghetto, head to this underrated, excellent-value hotel-style choice with spotless rooms. It is located on a quiet and pleasant plaza, and is a beer's breath away from the bars of Sopocachi.

Near the Main Bus Terminal

Some of the city's best choices are handy to the main bus terminal.

Hospedaje Milenio (Map pp190-1; ☎ 228-1263; Yanacochoa 860; s/d US\$3/5.35) As yellow and mellow as you'll get. It is run by friendly staff and includes kitchen use, hot water and is close to the bus terminal. The best rooms, including the single room in the tower, are upstairs and outward facing. It also has a travel agency and laundry service.

Adventure Brew Hostel (Map pp190-1; ☎ 246-1614; Av Montes 533; www.theadventurebrewhostel.com; dm/r US\$5/8) The name says it all. This brand-new abode on the block offers designer-style rooms, funky communal spaces, pancake breakfasts, as well as fun on tap. Yes, there's an authentic microbrewery on site. Owner Alistair is of Gravity Assisted Biking fame.

Arthy's Guesthouse (Map pp190-1; ☎ 228-1439; arthyshouse@gmail.com; Av Montes 693; r per person US\$5) This clean and cozy place, hidden behind a bright-orange door, deservedly receives rave reviews as a 'tranquil oasis,' despite its location on one of La Paz' busiest roads. Chill in the living room over a choice of DVDs. The friendly English-speaking owners will do all they can do to help you. Kitchen facilities available.

EATING

'Love food? Will eat.' La Paz enjoys an abundance of inexpensive eateries offering everything from local treats to more Western-style dishes. For local fare, your cheapest bets are the *almuerzos* (set lunches) in the countless hole-in-the-wall restaurants; look for the chalkboard menus out front. Common dishes include *lomo* (tenderloin), *churrasco* (steak),

milanesa (breaded and fried beef or chicken cutlets) and *silpancho* (beef schnitzel). Street stalls offer tasty morsels and there are vegetarian restaurants around.

West of the Prado

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Tambo Colonial (Map pp190-1; Hotel Rosario, Illampu 704; breakfast US\$2.50; ☎ 7-10:30am & 7-10:30pm) Offers an excellent fruity breakfast buffet and great salads and soups in the evening.

100% Natural (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga 345) A satisfying snack place with big breakfasts and tremendous, sanitary salads.

Pepe's Coffee Bar (Map pp190-1; Calle Jiménez 894) Take a spell from the Witches Market and linger over a coffee or fruit salad.

Profumo di Caffè (Map pp190-1; Plaza San Francisco) Guilt-free coffee in a new and stylish café attached to the Cathedral's museum.

Café Banais (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga) Great salads, vego meals and breakfasts in the heart of things. It's below Hotel Naira.

RESTAURANTS

Angelo Colonial (Map pp190-1; Calle Linares 922; mains US\$2.50-5) This quirky, darkened colonial-style restaurant sports more than a ramshackle collection of antiquities – pistols, swords and antique portraits – but it has excellent soups, salads and a luscious lasagna for vegetarians (US\$3). A pleasant place to spend a rainy afternoon.

Pot Colonial (Map pp190-1; Linares; mains US\$3-5) This relaxing place serves reliable meat dishes at armadillo pace. It's next to Coca Museum.

Pizzeria Italia (Map pp190-1; Illampu 809; ☎ 7am-11pm) Pastas, pizzas and vegetarian options with a daily happy hour.

Yusef (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga) Cheap, cheerful and Middle Eastern. Hummus, kebabs and the like are purchased by portion.

Restaurant Laza (Map pp190-1; Calle Bozo 244, Plaza Alonso de Mendoza) This lunchtime hole-in-the-wall is a winner.

Bar Tiwanaku (Map pp190-1; cnr Oruro & México; lunch US75¢) Has a good set lunch and hosts live music some weekends.

East of the Prado

Alexander Coffee Av 16 de Julio (Map pp190-1; Av 16 de Julio 1832); Potosí (Map pp190-1; Potosí 1091) Fashionable café chain serving all manner of java drinks, pastries and sandwiches. The best place for a frothy cappuccino.

Eli's Pizza Express I & II (Map pp190-1; Av 16 de Julio 1491 & 1800) A local favorite where you can choose between pizza, pasta, pastries and ice cream.

Confitería Manantial (Map pp190-1; Potosí 909) This place in Hotel Gloria has a popular veggie lunch and dinner buffet.

Restaurant Verona (Map pp190-1; Colón; mains US\$1-2) Open daily for sandwiches, pizzas and *almuerzos*. It's near Av Mariscal Santa Cruz.

Confitería Club de La Paz (Map pp190-1; ☎ 719-26265; Camacho & Av Mariscal Santa Cruz; mains US\$1.50-4.50) For a quick coffee or *empanada*, hit this literary café and haunt of politicians known for its strong espresso and cakes.

Lower Prado

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Café Ciudad (Map pp190-1; Plaza del Estudiante; ☎ 24hr) Average food, but the full menu is available around the clock and they don't mind travelers lingering over coffee.

Kuchen Stube (Map pp186-7; Rosendo Gutiérrez 461; ☎ 8am-9pm) Espresso coffee, German pastries and other decadent homemade goodies.

Sergiu's (Map pp190-1; Av 6 de Agosto; ☎ evenings only) The best by-the-slice pizza in town. The hot dogs and chili are also winners. It's near Aspiazu steps.

Andromeda (Map pp190-1; Av Aniceto Arce; lunch US\$1.75) Located at the bottom of Aspiazu steps, this is recommended for *almuerzos*.

RESTAURANTS

Chifa Luqing (Map pp186-7; Av 20 de Octubre 2090; almuerzo US\$2; ☎ 11am-11pm) One of the most deceptive places around. The nondescript outer hides bright Asian flavors.

Armonía (Map pp186-7; Ecuador 2286; ☎ noon-2:30pm Mon-Sat) La Paz' best all-you-can-eat vegetarian lunch is found above Libería Armonia in Sopocachi.

Restaurant Vienna (Map pp190-1; ☎ 239-1660; Federico Zuazo 1905; mains US\$4-7) Worth the splurge: this place is classy and arguably La Paz' best international restaurant.

The area's other recommended eateries serving international food include the following:

La Bodeguita Cubana (Map pp190-1; Federico Zuazo 1653; mains US\$3-6) An appealing hole-in-the-wall with meaty offerings, Cuban tunes and strong *mojitos* (rum-and-lime-juice cocktails).

Pronto Ristorante (Map pp186-7; Jáuregui 2248; mains US\$4-7) This is a pricey but 'dali-ciously' surreal experience. Chocolate lovers will scream for the 'Paranoia

of textures and tastes of Daliano chocolate' (B\$25). It's between Av 6 de Agosto and Av 20 de Octubre.

La Québécoise (Map pp186-7; ☎ 212-1682; Av 20 de Octubre 2387; mains US\$5-10; ☎ Mon-Sat) Lauded for its romantic atmosphere and excellent French-Canadian cuisine.

Markets & Street Food

For cheap, filling eats hit the markets. Cheap DIY meals can easily be cobbled together from the abundance of fruit, produce and bread sold there.

Mercado Camacho (Map pp190-1; cnr Av Simon Bolivar & Bueno) Stalls sell *empanadas* (deep-fried pillows of cheese-lined dough), and chicken sandwiches, while *comedores* serve up daily fare. A set feast of soup, a meat dish, rice and *oca* (edible Andean tuber resembling a potato) or potato comes in under US\$1.

At Mercado Lanza (Map pp190-1), in the streets surrounding Calle Evaristo Valle and Figueroa, is a mass of stalls selling anything and everything. While hygiene in the *comedor* is questionable, don't miss the rank of fruit drink stalls at the Figueroa entrance.

For excellent *empanadas*, go to the first landing on the steps between the Prado and Calle México. For around US40¢, you'll get an enormous beef or chicken *empanada* served with your choice of sauces – hot, hotter and hottest.

Self-Catering

Ketal Hipermercado (Map pp186-7; Av Aniceto Arce, Sopocachi) Picnic-basket goods – from olives to cheese, crackers and beer – are available here, just beyond Plaza Isabel la Católica.

DRINKING

There are scores of cheap local drinking dens around the city, especially near the Prado. Drunken marathons often typify Bolivian partying so single women should be aware of the type of establishments they're immersing themselves into.

There are a few great bars with a mixed traveler/Bolivian scene.

RamJam (Map pp186-7; Presbítero Medina 2421) If La Paz had a Paris Hilton, she'd be here. This new, trendy (but welcoming) hot spot has the lot: great food and drinks, mood lighting, live music, English breakfasts, microbrewed beer. You can breathe easy on the bar's 1st floor in Ozone, the most novel oxygen bar in the world (oxygen mask US\$10 for five minutes).

Oliver's Travels (Map pp190-1; Murillo 1014) The best (or worst) cultural experience in La Paz is to be had at this in-your-face unashamed English-style drinking hole. As the promo literature proclaims, it aims 'to offer nothing original – just beer, football, curry, typical English food, cheeky banter and lots of music you've heard before.' And luckily for owner Olly himself, crowds of revelers swallow this stuff.

Sol y Luna Cafe Bar (Map pp190-1; cnr Murillo 999 & Cochabamba) A relaxed Dutch-owned joint where cocktails, coffee, occasional live music and games are on the menu. For those too tight to buy their own guidebooks, there's a good reference collection here.

Boomerang (☎ 242-3700; Pasaje Gustavo Medinacelli, 2282) A new and appealing bar-cum-pizzeria in a bright and open atrium, which has little to do with an Australian icon. That is, unless the slightly soggy but tasty pizzas, Entel cellular phone chargers and Spanish newspapers keep you comin' back.

Mongo's (Map pp186-7; Hermanos Manchego 2444; ☎ 6:30pm until late) La Paz' long-standing hip, hot (it gets crowded) and happening spot. Open (as the promo literature says) till the last head hits the table.

Malegria (Map pp190-1; Goitia 155) A good place to mingle with students. It features Afroboliviano drumming and dancing on Thursday and live bands on weekends.

The local gilded youth mingle with up-market expats at trendy bars and clubs along 20 de Octubre in Sopocachi and lower down in Zona Sur, where US-style bars and discos spread along Av Ballivián and Calle 21. You'll need more than a backpacker's clothes (and budget) to fit in here.

ENTERTAINMENT

The municipal tourist office can tell you what's on, but promo matter is limited.

Teatro Municipal (Map pp190-1; cnr Genaro Sanjinés & Indaburo) Offers a program of folk-music concerts and foreign theatrical presentations.

Dead Stroke (Map pp186-7; Av 6 de Agosto 2460; ☎ nightly) Rack up a few wins at this popular billiards place.

Peñas

Typical of La Paz are folk-music venues called *peñas*. Most present traditional Andean music, but they often include lavish guitar and song recitals. The cover charge for the places listed

here is US\$4 to US\$5. The most touristy are **Peña Huari** (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga 339) and **Peña Parnaso** (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga 189), which both serve dinner and advertise nightly shows but often only go off when tour groups are in town. **Casa del Corregidor** (Map pp190-1; Murillo 1040) and **Peña Marka Tambo** (Map pp190-1; Calle Jaén 710) attract local music fans as well.

Cinemas

Cinematca Boliviana (Map pp190-1; ☎ 244-4090; www.cinematcaboliviana.org; cnr Zuazo & Rosando Gutiérrez; tickets US\$1.50) For classics and arty flicks in a wonderful art and cultural space try this place which, at the time of research, was being constructed.

Modern cinemas on the Prado – including **Cine 16 de Julio** (Map pp190-1; admission US\$2.50), near Plaza del Estudiante – show recent international releases, usually in the original language with Spanish subtitles.

SHOPPING

Street stalls are the cheapest place to buy everything from batteries and film to bootleg CDs.

Tight travelers can grab a bargain or three at the Mercado Negro (Map pp190-1); mere mortals, however, might enjoy the bulk bargains galore. It's a clogged maze of makeshift stalls that sprawls over several blocks. The name means 'black market,' but it's mostly above board and is a good place for cheap clothing and household goods. It is, however, notorious for pickpockets and recently, a few 'spitters' have been reported here (see p189).

Calle Sagárnaga is the street for tasteful and kitsch souvenirs and the nearby Witches Market (Mercado de Hechicería; Map pp190-1) is the place for oddities. It's asses-to-elbows with herbs, magical potions and shriveled llama fetuses, which locals bury under the porches of their new homes for luck and good fortune. If you're lucky, you might convince a *yatiri* (Aymara healer) to toss the coca leaves and tell your fortune, but they usually refuse gringo customers. Taking photographs here may be met with unpleasantness – unless you are a customer and first ask politely.

There are plenty of CD shops along Sagárnaga. Music and musical instruments can also be sourced around Calle Max Paredes. Other good places for musical instruments include the following:

Eddy Lima Shop (Map pp190-1; Illampu 827)

El Guitarrón (Map pp190-1; Sagárnaga 303)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Call **Aeropuerto El Alto** (☎ 281-0240) for flight information. Airline offices in La Paz:

AeroSur (Map pp190-1; ☎ 231-2244; Av 16 de Julio 1616)

Amazonas (☎ 222-0848; Saavedra 1649, Miraflores)

American Airlines (Map pp190-1; ☎ 235-5384; www.aa.com; Plaza Venezuela 1440, Edificio Herrmann Busch)

LAB (Map pp190-1; ☎ 237-1020/1024, 800-10-4321, 800-10-3001; Av Camacho 1460)

LanChile/LanPeru (Map pp190-1; ☎ 235-8377; www.lanchile.com, www.lanperu.com; Av 16 de Julio 1566, Edificio Ayacucho, Suite 104)

Taca (Map pp190-1; ☎ 274-4400; El Prado, Edificio Petrolero PB)

Transportes Aéreos Militares (TAM; ☎ 212-1582/1585, TAM airport 284-1884; Av Montes 738)

TAM Mercosur (Map pp190-1; ☎ 244-3442; www.tam.com.py in Spanish; Heriberto Gutiérrez 2323)

Domestic flight prices vary little between airlines, except for TAM, which is sometimes cheaper. Most travel agents sell tickets for internal flights for the same price as the airlines. The following schedule and price information is subject to change. Prices quoted are one way. Many domestic flights are not direct and often involve a stopover or more to pick up passengers, with legs usually lasting less than an hour. Be aware that some flights cannot go during wet season, especially to the Beni region.

Cobija US\$119, three flights weekly with AeroSur or TAM.

Cochabamba US\$49, three flights daily with AeroSur and three weekly with LAB/TAM.

Guayaramerín US\$142, one daily flight with Amazonas/TAM.

Puerto Suarez US\$171, three flights weekly via Santa Cruz with AeroSur/TAM.

Riberalta US\$142, two to three flights weekly with Amazonas/TAM.

Rurrenabaque US\$60, daily flights with Amazonas and TAM.

San Borja US\$53, two daily flights with Amazonas.

Santa Cruz US\$108, two to three flights daily with AeroSur and LAB/TAM.

Sucre US\$106/70, daily flights with AeroSur (direct) and LAB (via Cochabamba or Santa Cruz), one to two flights weekly with TAM.

Tarija US\$108, daily flights with AeroSur (direct or via Santa Cruz), LAB (via Cochabamba or Santa Cruz) and TAM.

Trinidad US\$70, daily flights with Amazonas (via San Borja) and LAB (via Cochabamba or Santa Cruz).

Yacuiba US\$94, weekly flight (via Sucre and Tarija) with TAM.

Bus

There are three *flota* departure points in La Paz: the main terminal, the cemetery district and Villa Fátima. Fares are relatively uniform between companies, but competition keeps prices low. Allow for longer travel times (often double) in the rainy season.

MAIN TERMINAL

Buses to all places south of La Paz leave from the main **terminal** (Map pp186-7; ☎ 228-0551). A few companies have ticket offices in the terminal, but their buses actually leave from the cemetery; sometimes you'll pay more if you buy your passage here. There's a secure **left-luggage facility** (🗄 5am-10pm) and a B\$2 terminal fee.

Approximate one-way fares and journey times from the main terminal are shown in the following table. Buses provide connections between major cities several times daily, and more expensive *bus cama* (sleeper) services are available on long overnight runs.

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Arica, Chile	8	10-13
Cochabamba	7	3-5
Cuzco, Peru	12-17	15-20
Iquique, Chile	11-13	12-17
Oruro	3	2
Potosí	11	5-7
Puno, Peru	8	6-8
Santa Cruz	18	12-15
Sucre	14	10-12
Tarija	24	10-15
Trinidad	40	20
Uyuni	13	6-10
Villazón	23	7-12

CEMETERY AREA

Micros and minibuses run to the *cementerio* (cemetery) constantly from the center: catch them on Av Mariscal Santa Cruz or grab *micro* 2 along Av Yanacocha. Heading into the city from the cemetery by day you can catch *micros* along Av Baptista. At night always take a taxi.

Transportes Manco Kapac (Map pp186-7; Plaza Felix Reyes Ortiz) and Transtur 2 de Febrero run to Copacabana (US\$2.50, three hours) all day from Calle José María Aliaga. Transporte 6 de Junio also goes to Copacabana between 5am and 6pm. Or for US\$4 to US\$5 try the more comfy tourist buses that do hotel pickups. From Copacabana, lots of *micros* and minibuses sprint to Puno (US\$3 to US\$4, three to four hours).

Between 5am and 6pm, **Autolíneas Ingavi** (Map pp186-7; Calle José María Asín) has departures every 30 minutes to Desaguadero (US\$1.50, three hours). Nearby is **Trans-Unificado Sorata** (Map pp186-7; cnr Ángel Babia & Manuel Bustillos), which operates five or so daily buses to Sorata (US\$1.50, 4½ to five hours). Seats are in short supply, so turn up one hour before; sit on the left for views of Sorata. Buses to Huarina and Huatajata also leave from this area.

VILLA FÁTIMA

You can reach Villa Fátima by *micro* or minibus from the Prado or Av Camacho. Turbus Totai and Flota Yungueña minibuses to Coroico (US\$2, four hours) leave from the *exsurtidor*, a former gas station. Flota Yungueña also has daily departures to Rurrenabaque (US\$7, 22 hours) at noon.

From here, there are hourly departures to Chulumani (US\$2.50, four hours) – a heinous trip in the rainy season; a bus to Guanay (US\$8, eight hours) at 9:30am daily; and another to Rurrenabaque (US\$11, 16 hours) at 11:30am daily.

GETTING AROUND

La Paz is well serviced by public transportation. There are full-size buses and *micros* (medium-size buses), which charge US20¢ for trips around the city center. *Kombi* minibuses charge slightly less around town and US25¢ to the Zona Sur. Buses, *micros* and minibuses announce their route with signs on the windshield; barkers shout out destinations on minibuses ad nauseam. *Trufis* are shared taxis that follow a fixed route and charge US25¢ per person around the center. Any of these vehicles can be waved down anywhere, except in areas cordoned off by the police.

Radio taxis, which you can phone or flag down, charge US75¢ around the center and US\$1 to the cemetery district, slightly more at night, slightly less coming downhill. Charges are for up to four passengers and include pickup, if necessary.

AROUND LA PAZ

VALLE DE LA LUNA

The **Valley of the Moon** (admission US65¢) makes a pleasant half-day break from La Paz' bustle. It's not a valley but a bizarrely eroded maze of canyons and pinnacles technically known as

badlands, 10km down the canyon of the Río Choqueyapu from the city center.

To get here, catch any *micro* marked 'Mallasa' or 'Zoológico' from Plaza del Estudiante. Get off after the Cactario at the junction for Malasilla Golf Course and walk for a few minutes toward Mallasa village. When you see a green house on your right, you're at the top of the *valle*. Be careful walking here in the rainy season – the route is eroded and can be slippery.

From the top of Valle de la Luna, catch another *micro* headed down the valley or continue a couple of kilometers on foot.

TIAHUANACO (TIWANAKU)

Tiahuanaco is Bolivia's most significant archaeological site, 72km west of La Paz on the road toward the Peruvian frontier at Desaguadero.

Little is known of the people who constructed this great ceremonial center on Lake Titicaca's southern shore. Archaeologists generally agree that the civilization that spawned Tiahuanaco rose in about 600 BC. The site was under construction around AD 700, but after AD 1200 the group faded into obscurity. However, evidence of its influence has been found throughout the area of the later Inca empire.

There are a number of megaliths (up to 175 tons in weight) strewn around the site, including a ruined pyramid and the remains of a ritual platform. Much has been restored, not always with total authenticity, and travelers fresh from Peru may be disappointed. Across the railway line from Tiahuanaco is a **site museum** (admission US\$3.50; ☎ 9am-5pm) and the ongoing excavation of **Puma Punku** (Gateway of the Puma). For a greater appreciation of Tiahuanaco's history, hire a guide (a reasonable one costs up to US\$10).

You can stop at Tiahuanaco en route between La Paz and Puno, Peru (via Desaguadero), but most travelers prefer to travel from La Paz to Puno via Lake Titicaca (p205) and visit Tiahuanaco as a day trip from La Paz. Autolíneas Ingavi *micros* depart every half hour for Tiahuanaco (US\$1, 1½ hours) from Calle José María Asín near the cemetery; some continue to Desaguadero. To return to La Paz, flag down a bus (expect to stand), or walk 1km west into Tiahuanaco village and catch one from the plaza.

Several La Paz agencies (p189) offer guided tours to Tiahuanaco for US\$15 to US\$20.

CORDILLERA REAL & THE YUNGAS

Northeast of La Paz, the dramatic Cordillera Real rises before giving way to the Yungas, beautiful subtropical valleys where steep forested mountainsides fall away into humid, cloud-filled gorges. The Yungas, which contain several Afro-Bolivian settlements, form a natural barrier between the *altiplano* and the Amazonian rainforests. Heading northeast from La Paz, the road winds up to La Cumbre (4600m), then descends 4340m to the Beni lowlands. Tropical fruits, coffee and coca all grow here. The climate is moderate with misty rain possible at any time of year.

COROICO

☎ 02 / pop 3500

Perched on the shoulder of Cerro Uchumachi (2548m) at an elevation of 1500m to 1750m, Coroico is a Bolivian Eden. It serves as a lowland retreat for middle-class *paceños* (citizens of La Paz), an enclave for a few European immigrants and a popular base for short treks into the countryside. As many expats can attest, it's so laid-back that it's hard to break away.

Orientation & Information

Coroico is 7km uphill from the transport junction of Yolosa. There's a 'tourist office' on the plaza which has hotel information only. The Parque Nacional Cotapata office is on the plaza; check here for permission to camp at the park's biological research station off the Choro trail.

Entel is on the western side of the plaza. MCM, near the bus offices, and Internet La Casa, one block east of the plaza, offer internet access for US\$2 an hour.

Banco Unión offers cash advances and may change cash. **Hotel Esmeralda** (☎ 213-6017; www.hotelesmeralda.com) changes traveler's checks at 5% commission.

Sights & Activities

For pretty views, trek an easy 20 minutes up to **El Calvario**, where the stations of the cross lead to a grassy knoll and **chapel**. To get there, head uphill toward Hotel Esmeralda. There are two good trailheads from El Calvario. The one to the left leads to the **cascadas**, a trio of waterfalls

6km (two hours) beyond the chapel. The trail to the right leads up to **Cerro Uchumachi** (a five-hour round trip), which affords terrific views of the valley. Don't set off on these routes on your own.

You can rent horses from **El Relincho** (☎ 719-13675), 100m past Hotel Esmeralda, for US\$6.20 an hour or US\$44 per day or US\$100 for a two-day camping trip, all including guide. Hotel Bella Vista rents bicycles.

Siria Leon (☎ 719-55431; siria_leon@yahoo.com; JZ Cuenca 062) is recommended for Spanish lessons (US\$4 an hour).

Sleeping

Rates rise as much as 20% on weekends and holidays; bargain midweek and for longer stays. There are many more places to sleep than those listed here and most have restaurants as well.

Residencial Coroico (r per person US\$1.75) One block north of the plaza, these are the dustiest, cheapest digs in town; rooftop rooms are best.

Hostal Sol y Luna (☎ 715-61626, in La Paz 02-236-2099; www.solyluna-bolivia.com; camping per person US\$1.85, s/d with shared bathroom US\$5/7.50, cabanas with bathroom US\$20-30; 🚻) This splendid German-run gringo-friendly retreat is well worth the 20-minute walk east of town. It has scenic campsites, self-contained cabins and comfortable rooms, with shared bathroom, near the pool. Bonuses include restaurant with veggie options, book exchange, shiatsu massage (US\$18 an hour) and a sublime slate hot tub (US\$6.20 per person).

Hostal Cafetal (☎ 719-33979; Rancho Beni; Miranda s/n; r per person weekdays/weekends US\$3.35/4.50; 🚻) A superlative option with stunning views, reputedly the best eats in Bolivia and a pool in a lush garden setting. Follow your nose (and the signs) from the plaza.

Hostal Kory (☎ in La Paz 243-1311; s US\$6, s/d with bathroom US\$11/20) Southwest of the plaza, the most 'solid' and plain of the budget options, with great views.

Hotel Bella Vista (☎ 221-36059; r per person US\$10, without bathroom US\$5) Bounce on in to this spotless place with racquetball courts and a small rooftop patio with expansive views.

Hotel Esmeralda (☎ 213-6017; www.hotelesmeralda.com; s/d/tr from US\$12/15/18; 🚻) Everyone (including most tour groups) seems to end up at Hotel Esmeralda, for the pool, sunny patio, restaurant and killer views. The complex

THE MOST DANGEROUS ROAD IN THE WORLD

Flanked by epic scenery and punctuated with waterfalls during the rainy season, the La Paz–Coroico road plunges over 3000m in 80km. It's called the 'World's Most Dangerous Road' because it sees the most fatalities annually (over 100 on average), but the road itself is not that treacherous. True, it's extremely narrow and can be muddy, slippery and deeply rutted, but Andean veterans will recall much worse routes in Peru and Ecuador. What makes the road so dangerous is the drivers: a combination of weekend warriors, macho bus drivers on sleep-deprived benders and tenderfooted tourists. To minimize the danger, avoid traveling on public holidays when the locals head down for big weekends.

range of prices depends on views and bathrooms. The cheapest have neither, and are dank and rather overpriced. It's located about 400m uphill east of the plaza; phone for free pickup. Ensure that your belongings are secure at all times.

Eating & Drinking

Coroico has a good choice of eateries; you'll sometimes wonder which country you're in. Back-Stubbe Konditorei is good for breakfast, Yungas coffee and homemade German desserts. It's near Hostal Kory.

Restaurante Cafetal (☎ 719-33979; mains US\$3.50-5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Bolivia's culinary gold medal goes to this French-run restaurant. It's worth every step of the 15-minute walk east of town for its phenomenal salads, crêpes, and breezy atmosphere.

La Casa (Ayacucho s/n; ☺ Tue-Sun) Fine European cuisine; book ahead for fondue or raclette.

La Bella Vista (plaza) Little Italy comes to Coroico – the best pizza in town.

Comedor popular (meals under US\$1) Typical Bolivian meals all day. It's northwest of the plaza.

For nightlife try **Bamboo's** (Iturralde) with live music on the weekend, cocktails and Mexican food, or Taurus, with a similar vibe.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses leave hourly (between 7am and 4pm) from next to the *ex-surtidor*

(former gas station) in La Paz' Villa Fátima neighborhood. A Flota Yungueña or Trans Totai minibus (US\$2, 3½ hours) is the best way to go. In Coroico, buses leave from the two main offices on the plaza and Calle Sagárnaga (the main road). There are hourly departures from Coroico to La Paz from around 6am (book in advance on Sundays), and daily buses to Rurrenabaque (US\$7.25, 15 hours) which leave from Yolosa if and when the buses have made it down the 'World's Most Dangerous Road' (see left). Those with stamina can risk the rough Coroico–Chulumani road (via Coripata) by *camión*; departures from the market.

CHULUMANI

☎ 02 / pop 4500

This placid town is the terminus of the Yunga Cruz trek (see opposite) and a great detour off the gringo circuit. It's also the capital of Sur Yungas province and is in a main coca-growing region.

Banco Unión, on the plaza, changes cash and traveler's checks (5% commission) and an Entel office is on the plaza.

For great views, head to the **mirador** two blocks south of the plaza. The gregarious owner of the Country Guesthouse (see following) is full of ideas for hiking, biking, river tubing and camping outside the town. **Ramiro Portugal** (☎ in La Paz 02-213-6016, 02-279-0381) takes groups on day trips (US\$25 for up to five people) to **Bosque Apa Apa**, a cloud forest rich in birds and flora. Camping, including tents, is US\$10 plus US\$1 per person per night.

Sleeping & Eating

Alojamiento Daniel (r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$3.50) Half a block uphill from the plaza, this place has clean rooms with shared showers. Next door is the similarly priced Alojamiento Chulumani.

Country Guesthouse (camping per person US\$2.65, r with bathroom & breakfast US\$6.65; ☺) The nicest place to stay is Xavier Sarabia's rustic guesthouse, a 10-minute walk southwest of the plaza. There's a pool, homey bar and good meals on request.

Hotel Panorama (☎ 213-6109; Murillo at Andrade; s/d US\$6.50/9; ☺) You pay for the views here. Moving up a notch in comfort, this friendly hotel has reasonable rooms.

For chow, try the restaurant at the Country Guesthouse or one of the basic *comedores* at

the *tranca*. The clean market also has good cheap meals.

El Mesón (plaza) dishes up cheap *almuerzos*. Across the plaza, Restaurant Chulumani has an upstairs dining terrace.

Getting There & Away

From Villa Fátima in La Paz, Turbus Totai buses go to and from Chulumani (US\$2.50, four hours) when full from 8am to 4pm. From Chulumani, Trans San Bartolomé departs for La Paz at 5:30am and noon daily. Trans Chulumani and 24 de Agosto minibuses leave regularly from the *tranca*. The Chulumani–Unduavi road (where the paved bit begins) is hazardous in the rainy season. Bring lots of snacks and water and expect delays.

It's possible to go to Coroico via Coripata: take a La Paz–bound bus and get off at the crossroads just after Puente Villa at Km 93. Here, wait for a bus or *camión* to Coripata and then change again for a lift to Coroico (for a lo-o-o-ng, dusty trip).

TREKKING IN THE CORDILLERA REAL

Several worthwhile treks run between the *altiplano* and the Yungas, all of which cross the Cordillera Real on relatively low passes. Most popular are the **Choro** (La Cumbre to Coroico, 70km), **Taqesi** (Takesi; 40km) and **Yunga Cruz** (114km). These two- to four-day treks all begin with a brief ascent, then head down from spectacular high-mountain landscapes into the riotous vegetation of the Yungas.

Trekking the Choro independently is only tricky at the trailhead: take any bus from La Paz to Coroico and alight at **La Cumbre**, the highest point on the road. The path begins on the left and is distinct for the first kilometer, but then gets harder to discern. Stay to your right and pass between two ponds (one often dry) before heading uphill. From here it's clear sailing to Coroico. Security is a concern as nasty incidents have been reported. Many tour agencies offer this as a three-day trip for around US\$100 to US\$150, all-inclusive (see p264). Serious trekkers should consult Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Central Andes*, which includes maps and detailed descriptions of these treks, as well as other routes.

GUANAY

Isolated Guanay is a detour from the Coroico–Rurrenabaque road, and it's at the end of the Camino del Oro trek from Sorata. It makes a

good base for visits to the gold-mining operations along the Ríos Mapiri and Tipuani. If you can overlook the devastation of the landscape wrought by gold fever, a visit with the miners is interesting. Access to the mining areas is by jeep along the Llipi road, or by motorized dugout canoes up the Río Mapiri.

Dollars can sometimes be changed with gold dealers or at the *farmacias* (pharmacies). Caranavi's Banco Unión does cash advances and changes traveler's checks.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Pahuichi (r per person US\$2.50) A block downhill from the plaza, this is the best value in town and has a reasonable restaurant.

Hospedaje Los Pinos (d US\$4.50) This friendly spot near the dock has clean doubles with private bathroom and fan.

Several other basic but friendly places within a block of the plaza all charge around US\$2 per person.

There are many restaurants on the main strip and around the plaza.

Getting There & Away

Four companies offer daily runs to and from La Paz via Caranavi and Yolosa (US\$5, 10 hours). For Coroico, get off at Yolosa, 7km west of Coroico, and catch a lift up the hill. If you're heading to Rurrenabaque (US\$7.50, 14 hours), get off in Caranavi and connect with a northbound bus.

Boats to Mapiri leave daily at 9am (three to four hours) from Puerto Mapiri. When the river is too low (August to September) departures are by jeep (US\$5, five hours).

Charter boats take travelers to Rurrenabaque, but these are pricey (US\$300 for a 10- to 15-person boat, eight to 10 hours when high water levels). Bear in mind the boat owners face a three-day return trip with no income and a hefty fuel bill. Stock up on equipment and food.

Gung-ho travelers can hire a guide (around US\$30 per day), build a balsa raft and float to Rurrenabaque. The journey takes five to seven days; you need to be self-sufficient and provide for the guide, too.

SORATA

☎ 02 / pop 2200

Sorata is the kind of place in which the hardest soccer thug would consider taking up yoga. Surrounded by green mountains, and

at the confluence of the Ríos San Cristobal and Challa Suyu, its calm beauty attracts tourists needing relaxation, as well as mountaineers and trekkers seeking adventure in the surrounding snowcapped peaks of Illampu (6362m) and Ancohumá (6427m). On Sunday, jeeps and buses ferry flocks of locals to the local market. On Monday many places are closed.

Activities

WALKING

More fun for the walk than the site is the 12km trek to the **Gruta de San Pedro** (San Pedro Cave; admission US\$1; ☎ 8am-5pm), a six-hour round trip from Sorata (a one-way taxi costs around US\$2.50). Bring water and snacks – or, better yet, stop by Café Illampu en route.

TREKKING

Peak hiking season is April to September. Ambitious adventurers can do the six-day **Camino del Oro trek**, an ancient trading route between the *altiplano* and the Río Tipuani goldfields. Alternatively, there's the steep climb up to **Laguna Challata**, a long day trek with multiple trails (it's best to take a guide; you can't see the lake until you get there); **Comunidad Lakathiya**, another long day trek; **Laguna Glacial**, a two- to three-day trek; the arduous six- to seven-day **Mapiri Trail** (note: this is disappearing due to landslides); or the seven-day **Illampu circuit**. Although this is one of the best trails, there have been ongoing incidents and it should not be attempted without well-informed guides.

The **Sorata Guides & Porters Association** (guia sorata@hotmail.com; Sucre 302) can help organize many different treks. Budget on US\$12 to US\$20 per day for a group plus food, depending on the group size.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Andean Biking (☎ 712-76685; www.andeanbiking.com; plaza) runs a series of awesome rides around Sorata for beginners to hard-core riders. Where else in the world can you cycle on pre-Inca paths, jump at 6000m and plunge thousands of meters downwards? A minimum of four people is required for most rides; prices are from US\$50 to US\$70 per ride. The main gig is a bike-boat extravaganza: a four- to five-day trip, with two days riding, two to three in a motorized dugout canoe, ending at Rurrenabque (US\$250, all inclusive). Mountain-bike

guru and owner Travis has been building a downhill track for more experienced riders – 2000m of downhill thrills.

Sleeping

Camping Altai Oasis (☎ 715-19856; resaltai@hotmail.com; camping per person US\$1.25, s/d US\$2.65/6, r with bathroom from US\$10, cabins US\$45-60) Come for a day, stay for a week. Travelers describe this place – set around greenery and river – as 'gold' and 'el paraíso' (paradise). There's a good bar-café, a book exchange, laundry service, hot showers and a communal kitchen. Thirty-minutes walk from the plaza, 1km down a winding detour off the road to San Pedro caves.

Residencial Sorata (☎ 213-6672; resorata@entelnet.bo; r per person US\$1.85-5) Friendly ghosts loom in this large, rambling quirky colonial mansion on the northeast corner of the plaza. Unkempt antiques (including the beds!) reflect a former glory. Louis is great on the trekking information.

Hostal Las Piedras (☎ 719-16341; laspiedras2002@yahoo.de; r per person US\$2.50, s/d with bathroom US\$5/7.50) Hard to beat. English-speaking German owner Petra is as *simpático* as her spotless artistically decorated rooms. Basic 'kitchen.' Head to the soccer field, a 10-minute walk from the plaza, down Calle Ascarrunz (a rough track).

Paraiso Hotel (☎ 213-6671; Villavicencio s/n; r per person US\$4.40, without bathroom US\$3) Paradise it ain't, but the sunny terrace makes up for the musty rooms.

Hotel Santa Lucía (☎ 213-6686; r without bathroom US\$3.80) An intimate hotel with delightful house-proud owner. Ten minutes from the plaza, down Calle Ascarrunz.

An obligatory stop on the way to San Pedro is the atmospheric Swiss-run Café Illampu (opposite), which has rental tents, grassy camping and terrific views.

Also recommended:

Hostal El Mirador (☎ 289-5008; Muñecas 400; s/d US\$1.90/3.80) The terrace has a more sunny disposition than this HI-affiliate's owner.

Hostal Italia (☎ 289 5009; r per person US\$2.50) In the main plaza above the pizzeria.

Eating & Drinking

Small, inexpensive restaurants around the market and the plaza sell cheap and filling *almuerzos*; Restaurant Sorata has veggie options.

For a quick B\$1 burger piled high with weenies and fries, hit the hamburger stands on the northwest corner of the plaza.

The main square should be renamed Plaza Italia, such are the number of (identical) pizzerias (oh! plus a Mexican). There are other international options.

Pete's Place (Hostal Don Julio, 1st fl, off the plaza; ☎ noon-10pm) For the latest trekking news and great food, this is the place. A yummy selection of veggie and international dishes will cure what ails you. Look for the signs on the plaza.

Café Illampu (☎ Thu-Mon) On the road to San Pedro, this café, run by the jovial Stephan the Swiss pastry chef, is where you'll find killer coffee and cakes, plus fresh berry *licuados* (fruit shakes).

Camping Altai-Oasis (☎ 715-19856) The café here offers coffee, drinks and its trademark steaks, veggie treats and great muesli (US\$2.20). See opposite for directions.

Getting There & Away

Sorata is far removed from the other Yungas towns and there are no direct connections to Coroico.

From La Paz, Trans Unificado Sorata departs the cemetery district 10 times daily (US\$1.70, 4½ hours). From Sorata, La Paz-bound buses depart from the plaza hourly from 4am to 4pm (5pm on weekends).

For Copacabana you must get off at the junction town of Huarina and wait for another bus.

LAKE TITICACA

Lake Titicaca is deservedly awash with gushing clichés. Although it is often wrongly described as the highest navigable lake in the world (both Peru and Chile have higher navigable bodies of water), this incongruous splash of sapphire amid the stark plains of the *altiplano* is rightly described as one of the most beautiful sights in the region.

At an elevation of 3820m, and more than 230km long and 97km wide, the lake straddles both Peru and Bolivia, and is a remnant of Lago Ballivián, an ancient inland sea. The lake's traditional Aymaran villages along the shore, ancient legends, and snow-topped peaks of the Cordillera Real in the background, provide a magical landscape and experience.

COPACABANA

☎ 02

Nestled between two hills and perched on the southern shore of Lake Titicaca, Copacabana (Copa) is a small, bright and enchanting town. It was for centuries the site of religious pilgrimages, and today the pilgrims flock to fiestas – the locals love a party.

Although it can appear a little tourist-ready, the town is a pleasant place to wander around, with excellent cafés, and walks along the lake and beyond. It is the launching pad for visiting Isla del Sol, and makes a pleasant stopover between La Paz and Puno or Cuzco (Peru). At 3800m, the days are pleasant and sunny (with rain in December and January) but nights are chilly throughout the rest of the year.

Information

The best book exchange is at La Cúpula (p208).

Alf@Net (cnr 6 de Agosto & Av 16 de Julio) A popular hangout with speedy internet access for US\$1.80 an hour. There are a couple more internet places on 6 de Agosto heading toward the lake.

Casa de Cambio Copacabana (6 de Agosto s/n) There's no ATM in town but this place, at Hotel Playa Azul, changes cash and traveler's checks (5% commission).

Pacha (cnr 6 de Agosto & Bolívar) For laundry; two-hour service for US\$1.25.

Prodem Near Casa de Cambio Copacabana. Is meant to do Visa cash advances (5% commission), but strangely often can't.

Tourist office (northeast cnr of plaza) If open, this office has some informative brochures.

Sights & Activities

The sparkling Moorish-style **cathedral**, built between 1605 and 1820, dominates town. The famous wooden **Virgen de Copacabana statue** is housed upstairs in the **Camarin de la Virgen** (admission by donation; ☎ 9am-noon & 2:30-6pm). Don't miss the **Capilla de Velas** (Candle Chapel), around the side of the cathedral, where thousands of candles illuminate an arched sepulchre and wax graffiti cakes the walls. The colorful **Benediciones de Movilidades** (*cha'lla*; blessing of automobiles) occurs daily at 10am and 2:30pm in front of the cathedral.

The hill north of town is **Cerro Calvario** (3966m), which can be reached in 30 minutes and is well worth the climb, particularly at sunset. Many pilgrims make this climb, placing stones at the stations of the cross as they ascend. Less impressive are the minor Inca

sites around town: **Horca del Inca** on the hill Niño Calvario; the **Tribunal del Inca** (☎ Tue-Sun 9:30am-6pm), near the cemetery; and **Baño del Inca** and **museum** (☎ 9am-6pm), 2km north of town. They are often closed despite their advertised opening hours.

Head to the lakeshore to rent **bicycles, motorcycles, paddleboats** or **sailboats**.

Festivals & Events

A Bolivian tradition is the blessing of miniature objects, like cars or houses, at the **Alasitas festival** (January 24), as a prayer that the real thing will be obtained in the coming year. These miniatures are sold in stalls around the plaza and at the top of Cerro Calvario.

Following Alasitas, the **Fiesta de la Virgen de Candelaria** is celebrated on the first two days of February. Dervishes from Peru and Bolivia perform traditional Aymara dances amid much music, drinking and feasting. On **Good Friday**, the town fills with pilgrims, who join a solemn candlelit procession at dusk. The biggest fiesta lasts for a week around **Independence Day** (around the first week in August),

WARNING

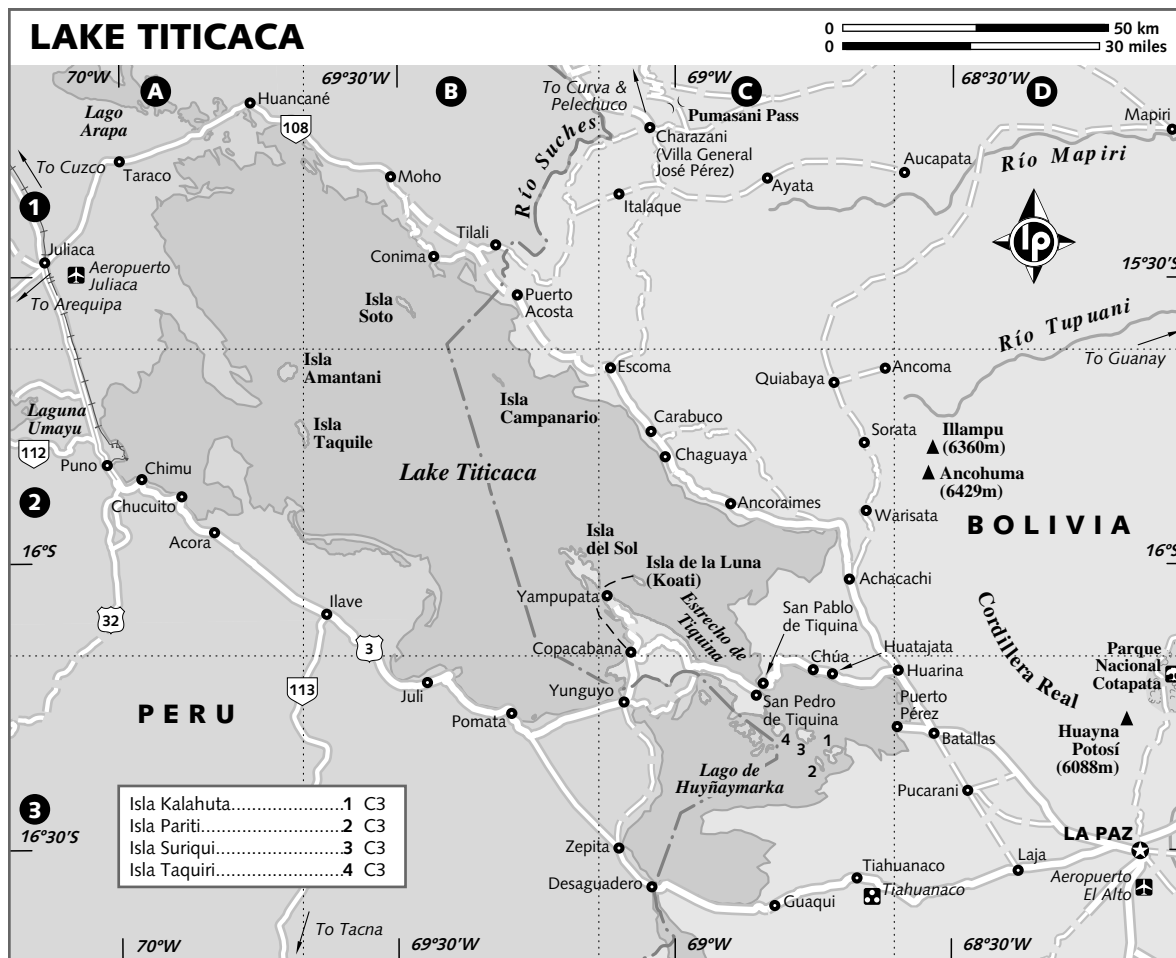
Particular care should be taken during festivals, particularly those for Semana Santa (Easter Week) and Independence Day week. Petty theft is common, and there have been more serious reports of tourists being tackled around the neck – these maneuvers cause you to faint, whereupon you are relieved of your goods.

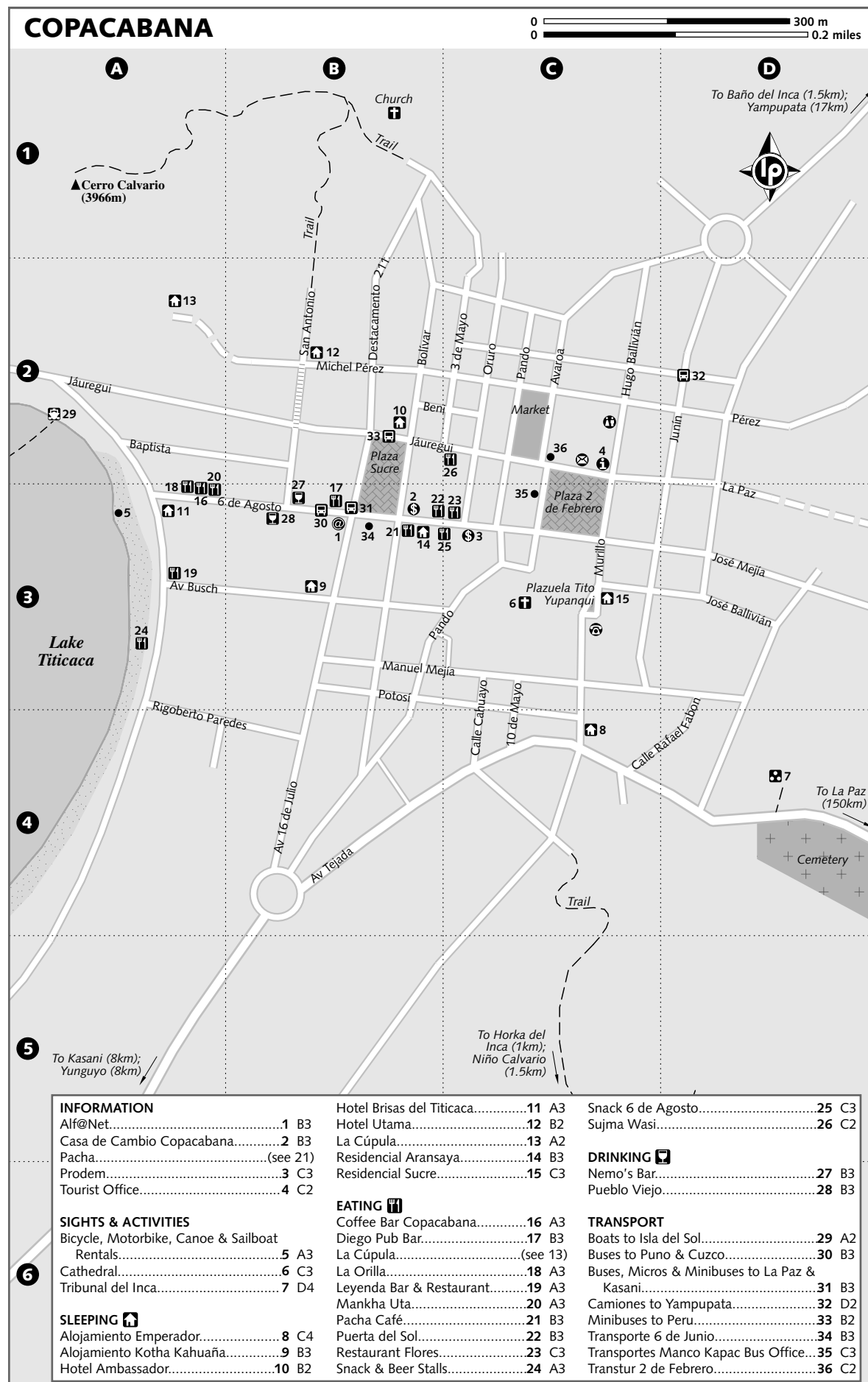
featuring parades, brass bands, fireworks and lots of alcohol.

Sleeping

There is an incredible variety of cheap places to snooze. During fiestas, however, everything fills up and prices can jump threefold. Most places will store backpacks for free while you overnight at Isla del Sol and beyond. Wild camping is possible on the summits of Niño Calvario and Cerro Sancollani. Following are the cheapest acceptable options, asking US\$1.25 to US\$4.50 per person for rooms without bathroom.

BOLIVIA





BOLIVIA

SPLURGE!

La Cúpula (☎ 862-2029; Michel Pérez 1-3; r from US\$512) No doubt Bolivia's best. With the individuality of a boutique hotel and the range of facilities of a resort, this German-run great-value place has the lot: excellent food (see right), hammocks, gardens, books and a relaxing vibe. Every room is uniquely decked out – you can even hole up in the 'cúpula.' The new artistic cabins are a treat (US\$32).

Alojamiento Emperador (☎ 862-2083; Murillo 235) Upbeat and colorful with a delightful señora who loves travelers. Use of small kitchen, firm beds and a sunny mezzanine. A new section has rooms with private bathrooms.

Alojamiento Kotha Kahuaña (☎ 862-2022; Av Busch 15) A mini Tiahuanaco awaits you at this clean (if pebbly) abode, which offers good upstairs rooms with lake views and hot water around the clock.

Residencial Aransaya (☎ 862-2229; 6 de Agosto 121) Very smart rooms with private bathroom, an inviting, sunny patio and a good restaurant below.

Hotel Brisas del Titicaca (☎ 862-2178; 6 de Agosto) This HI-affiliate overlooks the lake. Pity about the rude and disinterested staff that we encountered on our visit.

Hotel Ambassador (☎ 862-2216; cnr Jáuregui & Bolívar; r with bathroom & TV per person US\$5) A frilly no-frills experience with a cheerful rooftop restaurant.

Residencial Sucre (Murillo 228, r per person incl breakfast US\$5) Classy hotel-style entrance with a large courtyard and room choice of varying quality.

Hotel Utama (☎ 862-2013; Michel Pérez; r per person incl breakfast US\$7-10) This friendly midrange option has comfortable rooms with private bathroom (it often gets the overflow from the nearby La Cúpula).

Eating & Drinking

The local specialty is farmed Lake Titicaca *trucha criolla*, one of the world's largest trout. As usual, the cheapest meals are in the market. In the morning, head there to smell the fish and sate your sweet tooth with *api morado* (purple *api*; a syrupy beverage made of maize, lemon, cinnamon and sugar) and syrupy *buñuelos* (doughnuts).

La Cúpula (☎ 862-2029; Michel Pérez 1-3; ☎ from 7:30am) Great selection with veggie (and scenic) delights. No breakfast or lunch on Tuesdays.

Coffee Bar Copacabana (6 de Agosto s/n; almuerzos US\$1.25) Laid-back in more ways than one – eat quickly before the delicious food slides off your plate (thanks to the slanting concrete floor). Extensive list of teas and gourmet coffees, breakfasts, pastas, nachos and everything in between.

Leyenda Bar & Restaurant (cnr Costañera & Busch; mains US\$3-6; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) You can hardly go wrong at this atmospheric lakefront spot, where delicious juices, pizzas and trout are served to the strains of Bob Marley.

Sujma Wasi (Jáuregui 127; mains US\$4-6) An interesting choice with delightful courtyard tables and a varied menu including many Bolivian specialties.

Pacha Cafe (cnr 6 de Agosto & Bolívar; mains US\$8-12) Try the superlative hot chocolate and excellent pizza here (US\$1.90 to US\$3.15), and listen to occasional live entertainment.

Pueblo Viejo (6 de Agosto 684) Readers love this rustic, cozy and chilled bar-café, run by some 'cool dudes' who are proud of their ethnic decor, quirky lighting (check out the fire light) and laid-back atmosphere. Live music is a regular feature.

There are a number of cheap, typical places. On the main drag, Snack 6 de Agosto is good value, or give Restaurant Flores, Puerta del Sol or Diego Pub Bar a shot. The snack and beer stalls along the lakeshore are other options.

Also recommended:

Nemo's Bar (6 de Agosto 684) A British/Bolivian-run warm and cozy place perfect for a tippie.

La Orilla (6 de Agosto s/n) With full bar, fireplace and huge portions of pasta pesto, stuffed trout and coconut curry.

Mankha Uta (6 de Agosto s/n; set meals US\$1.50) Features veggie options.

Getting There & Away

Transportes Manco Kapac and Transturs 2 de Febrero both have several daily connections from La Paz (near the cemetery) via Tiquina Straits to Copacabana (US\$2, 3½ hours), with extra weekend departures. Faster (but packed) Transporte 6 de Junio minibuses depart frequently from 4am to 5pm. Note: buses depart Copacabana from Plaza Sucre, but often arrive at Plaza 2 de Febrero.

Comfortable nonstop tour buses from La Paz to Copacabana cost US\$4 to US\$5. You can arrange to break the journey in Copacabana and then continue into Puno (Peru) with the same agency. You can do just the Copacabana–Puno leg (US\$3 to US\$4, three to four hours) or go all the way to Cuzco (US\$10, 15 hours); book ahead.

COPACABANA TO YAMPUPATA TREK

The 17km walk from Copacabana to Yampupata (just across the strait from Isla del Sol) takes three to four hours. The scenery along the trek rocks, and you can take a boat across to Isla del Sol for a few more days of hiking, and then hop on a boat back to Copacabana – it makes a phenomenal trip.

From Copacabana, head northeast along the road across the flat plain. At the 3km mark you'll see the village of Kusijata; a 10-minute detour will take you to the Baño del Inca. Another 5km on you will notice the **Gruta de Lourdes** (Virgin in a Cave) on a hillside, well visible from the main road to Yampupata. Continue up the steep hill up the main road (for an alternative shortcut, turn right immediately after the small bridge. Follow the **Inca road** until it peters out at which point head straight up the hill until you hit the main dirt road). At the junction, take the road to the left, which leads down to the village of **Titicachi**.

At **Sicuani**, the next village 2km further on, **Hostal Yampu** (basic accommodations per person around

US\$2) has meals. Further up the road on the right, ask for Hilario Paye, a colorful character, who will happily take you on a ride on his puma-headed reed boat, or for a trip in his motorboat to the peninsular and beyond. It's another hour to the piers at Yampupata, where you can hire a boat to Yumani on Isla del Sol (US\$8 to US\$10 per boat). It is not easy to return to Copacabana by car, but you can try your luck with *movilidad* (anything that moves)!

ISLA DEL SOL & ISLA DE LA LUNA

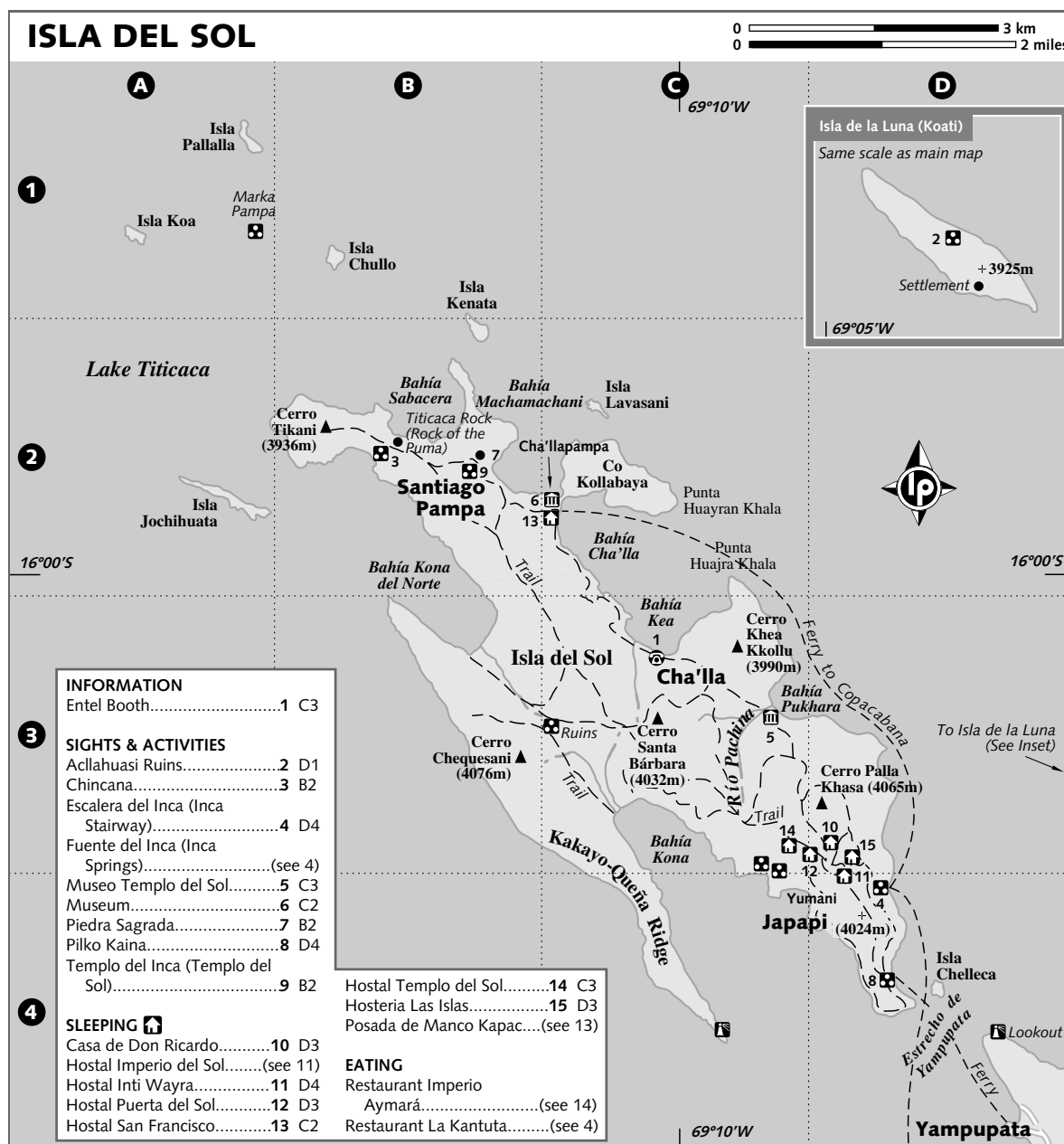
The Island of the Sun is the legendary Inca creation site and is the birthplace of the sun in Inca mythology. It was here that the bearded white god Viracocha and the first Incas, Manco Capac and his sister-wife Mama Huaca (or Mama Ocllo), made their mystical appearances. Isla de la Luna (Koati; Island of the Moon), the site of a deteriorating convent housing the virgins of the sun, is smaller and less touristed; a small admission fee may be charged.

With a population of around 5000, Isla del Sol is dotted with several villages, of which **Yumani** and **Cha'llapampa** are the largest. The island's Inca ruins include **Pilko Kaina** (admission US\$60¢) at the southern end and the **Chincana** complex in the north, which is the site of the sacred rock where the Inca creation legend began. At Cha'llapampa, there's a **museum** with artifacts from the underwater excavations near Isla Koa, north of Isla del Sol. The museum entry ticket (US\$1.25) is also valid for the northern ruins and the now rather abandoned **Museo Templo de Sol** at Cha'lla, which features a collection of dusty pots; its opening hours are erratic.

Networks of **walking tracks** make exploration easy, but the sunshine and altitude can take their toll. You can see the island's main archaeological sites in one long day, but it's best to stay overnight. Bring food, water and sunscreen. On a day tour, the boat arrives at Cha'llapampa near the northern end of the island at about 10am. A Spanish-speaking guide shows groups around the museum and accompanies them to Chincana. From there it's a moderately strenuous three- to four-hour walk along the ridgeline to Yumani, where food and accommodations are available. The **Escalera del Inca** (Inca Stairway) goes down to the jetty at **Fuente del Inca**, from where tour boats leave at 4pm for the return journey. Most

GETTING TO PERU

There are two options to enter Peru: the first via Copacabana and Yunguyo (Kasani–Yunguyo border crossing open 8am to 6pm), and the faster but less interesting route via Tapena/Desaguadero (open 9am to 9pm). If leaving direct from La Paz, the easiest way is to catch an agency bus to Puno (Peru); the bus breaks in Copacabana and again for immigration formalities in Yunguyo. Similar buses go direct to Cuzco. A cheaper way from Copacabana is via minibus from Plaza Sucre to the Kasani–Yunguyo border (US\$50¢, 30 minutes); there's onward transport to Puno, changing buses in Yunguyo. For information on travel from Peru to Bolivia, see p868. Note: Peruvian time is one hour behind Bolivian time.



tour boats stop to visit the Pilko Kaina ruins on the way back, finishing at Copacabana at around 6pm.

Most tour tickets theoretically let you return on a later day, so you can stay on the island to explore. But hooking up with your original company for the return isn't always easy. Half-day tours (US\$2) only give a glimpse of either end of the island and are hardly worthwhile. The easiest solution is to purchase two separate one-way tickets, which allows flexibility and works out at around US\$3.25.

Sleeping & Eating

Isla del Sol's infrastructure has exploded in recent years, with more restaurants and ac-

commodation options than sun rays. Note though that shops for self-catering are still rather scarce. You can camp just about anywhere away from the village and cultivated land.

There are a growing number of *alojamientos* on the hilltop in Yumani. There's little to distinguish them: they all charge US\$3 to US\$5 per person with shared cold (and some hot) showers, rooms with peach-colored walls and wooden floors, and lots of frilly bedcovers. Meals under US\$3 are sometimes available. Most *alojamientos* enjoy spectacular views.

At the north end of the island, you'll find lodging and meals in houses around Cha'llapampa and the beach behind. Lucio,

owner of Posada de Manco Kapac (☎ 712-88443; room per person US\$2.50), knows his stuff about the island. Hostal San Francisco (room per person US\$3) is a clean, helpful option.

Restaurant Imperio Aymará, on the hill-top, and Restaurant La Kantuta, at the top of the Escalera del Inca, are the best bets for simple meals.

Hosteria Las Islas (☎ 719-39047) Smack in the middle of the village, this is the pick for new, clean rooms, large terrace and a view you could eat from the outdoor café. You may have to book – it's a travel group hangout.

Hostal Inti Wayra (☎ 719-42015, in La Paz 02-246-1765) This large, two-story, ever-expanding white house offers some bright rooms in a familial atmosphere.

Hostal Imperial del Sol (☎ 719-42015) A perfectly peachy place – clean enough to eat an *empanada* off the floor. A deal pricier with own bathroom (US\$25).

Other options:

Hostal Templo del Sol (☎ 712-27616; s/d US\$2.50) Run-down but with spectacular views of Peru.

Hostal Puerta del Sol (☎ 719-55181; s/d US\$3/5) A cheery white house.

Casa de Don Ricardo (☎ 719-34427; birdy zehnder@hotmail.com; d incl breakfast US\$20) Pricier and very friendly place halfway up the hill from Fuente del Inca. Meals on request and spectacular sunny views, although unfortunately, Ricardo is not always there.

Getting There & Away

Day tours by boat from Copacabana to Isla del Sol and back cost from US\$2 to US\$4 per person, plus admission charges; buy tickets at the kiosks on the beach or at agencies in town. Tours cost the same if you walk from Cha'llapampa to Yumani. You will pay similar for a round-trip passage to the Pilko Kaina ruins but will end up spending more time on the water than on land. Boats leave Copacabana for Isla del Sol at 8:15am and 1:30pm, returning around 11am and 5pm. You can hop on a Copacabana-bound boat at the foot of the Escalera del Inca and have it drop you at Cha'llapampa in the north for US\$1.50.

If you have the time and energy, it's more interesting to walk from Copacabana to Yampupata and then cross to Isla del Sol by boat (see p209).

THE SOUTHWEST

Nowhere tantalizes the senses as much as Bolivia's southwest. Picture windswept basins, white-capped volcanic peaks and blinding white salt deserts. Feel indeterminable distances. Taste red dust. Further east, enjoy silence as the *altiplano* drops into ethereal and spectacular rainbow-rock surrounds. And as you head lower again, breathe in the scent of the region's magical orchards and vineyards.

ORURO

☎ 02 / pop 216,000

Set at 3700m around a range of mineral-rich hills, and set on the dusty and dry plains of the *altiplano*, this distinct city has a flavor all of its own.

Accommodations and transportation are in high demand during festivals and events, so advance booking is essential and inflated prices are the norm.

The city is three hours south of La Paz on a decent paved road, and is the northern limit of Bolivia's limited rail network. It's fiercely cold and windy year-round, so come prepared.

Information

There are a couple of Enlace ATMs on the plaza. Watch your cash stash – local pick-pockets and bag-slathers are quite competent, especially during drunken festivals.

Banco Boliviano Americano (cnr Calle Bolívar & Soria Galvarro) Changes cash and traveler's checks (5% commission).

Banco de Santa Cruz (Calle Bolívar 460) Also changes cash and traveler's checks (same commission).

Hotel Sucre (cnr Calle Sucre & 6 de Octubre) Charges US\$1.90 per dozen items for hand-wash-and-dry laundry service.

Immigration (☎ 527-0239; Ayacucho 322, 2nd fl) Extend your stay here (see p264).

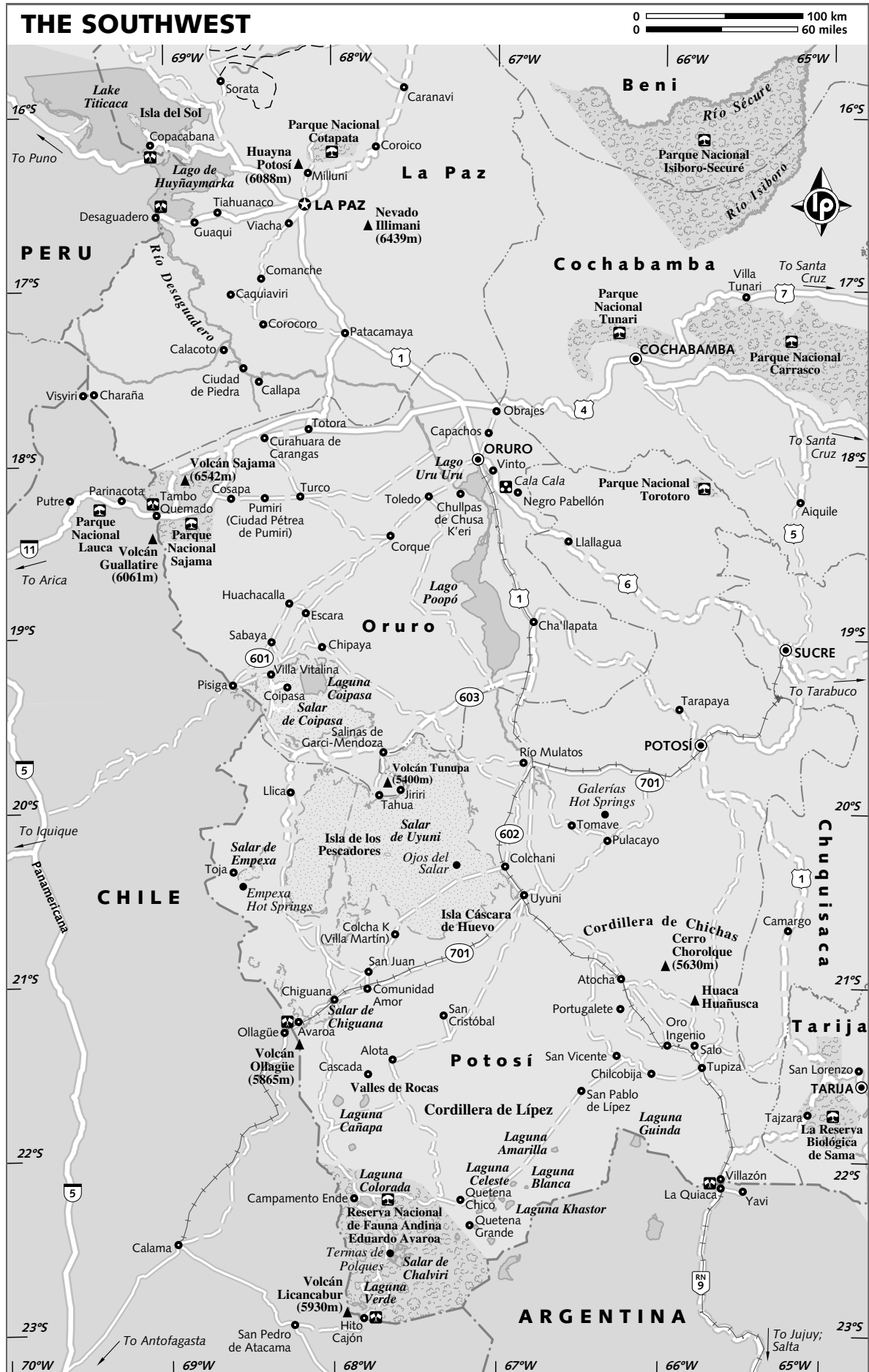
Mundo Internet (Calle Bolívar 573; per hr US\$65¢; ☎ 9am-midnight) The best of several internet places.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 525-0144; Plaza 10 de Febrero) On the west side of the plaza and has more printed literature than anywhere else in the country.

Tourist police (☎ 525-1923; Plaza 10 de Febrero) Only seem to be out in force during Carnaval.

Sights & Activities

Museo Patiño (☎ 525-4015; Soria Galvarro 5755; admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) is a former



BOLIVIA

residence of tin baron Simon Patiño. Exhibits include period furnishings, paintings, photographs and some fine toys.

Adjacent to the **Santuario de la Virgen del Socavón** is the **Museo Sacro, Folklórico, Arqueológico y Minero** (☎ 525-0616; Plaza del Folklore; admission US\$80¢; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri), some of which is in a defunct mine, with displays on mines, miners and the all-important, devilish miners' god, El Tío.

At the south end of town, the **Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas** (admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm) has artifacts from the early Chipaya and Uru tribes. Take *micro* C marked 'Sud' from the plaza's northwest corner or opposite the railway station and get off just beyond the tin foundry.

The **Museo Mineralógico y Geológico** (☎ 526-1250; admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), on the university campus south of the center, has exhibits of minerals, precious stones, fossils and crystals. From the center, take *micro* A, also marked 'Sud.'

The **Obrajes hot springs** (admission US\$1.25), 25km northeast of town, are the best of several nearby soaking options. From the corner of Caro and Av 6 de Agosto, catch an 'Obrajes' *micro* (US\$60¢, 45 minutes), which departs from 7:30am to 5pm daily; it also passes by the less appealing **Capachos hot springs**, 10km northeast of town. On weekends, local rock climbers flock to the area called **Rumi Campana**, 2km northwest of town; contact the **Club de Montañismo Halcones** (www.geocities.com/yosemite/gorge/1177).

Festivals & Events

During the spectacular **Carnaval**, from the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, the city turns into a parade of party animals, and it's a devilish time. Revelers – including proud locals, 90% of whom call themselves *quirquinchos* (armadillos) – pitch water at each other (which, frankly, can be downright tiresome). Several parade days (including the **Entrada** and **la Diablada**) feature dancers in intricately garish masks and costumes.

Sleeping

Near the train station on Velasco Galvarro there are quite a few handy, if not classy, *alojamientos*.

Alojamiento Copacabana (☎ 525-4184; Velasco Galvarro No 6352; r per person US\$2, with bathroom US\$2.50) Clean and secure (the backpacker-friendly

owner sleeps by the door at night) – the best on this strip.

Residencial San Salvador (☎ 527-6771; Velasco Galvarro No 6325; r per person US\$2.50) If you don't mind doggy smells, surly service and dark receptions, then it's OK.

Alojamiento San Juan de Dios (☎ 527-7083; Velasco Galvarro No 6346; r per person US\$2.50) A short step up from the bottom of the barrel.

Hotel Bernal (☎ 527-9468, Av Brasil 701; s/d US\$7.50/11.30) Opposite the bus terminal. What it lacks in personality, it makes up for in orderliness.

Other solid options include the following:

Residencial Gloria (☎ 727-6250; Potosí 1569; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$3.15) Spacious and secure in colonial building. Midnight curfew and bathrooms not its strong point.

Residencial San Miguel (☎ 527-2132; Calle Sucre 331; r per person US\$3.15, with bathroom US\$5)

Hostal Hidalgo (☎ 525-7516; 6 de Octubre 1616; s/d US\$10/17) A modernish central option with clean rooms.

Hotel Samay Wasí (☎ 527-6737; samaywasioruro@hotmail.com; Av Brasil 392; s/d incl breakfast US\$13/20) This modern, high-rise HI-affiliate near the bus terminal has gas showers around the clock, cable TV and phones.

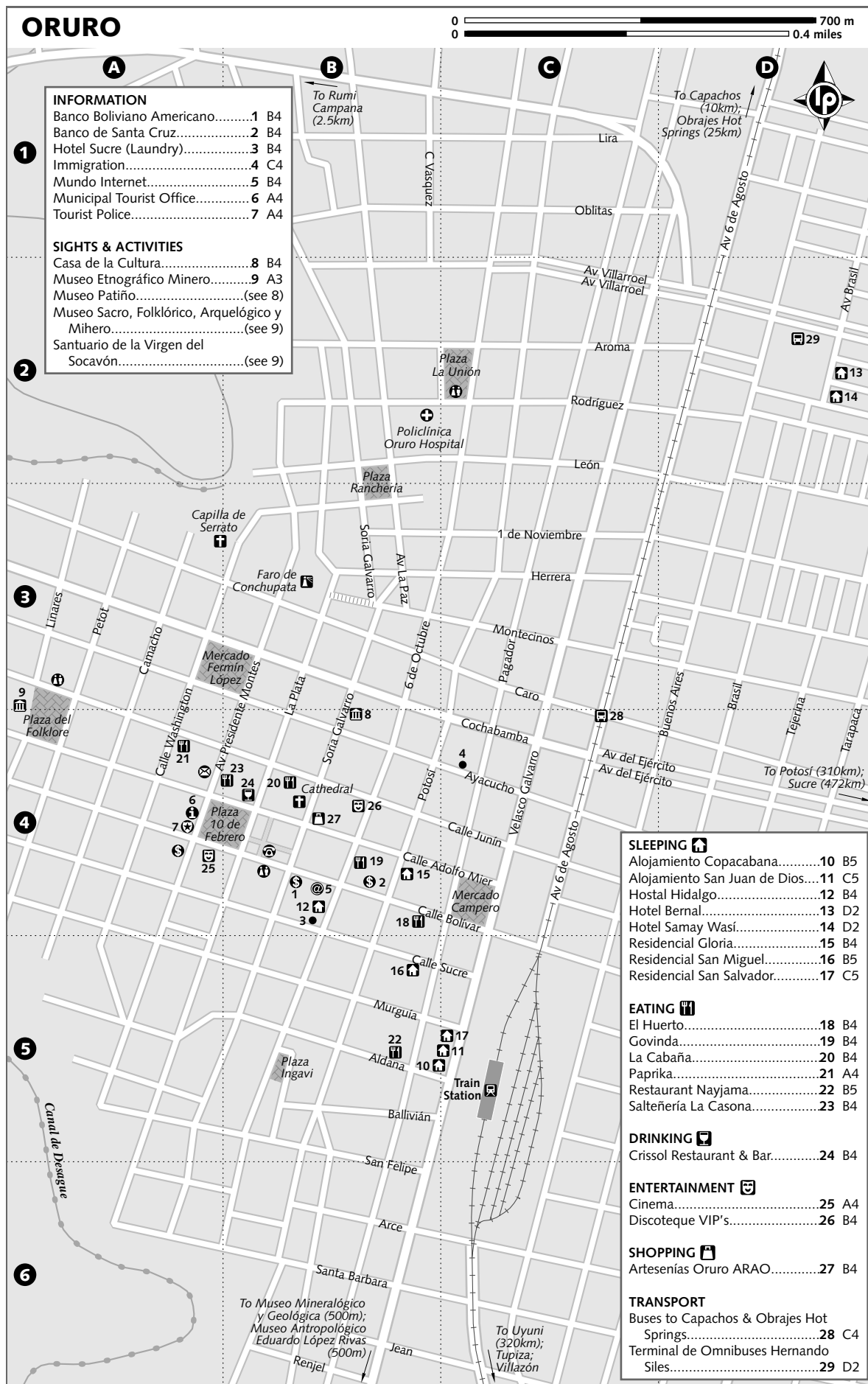
Eating

Life doesn't really get going here until 11am, so Mercado Campero is your best bet for an early breakfast. Stalls serve mostly *api* and pastries in the morning, but look out for *falso conejo* ('false rabbit,' a rubbery meat-based concoction), mutton soup, and beef and potatoes smothered with hot *llajhua* (spicy tomato-based sauce). For bargain lunch specials, check out the small eateries around the train station.

Salteñería La Casona (Av Presidente Montes 5969) The best *salteñas* are found here, just off Plaza 10 de Febrero; it also has sandwiches and pizza and pasta.

SPLURGE!

Restaurant Nayjama (☎ 527-7699; cnr Aldana 1880 & Pagador; mains US\$4-7) Cordon bleu cuisine on the *altiplano*? *Si señor*. The elegant, nonsmoking Restaurant Nayjama is run by celeb chef Don Roberto. He has catered to jet-setters the world over – invite him for a glass of wine to find out who. The house specialties are novel, international interpretations of classic Bolivian dishes and vegetarian options are available on request.



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EATING 🍴

18	El Huerto.....	18	B4
19	Govinda.....	19	B4
20	La Cabaña.....	20	B4
21	Paprika.....	21	A4
22	Restaurant Nayjama.....	22	B5
23	Salteñería La Casona.....	23	B4

DRINKING 🍷

24	Crissol Restaurant & Bar.....	24	B4
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ENTERTAINMENT 🎬

25	Cinema.....	25	A4
26	Discoteque VIP's.....	26	B4

SHOPPING 🛍️

27	Artesenías Oruro ARAO.....	27	B4
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TRANSPORT

28	Buses to Capachos & Obrajes Hot Springs.....	28	C4
29	Terminal de Omnibuses Hernando Siles.....	29	D2

Govinda (6 de Octubre 6089; mains US\$1-2) For Hare veggie fare, try this godlike place.

Paprika (Calle Junín 821) Join the locals for some lively banter. Where else can you be served a US\$1.25 lunch by bow-tied waiters?

El Huerto (Calle Bolívar) Lunch for around US\$1.35. It's near Pagador.

La Cabaña (Calle Junín 609; mains US\$1-4) Serves juicy steaks and typical Bolivian dishes in a pleasant setting.

Drinking

Crissol Restaurant & Bar (☎ 525-3449; cnr Adolfo Mier & La Plata) Is that really a car suspended from the roof? Rev into the *altiplano's* classiest place for a game of pool. Live music and dancing on weekends, full menu and sports TV lounge. Lunchtime salad buffet served upstairs for US\$1.25.

Entertainment

In the evenings you can hit the right note at one of many karaoke bars around town or at the sleazy **Discoteque VIP's** (cnr Calle Junín & 6 de Octubre). The **cinema** (Calle Bolívar; admission US\$1), on the west side of the plaza, screens relatively recent releases.

Shopping

Go on, be a devil! The design and production of artful Diablada masks and costumes is a booming cottage industry. Drop by the workshops on Av La Paz, between León and Villarroel.

Artesanías Oruro ARAO (☎ 525-0331; cnr Soria Galvarro & Calle Adolfo Mier) Opposite the cathedral, this place stocks a diverse selection of fine fair-trade Bolivian handicrafts.

Getting There & Away

BUS

All buses arrive and depart from **Terminal de Omnibuses Hernando Siles** (☎ 527-9535; Av Villarroel), a flat 15-minute walk northeast of the center. Buses to La Paz (US\$1.90 to US\$2, three to four hours) run every 30 minutes. There are daily services to Cochabamba (US\$1.75, 4½ hours), Potosí (normal/*cama* US\$2/9, five hours) with connections to Tupiza and Villazón, and several nighttime services to Uyuni (US\$3 to US\$4, eight hours), but the train is the ticket on this rough route.

Basic services to Sucre (US\$5, eight to 10 hours) go via either Cochabamba or Potosí, or there's four overnight direct buses. Flota

Bolívar goes direct to Santa Cruz (US\$12, 18 to 20 hours), or you can make connections in Cochabamba.

There are daily departures for Arica, Chile (US\$11, nine hours) via Tambo Quemado (passing through Parque Nacional Sajama) with connections to Iquique. Most travelers, however, prefer to enter Chile further south at San Pedro Atacama via Uyuni and a *salares* (salt plains) tour.

TRAIN

Oruro became a railroading center thanks to its mines, but the only surviving passenger connection is with Uyuni and points south. You must take your passport to the **ticket window** (☎ 527-4605; ☎ 8am-noon & 2:30-6pm Sun-Fri); arrive early and purchase your ticket a day ahead to avoid long lines.

A taxi between the train station and the center costs US50¢ per person.

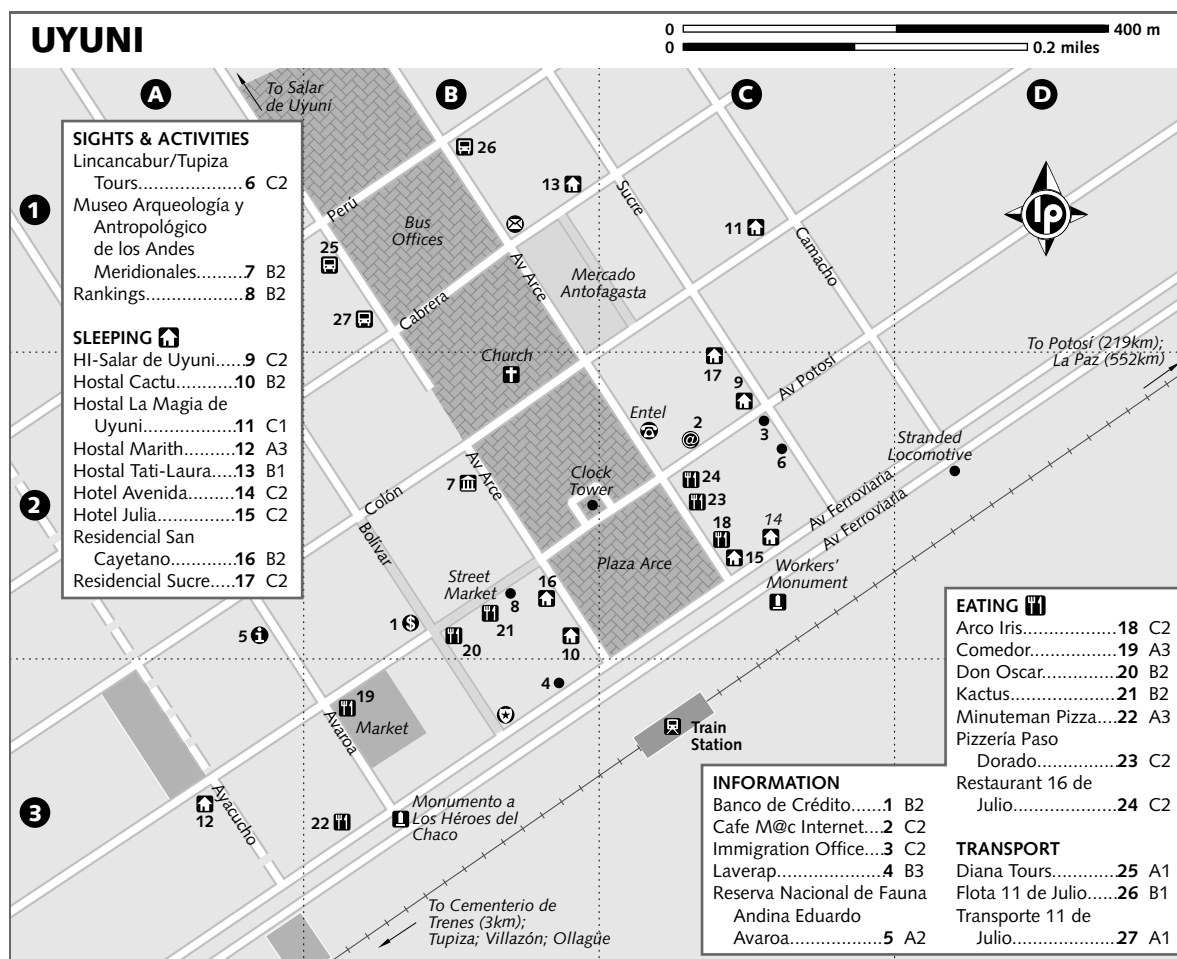
The privatized service is run by the Chilean **Empresa Ferroviaria Andina** (FCA; www.fca.com.bo in Spanish) and offers two services. The top-notch *Expreso del Sur* has two classes: the quite serviceable *salon* and top-of-the-line executive *premier*, which includes meals, videos and a dining car. It departs Oruro at 3:30pm on Tuesday and Friday for Uyuni (*salon/executive* US\$6.50/13, 6½ hours), Tupiza (US\$11.50/25.50, 11¾ hours) and Villazón (US\$13.70/30, 15 hours). It's a thoroughly enjoyable trip with beautiful scenery as far as Uyuni, but unfortunately the stretch to Tupiza is after dark.

The *Wara Wara del Sur* is the 2nd-class train, departing Oruro at 7pm Wednesday and Sunday, stopping at numerous stations en route to Uyuni (*salon/executive* US\$5/11, seven hours), Tupiza (US\$9/20, 13 hours) and Villazón (US\$11/23, 16¾ hours). The slightly cheaper 3rd class is called *popular*: prime your wrestling persona before joining the fray. There's no dining car, but snacks are peddled at every stop.

UYUNI

☎ 02 / pop 14,000

This 'climatically challenged,' otherworldly and isolated community (elevation 3675m) today seems to exist only for the tourist hoards who venture out to the extraordinary *salares*. The town itself has two notable sights: the archaeology museum and the rubbish-strewn Cementerio de Trenes (a graveyard of rusting locomotives 3km south of town).



Information

At the time of research, the tourist information office, normally housed in the clock tower, was closed.

Banco de Crédito (Av Potosí) Near Av Arce. Break big boliviano notes and change cash here. Otherwise, try the streetchangers near the bank, bigger tour companies or popular restaurants; several places on Potosí buy Chilean and Argentine pesos.

Cafe M@c Internet (Av Potosí) Opposite the plaza.

Immigration office (cnr Sucre & Av Potosí) If you're traveling to Chile, you're best off picking up a Bolivian exit stamp (officially US\$2) at this Las Vegasesque office, since the hours of the Bolivian border post at Hito Cajón (just beyond Laguna Verde) are about as reliable as *altiplano* transport.

Laverap (Av Ferroviaria) Does laundry for US\$1 per kilo. Some hostals and hotels offer the same service.

Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo

Avaroa office (REA; ☎ 293-2225; Avaroa) Sernap's friendly office is more user-friendly than the park's name.

Sights

The trippy **Museo Arqueología y Antropológico de los Andes Meridionales** (cnr Av Arce & Colón; adult/student US65¢/30¢; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat

& Sun) features mummies, loads of skulls and Spanish-language descriptions of the practices of mummification and deformation.

Tours

A drive across the Salar and surrounds is a surreal and must-do experience: salt plains, hot springs, geysers, colored lagoons, volcanoes and flamingos are the tour trademarks. In the wet season, some areas cannot be reached.

THREE- OR FOUR-DAY TRIPS

The most popular tour is a jeep trip: a four-day circuit visiting the Salar de Uyuni (p219), Laguna Colorada, Sol de Mañana and Laguna Verde. If you want to head into Chile, you can do three days of the tour, hop off at Laguna Verde and connect there with transport to San Pedro de Atacama (often the price is the same; check whether transfer is included in fee). Before leaving Uyuni, get a Bolivian exit stamp; better tour agencies can often arrange stamps outside office hours. (There is a border outpost at Laguna Verde but it's best to get the stamps in Uyuni.)

CUSTOM TRIPS

Shorter trips traverse the northern crescent of the Salar de Uyuni, stopping overnight at the friendly village of Jirira, with a climb on Volcán Tunupa. Depending on the season, you can arrange longer custom trips visiting Llica, the Salar de Coipasa or Laguna Celeste via the world's highest motorable road near the Argentine border.

Sleeping

Uyuni's tourism boom means the best hotels fill up fast; advance booking is advisable in high season. In a pinch, crash out for free in the railway station's waiting room; it's toasty with all the bodies in there and quite safe.

Cheap places near the station come in handy (although can be noisy) since most trains arrive and depart at ungodly hours. Most places are associated with one tour operator or another.

Hostal Marith (☎ 693-2174; Av Potosí 61; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$5) Clean and painted rooms off the main drag. Extras include laundry sinks and a social patio.

Hostal Cactu (Plaza Arce; r per person US\$3.15) A typical but OK cheapie, which seems to be forever

renovating. It's on the southwest side of the plaza.

Hi-Salar de Uyuni (☎ /fax 693-2228; www.hostellingbolivia.org; cnr Av Potosí & Sucre; dm US\$3.15, d per person US\$7.55; ☑) A veritable labyrinth of rooms and a bit on the dark side, but clean.

Hotel Avenida (☎ 693-2078; Av Ferroviaria 11; r per person US\$5-6, without bathroom US\$2-3) A popular and clean option for pre-departure and return trips. Good laundry sinks and hot showers between 7am to 9pm.

Hotel Julia (☎ 693-2134; Av Ferroviaria/Aniceto Arce; s/d US\$7.55/14.40) More 'grown up' than the cheapies, and good for a comfortable posttrip sleep.

Hostal La Magia de Uyuni (☎ 693-2541; magia_uyuni@yahoo.es; Colón 432; s/d incl breakfast US\$15/20) A bit twee, but the homey rooms are arranged around a indoor courtyard. It's popular among small tour groups.

Other options:

Residencial San Cayetano (Plaza Arce; r per person US\$2) On the north side of the plaza. Serviceable. Rise early to use the one decent shower (US\$50¢).

Hostal Tati – Laura (☎ 742-21226; Cabrera 334; r US\$2.50) This new concrete block is nicer on the inside than the out.

Residencial Sucre (☎ 693-2047; Sucre 132; r per person US\$2.50) Marginal, saggy mattresses and cold water only.

CHOOSING AN OPERATOR

Operators are piled high in Uyuni: there are currently over 60 agencies offering trips to the Salar. Most offer Spanish-speaking drivers who take you on the identical four-day trip. On the positive side, the competition means more choice; the brackish side is it's lowered quality as many dodgy and fly-by-night operators try to make a fast buck. It's your right to negotiate, but remember that cost-cutting leads to operators cutting corners – at the expense of safety and the environment. Common exploits include trying to cram an extra body into the jeep (six is comfortable), or they join forces with other agencies to make up the numbers. 'Grainy' experiences include ill-maintained jeeps, breakdowns, drunk drivers, poor food and service, and disregard for the Salar's once-pristine environment. Environmental no-nos include:

- Using the facilities of the salt hotel (it's an illegal structure).
- Chasing flamingos to get a good in-flight photo.
- Leaving garbage – including toilet paper – behind.

The best operators have written itineraries outlining meals (vegetarians can be catered for), accommodations and trip details. The average costs are between US\$60 and US\$100; plan on the higher figure during peak season (July to September). In most cases, price reflects quality. Booking and professional operators outside Uyuni cost extra, but may be worth it.

If touring from Uyuni, you could visit the **Rankings** (Av Potosí 9, 1st fl) office. More like a dating agency than an official ranking service, it helps match up travelers with operators according to their requirements: food, accommodations and other preferences (although many operators promote a high 'ranking' on posters – a misrepresentation). Your best bet is to talk to travelers to get the latest scoop.

Eating

Minuteman Pizza (☎ 693-2094; Av Ferroviaria 60, at Hotel Toñito; pizzas US\$3.80-6.30; 🕒 from 8am) When the owner built a purpose-built pizza kitchen, he meant business. And he got it. Uyuni's best all-round eating choice offers the most gourmet of gourmet pizzas, Budweiser, wines, and a huge range of breakfasts. Ideal for the pretrip carbo loading or the return trip binge (by the way, 'large' means *large*).

Comedor (cnr Av Potosí & Avaroa) If you've got a strong stomach, cheap meals are on offer at the market *comedor* and nearby street food stalls. For a piquant dose of *altiplano* culture, look for *charque kan* (mashed hominy peppered with bits of dried llama meat), often found inside tamales.

Arco Iris (Plaza Arce) The best spot to cobble together a tour group. It's a warm place with good pizzas, cold beer and occasional live music.

Pizzeria Paso Dorado (Plaza Arce 49; pizzas US\$4-10) Serves nonround choices on the plaza.

Don Oscar (cnr Av Potosí & Bolívar) This friendly spot does decent dinners.

The more upmarket **Restaurant 16 de Julio** (Plaza Arce 35; mains US\$2-4; 🕒 from 7am) and nearby **Kactus** dish out tasty pasta, international dishes and Bolivian fare.

Getting There & Away

Arrive from Tupiza via the badlands to avoid the crowds. In high season, it can be tricky to get out of isolated Uyuni. Buy your bus ticket the day before or ask a tour agency how much they charge to purchase train tickets; lines are long and *quien es mas macho* (literally 'who is the most macho') shoving matches can break out for the limited seats.

BUS & JEEP

All buses leave from the west end of Av Arce behind the church.

Todo Turismo (☎ 211-9418; Antofagasta Sq 504 near the bus station; one way US\$25) in La Paz has introduced a new (and more comfortable) direct bus service. This can be booked direct or through tour agencies for the same price. If you opt to go the cheaper option, Transporte 11 de Julio buses blast off at 10am and 7pm daily for Potosí (US\$3 to US\$4, seven hours) and Sucre (US\$6 to US\$7, nine to 11 hours). Diana Tours runs the same service at 10am and 7pm daily. Flota 11 de Julio goes to Tupiza (US\$5 to US\$6, 10 to 12 hours) at

9am on Wednesday and Sunday, and Calama in Chile, via Avoroa (US\$10, 12 to 15 hours), at 4am Monday and Thursday. Oruro (US\$3.80 to US\$6.30, eight to 10 hours) depart at 7:45pm daily. Daily services go to La Paz (US\$8, 11 to 14 hours).

Daily *rapiditos* (4WD Jeep services) shuttle between Uyuni and Tupiza (US\$6.50, six to seven hours) departing at around 5:30am. Several companies depart around 5am after they've stuffed in as many as 10 passengers.

TRAIN

Uyuni has a modern, well-organized **train station** (☎ 693-2153); confirm hours on the noticeboard inside as the train can be delayed, then queue at least two hours before departure (in the high season only). Comfortable but crowded *Expreso del Sur* trains ramble to Oruro (salon/executive US\$6.50/12.70, seven hours) on Thursday and Sunday at 12:05am (that's Wednesday and Saturday night folks!). Departures south to Tupiza (US\$3.60/5.15, five hours) and Villazón (US\$5.40/8, 9½ hours) are at 10:40pm on Tuesday and Friday. If tickets sell out, you could take a bus 111km south to Atocha, where the train stops at 12:45am.

Chronically late *Wara Wara del Sur* trains are supposed to chug out of the station for Oruro (3rd/2nd/1st class US\$3.90/5/11, 7½ hours) at 1:45am on Tuesday and Friday and at 2:50am on Monday and Thursday for Tupiza (US\$4.50/6/12.45, 5½ hours) and Villazón (US\$4.50/6/12, nine hours).

At 3:30am on Tuesday, a train trundles west for the town of Avaroa on the Chilean border, where you cross to Ollagüe and have to wait several hours to clear Chilean customs. Another train continues the journey to Calama (US\$14). The whole trip takes 20 to 40 hours and is strictly for masochistic rail junkies. Note: these train timetables are subject to change so double check before you wait up 'til the wee hours.

WARNING

In the past couple of years, pre-departure robberies have been increasing, where farewelling 'friends' enter the train and relieve others of their goods. Don't store your belongings in the overhead compartments.

SOUTHWEST CIRCUIT

Different times of year offer different experiences: from April to September, the *salares* are dry and blindingly white. In the rainy season, they're under water, projecting a perfect mirror image of clouds, sky and land to the horizon. At this time, roads may be quagmires, making passage difficult, and hail and snow are always a possibility.

Salar de Uyuni

The world's largest salt flat sits at a lofty 3653m and blankets an amazing 12,000 sq km. It was part of a prehistoric salt lake, Lago Minchín, which covered most of southwest Bolivia. When it dried up, it left a couple of seasonal puddles and several salt pans, including the **Salar de Uyuni** and **Salar de Coipasa**.

Towns of note include **Colchani** on the eastern shore and **Llica** on the west, where there are basic accommodations. A maze of tracks crisscrosses the *salar* and connects nearby settlements and several islands that pepper this blindingly-white desert. **Isla de los Pescadores** bears amazing stands of giant cactus and a marooned colony of vizcachas (long-tailed rodents related to chinchillas). Please stay away from **Isla Cáscara de Huevo**; flamingos breed here.

At the time of research, the *salar*'s famous salt hotels, Hotel Playa Blanca and the Palacio de Sal, were being deconstructed and moved block by block to the edge of *salar* near Colchani due to environmental concerns. One remains as a 'museum' (read 'illegal structure') and continues to be included as a stopover in many tours.

Far Southwest

Several startlingly beautiful sights are hidden away in this remote corner. The surreal landscape is nearly treeless, punctuated by gentle hills and volcanoes near the Chilean border. Wildlife in the area includes three types of flamingos (most notably the rare James species), plus plenty of llamas, vicuñas, emus and owls.

The following sites comprise the major stops on most tours. **Laguna Colorada** is a bright adobe-red lake fringed with cakey-white minerals, 25km east of the Chilean border. On its western shore is Campamento Ende and beside it the meteorological station, where those with marginal tour companies find shelter and visitors without tents can crash overnight.

The thin, clear air is bitterly cold and between June and September, the temperature at night drops below -20°C (-4°F). The air is perfumed by *llareta*, a rock-hard, mosslike shrub that is broken apart to be burned for fuel.

Most independent transport to Laguna Colorada will be supplying or servicing mining and military camps or the on-hold geothermal project 50km south at **Sol de Mañana**. The main interest here is the 4950m-high **geyser basin**, with its boiling mud pots and sulfurous fumaroles. Tread carefully when approaching the site; any damp or cracked earth is potentially dangerous. The nearby **Termas de Polques** hot springs spout comfortable 30°C (86°F) sulfurous water and provide a relaxing morning dip at 4200m.

Laguna Verde, a splendid aquamarine lake, is tucked into Bolivia's southwestern corner at 5000m. Behind the lake rises the dramatic 5930m cone of **Volcán Licancabur**.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The easiest way to visit the far southwest is with a group from Uyuni (see p216). Some agencies in both La Paz and Potosí arrange tours, but charge more because of their commission. Alternatively, you can set out from Tupiza (see p221) and end up in Uyuni, a very worthwhile option.

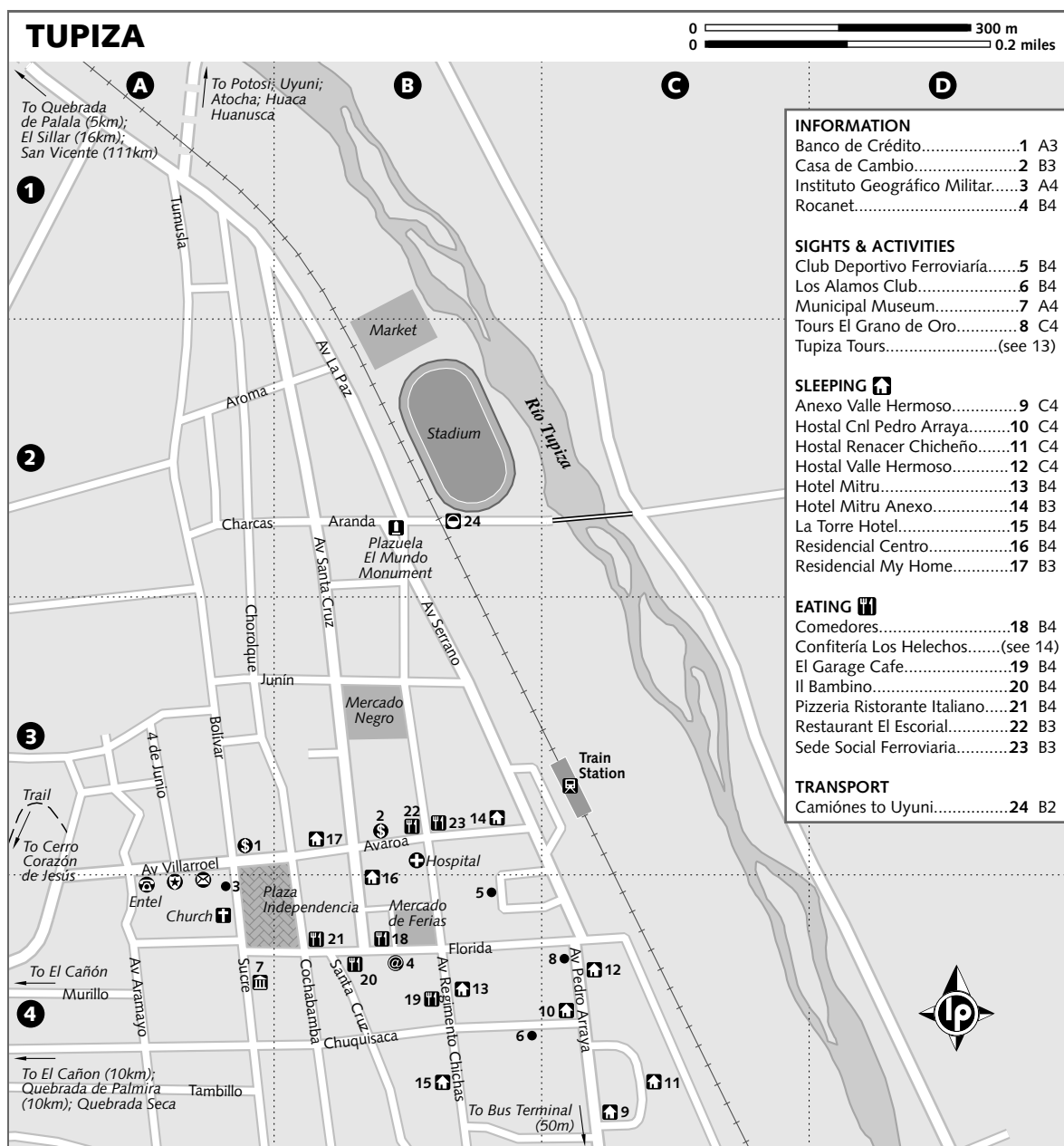
The sparsely populated far southwest region is even more remote than the *salares*, but there are several mining and military camps and weather stations that may provide a place to crash in an emergency. The determined can do it independently, but you'll need a compass, maps, camping gear, warm clothing, food, water, patience, fortitude, a loose screw and people skills (for when you get stuck).

TUPIZA

📍 02 / pop 22,300

If ever there's a place where you want to throw your leg over a horse, brandish spurs and say, 'ride 'em cowboy,' this is it. Reminiscent of the American Wild West, but more spectacular, this tranquil settlement is set at 2950m and ringed by an amazing landscape of rainbow-colored rocks, hills, mountains and canyons of the Cordillera de Chicas. It was the apt setting for the demise of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid: after robbing an Aramayo payroll at Huaca Huañusca, some 40km north of Tupiza, the pair reputedly met their makers in the mining village of San Vicente in 1908.

BOLIVIA



Hiking, biking and horse-riding opportunities abound and the variety of bizarre geologic formations, deep gorges and cactus forests are dramatic backdrops. Unsurprisingly, it's finally been discovered by travelers, and is well and truly on the gringo trail. Many people who visit for a day end up staying for a week to enjoy a tranquil and friendly experience.

Information

Several internet places on the plaza have decent connections for US40¢ an hour. The quiet, nonsmoking **Rocanet** (Florida) has the best connections.

Most hotels offer same-day laundry service for around US\$1 per kilo.

For maps, try the Instituto Geográfico Militar, upstairs inside the Municipalidad on the plaza. A map of the town costs US60¢.

Tupiza Tours (☎ /fax 694-3513; www.tupizatours.com; Av Regimiento Chichas 187, at Hotel Mitru) is a wealth of information, has a book exchange and gives cash advances for around 3% commission. To change cash, try the *casa de cambio* inside the *librería* (stationery store) on Avaroa or Banco de Crédito on the plaza's north side, which also gives Visa and MasterCard advances (US\$5 per transaction).

There's no tourist office.

Sights & Activities

Tupiza's main attraction is the stunning surrounding countryside, best seen on foot or

horseback. Recommended destinations include the following canyons and rock formations: **Quebrada de Palala** (10km round trip), **Quebrada de Palmira** (10km), **El Cañon** (10km), **Quebrada Seca** (10km to 20km) and **El Sillar** (32km).

A short trek up **Cerro Corazón de Jesús**, west of town, reveals lovely views over the town, especially at sunset. Lively **street markets** convene on Thursday and Saturday morning near the train station. You can steam in a sauna (US\$65¢) at **Los Alamos Club** (Chuquisaca) or play a set of tennis (US\$1.35) on the clay courts at **Club Deportivo Ferroviaria** (set back from Av Serrano, about a block from the train station). Hotel Mitru enthusiastically promotes its pool (all day use US\$1.25) to the public, although it doesn't always have water in it! There's a dusty **municipal museum** (admission free; ☎ 3-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri) off the plaza.

Tours

Tour companies are being trotted out at a pace in Tupiza. Ask other travelers for recommendations. Most operators offer day trips exploring Tupiza's rugged *quebradas* (ravines) for around US\$20 per person. Several now offer the triathlon, where you visit Tupiza's best places in a full-day circuit by bicycle, horse and in a jeep (from US\$20 per person for group of six).

The best operators have safety equipment for the triathlon (helmets and jackets for bike trips, and hard hats for horse-riding), but most do the same or similar circuits.

Tours El Grano de Oro (☎ 6944-4763; elgranodeoro.tours@hotmail.com; Av Pedro Arraya 492) A new company worth checking out (if only for the owner's local knowledge and ecofriendly attitude). Trips to the Salar de Uyuni (US\$100 per person for six people), two-day horse and camping trips (US\$12.50 to US\$17 depending on sleeping arrangements; they have their own 'hacienda') and tailor-made triathlons.

Tupiza Tours (☎/fax 694-3513; www.tupizatours.com; Av Regimiento Chichas, at Hotel Mitru) A reliable company. As well as the jeep or triathlon trips, Tupiza Tours offers fanatics the more arduous Butch and Sundance trail to Huaca Huañusca and the lonely mining village of San Vicente where the outlaws' careers abruptly ended (per person US\$140). It also arranges horseback trips for US\$2.50/15 per hour/day or you can embark on a recommended four-day, three-night tour from Tupiza to the Salar de Uyuni (see p219) for around US\$115 per person (with six people, showers US\$60¢ extra).

Sleeping

The cheapest options are several basic *residenciales* opposite the train station.

Hostal Cnl Pedro Arrayo (☎ 694-2734; hostal.arraya@hotmail.com; Av Pedro Arraya 494; per person US\$2.50, per person with bathroom US\$4.50) This brand-new sparkling place is arranged in stablelike fashion around a clean courtyard. Riders of the bike variety will love it; secure storage guaranteed. A tour company is attached to the hostel.

Residencial Centro (☎ 694-2705; Av Santa Cruz 287; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$4) This central option has well-kept and clean rooms with perennially hot showers.

Hostal Valle Hermoso (☎ 694-2370; www.bolivia.freehosting.net; Av Pedro Arraya 478; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$4.40) An HI hostel with a book exchange, optional breakfast and laundry service. Boards advertise group tours. The same family has recently opened the bright, new Anexo Valley Hermoso up the road, near the bus station, for similar prices.

Residencial My Home (☎ 694-2947; Avaroa 288; r per person US\$3.15, with bathroom US\$4.40) A local doctor and his nurse wife have recently taken over this and are in the throes of operating. Hospital beds to match, in freshly painted, bright and airy rooms. Prognosis is looking great.

Hotel Mitru Anexo (☎ 694-3002; Avaroa at Serrano; s/d US\$6.30/11.30, without bathroom US\$3.15/6.30) Affiliated with the Mitru and located near the train station, this hotel is also excellent value. Guests can use the kitchen, as well as the Hotel Mitru pool (if it has water in it).

Hotel Mitru (☎ 694-3001; Av Regimiento Chichas 187; s US\$4-8, d US\$15-20, ste US\$35-40; ☎) The prices have been extended as much as the hotel over the last couple of years, but it's bright and airy and still good value.

La Torre Hotel (☎ 694-2633; Av Regimiento Chichas 220; s/d US\$5/9) Readers recommend this hotel's clean rooms with reasonable beds, TV and telephone. The owners have just opened up a tour company in the same location.

Eating

Affordable street meals are also served outside the train station and at the *comedores* around the market.

Restaurant El Escorial (☎ 694-2010; cnr Av Chichas & Abaroa; almuerzos US\$1) Large mirrors, ornaments and the ubiquitous TV set contrast with the plastic chairs of this signless eatery. Excellent *almuerzos* (US\$1.25 on Sunday).

El Garage Cafe (Av Regimiento Chichas; snacks US\$1-2.25) A café in a garage or vice versa? This quirky place (and equally eccentric owner, perhaps) have had their share of fumes. Now, it boasts formica tables, vinyl records, cacti and a Che Guevara shrine. A fun place to idle. It's opposite Hotel Mitru.

Il Bambino (cnr Florida & Santa Cruz; almuerzos US\$1.25) Try the southern *altiplano's* best *salteñas* at this friendly place which also has massive *almuerzos*.

Pizzeria Ristorante Italiano (Florida s/n; pizzas US\$2-6.30) You name it, it's got it, from breakfasts to pasta and dishes à la Chinese (despite the name). Not the cheapest in town but a popular gringo hangout just off the plaza.

Confitería Los Helechos (Avaroa; mains US\$2.50-3.15) This place in Hotel Mitru Anexo reliably serves three meals a day. Breakfasts with real coffee are especially nice. Later in the day, there's a salad bar, good chicken, burgers, *licuados* and cocktails.

Locals (mainly males) head to the **Sede Social Ferroviaria** (cnr Avaroa & Av Regimiento Chichas).

Getting There & Away

BUS, JEEP & CAMIÓN

Buses depart from the **terminal** (Av Pedro Arraya) at the southern end of the *avenida*. Fares for Oruro-bound routes north double a month before Carnival. Several companies have 10am and evening departures to Potosí (US\$5, at least eight hours), with Sucre connections. Several services depart for Tarija (US\$4, eight hours) at 8pm, with connections to Yacuiba. Many companies serve Villazón (US\$1.25, three hours) at 4am and 2pm daily; sit on the right for views. There are daily departures to La Paz (US\$8 to US\$12, 16 hours) via Potosí at 10am and 3:30pm. O'Globo leaves for Cochabamba at 10am and 8:30pm daily.

Flota Boquerón leaves on Monday and Thursday for Uyuni (US\$6.30, 10 to 12 hours) but the train is much less nerve-racking. 4WD Jeep services to Uyuni (US\$6.75, seven to eight hours) depart around 10:30am when there is enough demand. Irregular *camiones* to Uyuni (check about times) leave from just east off Plazuela El Mundo, a traffic circle around an enormous globe.

TRAIN

The **ticket office** (☎ 694-2527; ☒ 8am-noon & 3-6pm), sells tickets for the *Expreso del Sur* and *Wara Wara del Sur*, or if you don't want to queue,

have Tupiza Tours buy your ticket for a small surcharge. The scenery is brilliant, so travel by day if possible. The *Expreso del Sur* trundles north to Uyuni (salon/executive US\$5/12, five hours) and Oruro (US\$12/26, 11¾ hours) at 6:25pm on Wednesday and Saturday. At 4:10am on Wednesday and Saturday (having left Oruro on Tuesday and Friday the previous evening) the *Expreso del Sur* speeds south to Villazón (\$US2/6, three hours).

The cheaper *Wara Wara del Sur*, which are always late and crowded, leave at 7:05pm on Monday and Thursday for Uyuni (salon/executive US\$2.75/5.75, six hours) and Oruro (US\$8.80/20, 13¾ hours), and at 8:35am on Monday and Thursday for Villazón (US\$1/2, three hours), having left Oruro the previous days.

TARIJA

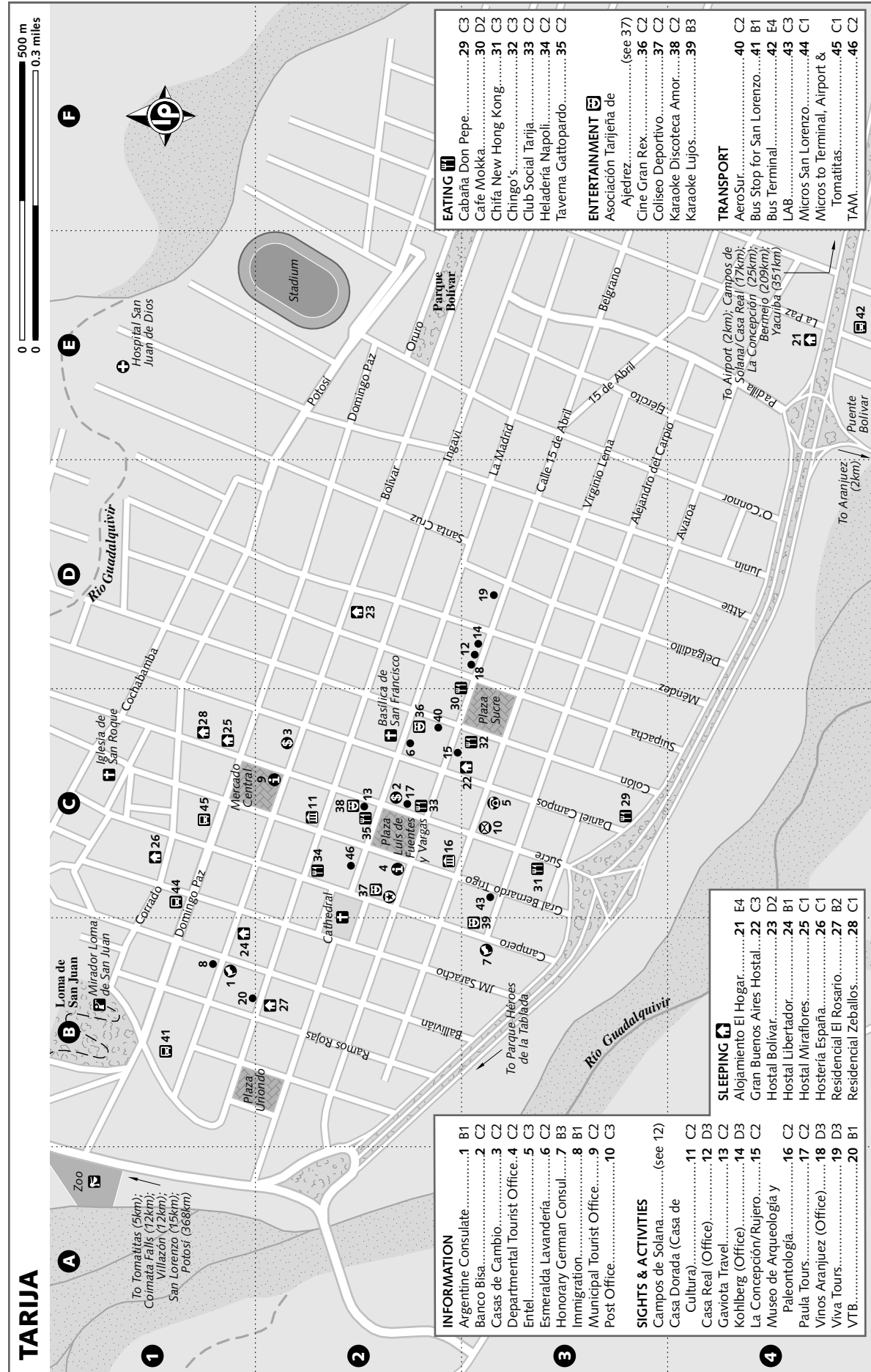
☎ 04 / pop 392,000

Befitting of a viticultural city, Tarija is like an aging red wine: it's modest, displays positive attributes, and consistently improves over time. The city is almost Mediterranean in nature and design: stately date palms line the beautiful plaza, colonial houses abound, and a central market pulsates with life and flavors. The city's numerous cafés, plazas and museums provide a pleasant place to relax. A significant student population adds action to the ambience.

The surrounding region has many sights and activities, bottled for the traveler. Vineyards, Inca trails and fossilized regions occupy a diverse range of habitats, from lush fertile valleys to desert-type plains (the start of the Chaco). With planning, these areas are accessible by hiking, or with the growing number of tour operators. The valley's springlike climate is idyllic. *Chapacos* (as *tarijeños* refer to themselves) are in many ways more Spanish or Argentine than Bolivian. They are proud of their fiestas, unique musical instruments and local foods, including the fortified wine *singani*. But, although rich in so many ways, over half the population of the region is said to live in poverty.

Orientation

Street numbers are preceded by an O (*oeste*) for those addresses west of Colón and an E (*este*) for those east of Colón; addresses north of Av Las Américas (Av Victor Paz Estenssoro) take an N.



TARIJA

0 500 m
0 0.3 miles

F

E

D

C

B

A

1

2

3

4

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 - Cafe Mokka.....30 D2
 - Chifa New Hong Kong.....31 C3
 - Chingo's.....32 C2
 - Club Social Tarija.....33 C2
 - Heladería Napoli.....34 C2
 - Taverna Gattopardo.....35 C2

- ENTERTAINMENT**
- Asociación Tarijeña de Ajedrez.....(see 37)
 - Cine Gran Rex.....36 C2
 - Coliseo Deportivo.....37 C2
 - Karaoke Discoteca Amor.....38 C2
 - Karaoke Lujos.....39 B3

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 - Bus Stop for San Lorenzo.....41 B1
 - Bus Terminal.....42 E4
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 - Esmeralda Lavandería.....6 C2
 - Honorary German Consul.....7 B3
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- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Campos de Solana.....(see 12)
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 - Residencial El Rosarío.....27 B2
 - Residencial Zeballos.....28 C1

BOLIVIA

Information

Several internet places around Plaza Sucre and in Calle Ingavi (between Sucre and Campos) charge less than US\$50¢ an hour and are open until midnight. ATMs are numerous around the plazas.

Banco Bisa On the main plaza. Changes traveler's checks (up to US\$1000 for US\$6 fee).

Casas de cambio (Bolívar btwn Sucre & Daniel Campos) Changes US dollars and Argentine pesos.

Departmental tourist office (☎ 663-1000;

🕒 8am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) On the main plaza, this helpful office has maps and trees worth of information.

Entel A block southeast of the plaza on Virginio Lema.

Esmeralda Lavandería (☎ 664-2043; La Madrid 0-157) Offers quick machine wash-and-dry service for US\$1 per kilo.

Immigration (☎ 664-3450; cnr Bolívar & Ballivián)

Is very friendly and worth visiting about border crossings or to extend your visa.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 663-3581; cnr Bolívar & Sucre; 🕒 8am-noon & 2:30-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Staff very friendly but don't always know their stuff.

Post office (cnr Sucre & Virginio Lema)

Sights & Activities

It's worth a stroll around the center to see what remains of the colonial atmosphere. For fossil frolickers, the university-run **Museo de Arqueología y Paleontología** (Virginio Lema; admission US\$60¢; 🕒 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat & Sun) houses a good overview of the region's geology and prehistoric creatures. It's near Gral Bernardo Trigo.

Wealthy 19th-century merchant Moisés Navajas left behind the partially restored **Casa Dorada** (cnr Ingavi & Gral Bernardo Trigo) – now the **Casa de la Cultura** – which houses a quirky extravaganza of European furniture, imported by a Spanish couple in 1903. Open for guided tours (US\$50¢).

A popular weekend retreat is **San Lorenzo**, 15km northwest; you can pop into the former home of the *chapaco* hero Moto Méndez. San Lorenzo *micros* leave from the corner of Domingo Paz and JM Saracho. Another getaway is **Tomatitas**, 5km northwest. Have a dip in the natural swimming hole or trek to the 50m-high **Coimata Falls**. Tomatitas *micros* leave frequently from the west end of Av Domingo Paz. For Coimata Falls, walk or hitch 5km to Coimata; the falls are a 40-minute walk upstream.

As the region's viticulture center producing both wine and *singani*, Tarija caters to those who love a good drop. Brands include La Concepción/Rujero, Santa Ana de Casa Real and Kohlberg (see p260). Note: many of these *bodegas* (wineries) have offices in town where you can buy the wine at lower prices than the shops. Brands include La Concepción/Rujer, Santa Ana de Casa Real, Campos de Solana and Kohlberg. **Viva Tours** (☎ 663-8325; www.vivatour@cosett.com.bo; Calle 15 de Abril 0-509) can sate your appetite with excellent and reasonably priced half-day winery tours (US\$15 per person for three, less if more people). Full-day trips incorporate surrounding areas, including the stunning **La Reserva Biológica de Sama**, Inca trail, colonial villages of the *campiña* (countryside) and the varied Gran Chaco hinterlands.

Recommended companies offering similar routes include the following:

Gaviota Travel (☎ 664-7180; gaviota@cosett.com.bo; Sucre 681)

Paula Tours (☎ 665-8156; toursbo@hotmail.com; Plaza Luis de Fuentes y Vargas)

VTB (☎ 664-4341; vtb@entelnet.bo; Hostal Cermen, Ingavi 0-0784)

Sleeping

Alojamiento El Hogar (☎ 664-3964; cnr Paz Estenssoro & La Paz; r per person US\$2) The best of several dodgy options near the bus terminal is basic but friendly and family-run.

Hostería España (☎ 664-1790; Corrado 0-546; r per person US\$3.15, with bathroom US\$5) A helpful place offering all-round value with kitchen, hot showers and patio. It has many long-term university student residents.

Residencial El Rosario (☎ 664-2942; Ingavi 0-777; r per person US\$3.15, with bathroom US\$5.60) The owner is as aged and thorny as the unkempt rose bushes (in a caring kind of way), and runs a tight ship. Good gas showers, laundry sinks and cable TV room.

Residencial Zeballos (☎ 664-2068; Sucre N-966; r per person US\$3.35, with bathroom & cable TV US\$6.35) Leafy with bright, comfortable rooms, laundry service and a sunny courtyard. Rates include breakfast.

Hostal Bolívar (☎ 664-2741; Bolívar E-256; s US\$5.50-9.50, d US\$11.30-16) Sunny geranium-filled courtyards and funky tiles are the main features of this spotless place. The more expensive rooms are larger and nicer and have street-facing windows.

Hostal Libertador (☎ 664-4231; Bolívar 0-649; s/d with bathroom US\$9/15) Welcoming, family-run place with phone, cable TV and good optional breakfast (US\$60¢).

Also recommended:

Hostal Miraflores (☎ 664-3355; Sucre N-920; r per person US\$3.15, s/d with bathroom US\$7.50/12.50) The position near the market, and the rambling courtyard, makes up for the dingy and dark budget rooms. Rooms upstairs are better.

Gran Buenos Aires Hostal (☎ 663-6802; hostalbaires@mail.com; Daniel Campos N-448; s/d with bathroom US\$8.80/15) A comfortable option with pleasant open eating areas. Can arrange tours.

Eating

At the northeast corner of the Mercado Central, at the intersection of Sucre and Domingo Paz, vendors sell local pastries and snacks, including delicious crêpelike *panqueques*. Breakfast is served at the back of the market, other cheap meals are available upstairs and fresh juices can be found in the produce section. Don't miss the huge bakery and sweets section off Bolívar.

Heladería Napoli (Campero N-630) The ice-cream cones are simply divine.

Cafe Mokka (Plaza Sucre; snacks US\$60¢-\$1.20, pizza US\$3-4) You'll spend as much time looking at the creative table tops as you will at the menu, a selection of sandwiches to pastas that fills the guts of many a gringo.

Club Social Tarija (Plaza Luis de Fuentes y Vargas; almuerzos US\$1) Get a whiff of past grandeur in this wonderful old dining room.

Taverna Gattopardo (☎ 663-0656; Plaza La Madrid; mains US\$1.25-6.30) Deservedly popular for its snacks, including fondue. It has a wine-tasting bar where you can sample the region's best vintages between bites of local Serrano ham. It's on the north side of the plaza.

Cabaña Don Pepe (☎ 664-2426; cnr Daniel Campos & Av Victor Paz; lunch US\$1.90) A culinary must in Tarija. Formal and floral with smart service, and the best kebabs this side of the Argentinean border. Specialty Sunday lunches – 14 varieties of meat '*a la brasa*' (hot coals).

Chifa New Hong Kong (Sucre N-235; almuerzos US\$2.25) Cheap cocktails and big Asian *almuerzos*.

Chingo's (Plaza Sucre) Get fried at this local hangout, which serves popular greasies.

Drinking

Bagdad Café (Plaza Sucre) Has a full bar and light dinner menu.

Entertainment

Earplug alert: karaoke runs rampant around Plaza Sucre. For more tone-deafness try the hip **Karaoke Discoteca Amor** (Sucre at La Madrid) or **Karaoke Lujos** (Campero), near the corner of Alejandro del Carpio.

Cine Gran Rex (La Madrid at Colón) This cinema screens double-feature first-run flicks for a couple of bucks.

Coliseo Deportivo (Campero) Entertaining basketball, *futsal* and volleyball games are played here.

Asociación Tarijeña de Ajedrez (Campero) After 6pm, chess heads can find a game next door to Coliseo Deportivo where you can play for free if you respect club rules: no smoking and quiet, please.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The airport (off Av Victor Paz Esstensoro) is 3km east of town. **LAB** (☎ 664-2195; Gral Bernardo Trigo N-329) has regular service to Cochabamba and a couple of flights a week to Santa Cruz and La Paz. **TAM** (☎ 664-2734; La Madrid 0-470) has Tuesday flights to Santa Cruz and Wednesday flights to La Paz via Sucre. (Note: schedules change regularly.) **AeroSur** (☎ 663-0893; Calle 15 de Abril 143) flies twice a week to La Paz and Santa Cruz.

Taxis into town (US\$2.50) cost twice as much from the terminal as from the road 100m outside. *Micro A* (US\$20¢) will drop you two blocks from the airport and returns to the Mercado Central.

BUS

The **bus terminal** (☎ 663-6508) is at the eastern end of town, a 20-minute walk from the center. Cross the street from the bus stop to catch *micro A* (US\$20¢) to the center.

Several buses travel daily to Potosí (US\$6 to US\$9, 12 to 15 hours), Oruro (US\$12, 16 hours), Cochabamba (US\$12.50 to US\$15, 18 hours) and Sucre (US\$11.50, 18 hours). For Tupiza (US\$5.50, nine to 10 hours), there are daily evening departures. Daily buses to Villazón (US\$4 to US\$5, eight to nine hours) follow a spectacular unpaved route. Daily buses for La Paz (US\$12.50 to US\$15, 24 hours) leave at 7am and 5pm, and to Santa Cruz at 7:30am and 6:30pm (US\$12 to US\$15, 24 hours). There's one daily departure for the rough ride to Uyuni (US\$8, 20 hours) at 3:30pm.

International connections to Argentina, via Bermejo or Yacuiba, involve long hauls through beautiful scenery.

VILLAZÓN

☎ 04 / pop 28,000

The main Argentine–Bolivian border town is the dusty, haphazard conglomeration of Villazón. Most focused travelers are arriving or leaving Bolivia or Argentina and don't have any need to stay. Sights and attractions aren't big on the town's priorities, but the busy market is a fun place to visit. Surprisingly, despite its frontier status, the busy town doesn't feel overly sinister. The locals appear too busy dealing in contraband items to smuggle your backpack, but that said, you should still be on your guard, especially as you walk down the 'gadget thoroughfare': petty theft, scams and counterfeit US banknotes are not unheard of here. Bolivian time lags one hour behind Argentine time.

Information

There are decent internet places (US\$1 per hour) opposite the bus station and several

others north of the plaza along Av Independencia. Public phones are plentiful near the frontier.

Numerous *casas de cambio* along Av República Argentina offer rates for dollars, Argentine pesos, and bolivianos. **Casa de Cambio Beto** (Av República Argentina s/n) changes traveler's checks at similar rates, minus 5% commission. **Banco de Crédito** (Oruro 111) changes cash but lacks an ATM.

Sleeping

Several passable *residenciales* along the main drag between the bus and train stations cater to locals. Accommodations on the Argentine side can be better value, if a tad more expensive. For sleeping options in neighboring La Quiaca, Argentina, see p113.

Residencial Martínez (☎ 596-3353; 25 de Mayo 13; r per person US\$2) The gas showers (no electric death-trap heater!) of this red faux-brick place are appealing; only one of the rooms has private bathroom. It's opposite the bus terminal.

Residencial El Cortijo (☎ 596-2093; 20 de Mayo 338; d US\$2.50, with bathroom & cable TV US\$10) The empty



pool looks a bit sad in the middle, but the rooms have been well maintained, with a clean, waxy odor. Two blocks north of the bus terminal. Hot showers cost an extra US65¢ for rooms without bathroom.

Grand Palace Hotel (☎ 596-5333; 25 de Mayo 52; r per person US\$4.50-5, without bathroom US\$2.65) More like a boarding house dorm, with long corridors, pink walls and a selection of '60s-style furniture, but the rooms (some windowless) meet the grade of a school matron.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 596-3535; Plaza 6 de Agosto 138; s/d US\$4.65/6.65, with bathroom US\$6.30/12.50) Sunny, light, hotel-style rooms overlooking the plaza. The nicest place in town.

Eating

Villazón's food choices are limited. Try the market *comedores*, or hop over to La Quiaca (p113) for a better selection of cheap eateries. There are a few places opposite the bus terminal on Av República Argentina. Or try **Snack Pizzeria Don Vicco** (Av República Argentina s/n).

Getting There & Around

Bus

All northbound buses depart from Villazón's central terminal (US25¢ terminal fee). Daily buses head for Tupiza (US\$1.25, two to three hours) at 7am, 8am, 3pm and 5pm. Many continue or make connections to Potosí (US\$6.30 to US\$11.30, 10 to 12 hours) with further connections to Sucre, Oruro, Cochabamba and La Paz. There are daily services along the rough but amazing route to Tarija (US\$3.15, seven hours). Agencies across from the terminal sell tickets to most major Argentine destinations, including Buenos Aires.

Train

Villazón's train station is 600m north of the border crossing; a taxi costs US\$2.50. The

GETTING TO ARGENTINA

Exit stamps are obtained from **Bolivian immigration** (🕒 24hr), at the Villazón bridge/border post; there is no official charge for these services. Formalities are minimal, but you may be held up south of the border by exhaustive customs searches (mainly for locals and their contraband goods). For information on La Quiaca, Argentina and travel to Bolivia, see p112.

Expreso del Sur departs Wednesday and Saturday at 3:30pm for Tupiza (salon/executive US\$2.15/4.50, 2¾ hours), Uyuni (US\$7/17, eight hours) and Oruro (US\$13.70/30, 15 hours). This is an enjoyable trip with superb scenery for the first few hours. The more crowded and basic *Wara Wara del Sur* departs Monday and Thursday at 3:30pm for Tupiza (US\$2/4, three hours), Uyuni (US\$6/12.20, 9½ hours) and Oruro (US\$11/23, seven hours). It's a good option as far as Tupiza, but after dark it turns tedious.

COCHABAMBA

☎ 04 / pop 517,000

With a massive statue of Christ looming over the metropolis, Cochabamba has not been blessed as the most exciting city in Bolivia, albeit an economically successful one. The old center features beautiful colonial houses, balconies, overhanging eaves and large courtyards, while the more modern area to the north is home to a standard strip of high-rises and glitzy cafés.

A definite plus is the weather – warm, dry and sunny (with the odd downpour) – a welcome relief after the chilly *altiplano*. There's a generous tree-lined plaza and vibrant markets, and some interesting museums. The town's congenial nightlife is thanks to the university population. Don't leave without sampling some *chicha cochabambina*, a traditional fermented corn brew quaffed throughout the region.

The city was founded in 1574, and soon blossomed into the country's primary granary, thanks to its fertile soil and mild climate.

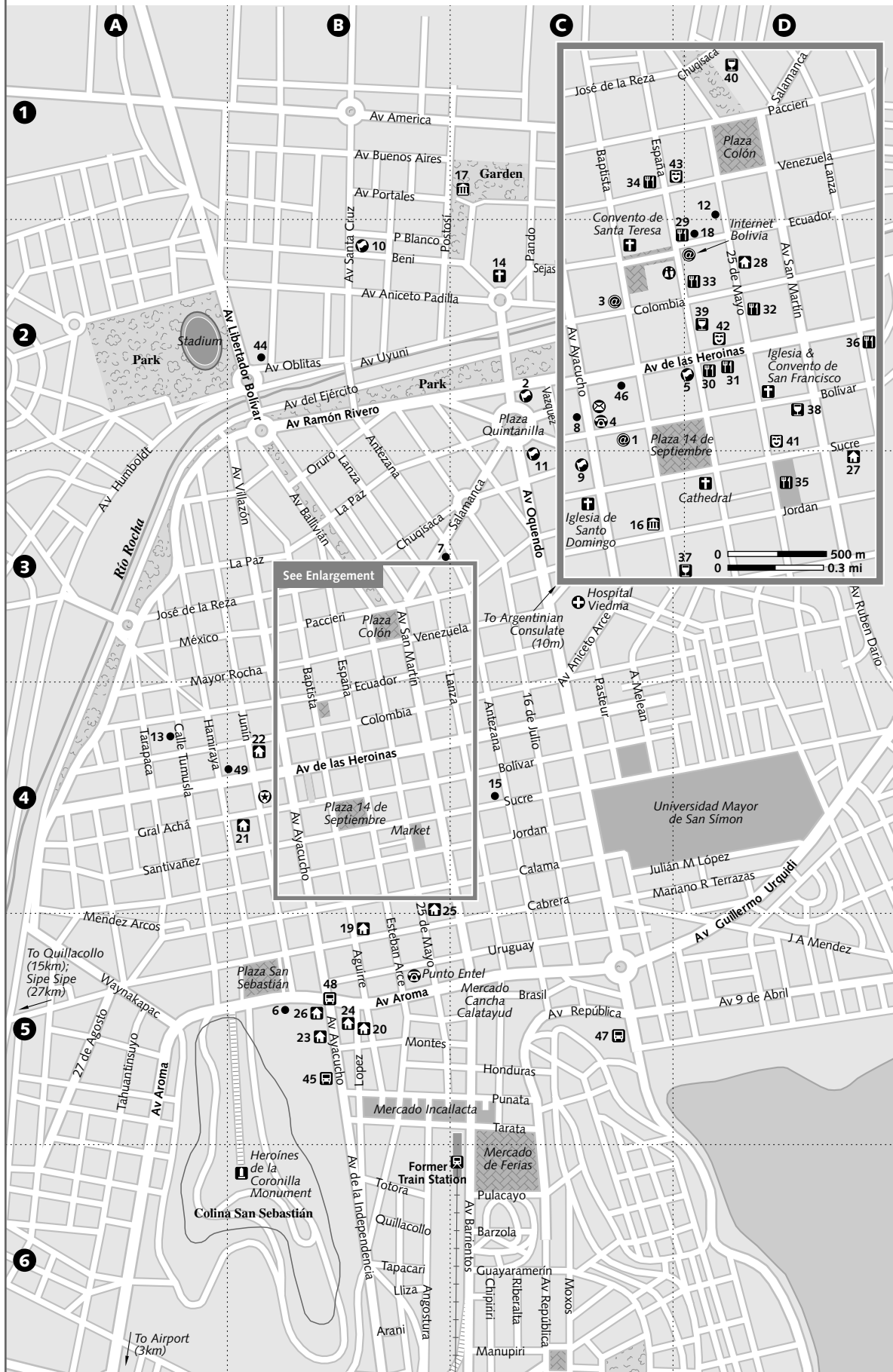
Orientation

Addresses north of Av de las Heroínas take an N, those below take an S. Addresses east of Av Ayacucho take an E and those west an O. The number immediately following the letter tells you how many blocks away from these division streets the address falls. Good maps are available at kiosks on the west side of the plaza or at the well-stocked Amigos del Libro (see following), which also carries guidebooks.

Information

Internet places are as common as *empanadas*. Banks and *casas de cambio* will change traveler's checks and there are ATMs located all around town. The unnamed *casa de cambio* on

COCHABAMBA



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the southwest side of the plaza gives OK rates (3% commission). You'll find street money changers on Av Heroínas and around the **Entel** (Gral Achá) office.

- Black Cat** (cnr Bolívar & Aguirre)
- Bolivian immigration** (☎ 422-5553; cnr Junin & Arce) Can extend your length of stay. See p258 for details on consular representation in Cochabamba.
- CyberNet Café** (cnr Colombia & Baptista)
- Lavandería Brilliante** (Av Aroma H118) For laundry.
- Lavaya** (cnr Salamanca & Antezana) For laundry.
- Los Amigos del Libro** (☎ 450-4150; Av Ayacucho 156) The best-stocked bookshop with the company's knowledgeable and company founder at the helm.

Dangers & Annoyances

Avoid the areas around Mercados Cancha Calatayud and Mercado de Ferias (near the former train station) and west from here to Av de la Independencia (bus station); locals say it's dangerous. Do not climb the hill Colina San Sebastian as assaults have been reported.

Festivals & Events

The **Fiesta de la Virgen de Urcupiña** (around August 15 to 18) is huge, with pilgrims converging on the village of Quillacollo, 13km west of Cochabamba.

Sights & Activities

Museo Arqueológico (cnr Jordán & Baptista; admission US\$1.90; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) has a fine collection of Bolivian mummies and artifacts in three sections: paleontology, fossils and archaeology. Exhibits date from as early as 12,000 BC.

Tin baron Simón Patiño never actually lived in the pretentious **Palacio de Portales** (☎ 224-3137; admission with guide US\$1.35; ☎ gardens 2:30-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10:30am-12:30pm Sat & Sun), a French-style mansion in the *barrio* of Queru Queru, north of the center. It was built between 1915 and 1925 and everything, except perhaps the bricks, was imported from Europe. Now the Simón I Patiño Cultural Center, it's used for music recitals and art exhibitions. Entrance is by guided tour only. Tours in Spanish/English start at 5pm/5:30pm from Monday to Friday, and 11am/11:30am on Saturday; call ahead to verify tour times. Don't miss the **Natural History Museum** next door. Take *micro* 'E' north from Av San Martín.

The **Cristo de la Concordia** statue, which towers over the city's east side, can be reached by taxi

(US\$4.50 round-trip from the center). There's a **teleférico** (cable car; round-trip US\$80¢; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) that climbs the 2900m to the top.

Courses

Cochabamba is a good spot for studying Spanish, Quechua or Aymara. Private teachers charge around US\$5 per hour, but not all are experienced. Ask for recommendations at the following places:

Centro Boliviano-Americano (CBA; ☎ 222-1288/2518; www.cbacoch.org in Spanish; 25 de Mayo N-365)

Instituto Cultural Boliviano-Alemán (ICBA; ☎ 645-2091; www.icba-sucre.edu.bo; Avaroa 326)

Volunteer Bolivia (☎ 04-452-6028; www.volunteerbolivia.org; 342 Ecuador btwn 25 de Mayo & España)

Tours

To visit nearby national parks and reserves, contact **Fremen Tours** (☎ 225-9392; www.andes-azonia.com; Calle Tumusla N-245).

Sleeping

There are a few thrifty places around town, but quality isn't always their virtue.

Alojamiento Cochabamba (☎ 222-5067; Aguirre S-591; r per person US\$2) You won't be caught short at this basic flophouse – there are chamber pots under each bed. But watch out for the wobbly veranda...

Alojamiento San Juan de Dios (López S-871; r per person US\$2) Recommended only for the price.

Hostal Oruro (☎ 424-1047; López S-864; r per person US\$3.15) If Hostal Elisa is full, head next door to this passable place. The shared bathrooms have solar-heated showers.

Hostal Versalles (☎ 422-1096; Av Ayacucho S-714; r per person US\$3.25, with bathroom US\$4.50) The best choice nearest the bus terminal is a clean, friendly HI-affiliate where breakfast is included. More expensive rooms have cable TV.

Hostal Florida (☎ /fax 225-7911; floridahostal@latinmail.com; 25 de Mayo S-583; r per person US\$3.80, with bathroom, phone & cable TV US\$6.30) An OK choice with quirky outdoor furniture in a central courtyard.

Hostal Elisa (☎ /fax 423-5102; López S-834; s/d per person US\$3.80/6.30, with bathroom US\$7.50/12.50) The top pick: an oasis in an otherwise unattractive location in a dodgy part of town. Behind the door there's friendly management, gas-heated showers and a sunny, flowery courtyard. Convenient to the bus station.

Hostal Colonial (☎ 222-1791; Junín N-134; s/d US\$5/8.80) If you can overlook the saggy mat-

tresses, the rooms are pleasant. Mellow atmosphere with courtyard garden. Expunge your sins of the night before in the hostel's chapel.

Hostal Central (☎ 222-3622; General Achá 0-235; s/d with bathroom US\$6.30/11.30) Starts promisingly, but soon disintegrates. The overgrown central courtyard, missing curtain hooks and unfriendly management detracts from what was formerly an excellent choice. TV is a plus, however, and prices are less without this luxury.

Hostal Ecuatorial (☎ 455-6370; Av Ayacucho; r per person US\$7.55) The place of paradox: it's clean and modern in a dodgy district, but handy to the bus station if travel schedules are untimely. Watch your stuff on the way to and fro.

Residencial Familiar (☎ 222-7988; Sucre E-554; r per person US\$3.25, d with bathroom US\$10) and the better but worn **Residencial Familiar Anexo** (☎ 222-7986; 25 de Mayo N-234; r per person US\$3.25, d with bathroom US\$10) have poor beds and are a bit on the nose, but are popular with travelers.

Eating

Markets are cheap for simple but varied and tasty meals; don't miss the huge, mouthwatering fruit salads. The most central market, on 25 de Mayo, is between Sucre and Jordán. There are plenty of tantalizing *salteñerías* about town. Av Heroínas is fast-food row and is good for pizza, chicken and burgers. Av Ballivián (known as El Prado) is packed with up-market bars and restaurants and is also worth checking out for *almuerzos* and classy coffees. Economical *almuerzos* are everywhere.

More central options:

Snack Uno's (cnr Avs de las Heroínas & Lanza Lanza; set lunch US\$1.25) Cochabamba's best vegetarian food. Pizza and pasta dishes are also available and there's a good *salteñería* next door.

Dumbo (Av de las Heroínas; mains US\$1.30-4.40) May mouse around with Mickey's copyright but serves good light meals and fancy ice creams. Packed on weekend afternoons for a social tea and ice cream.

Eli's (Colombia & 25 de Mayo N-254) Pizzas are the ticket here.

Capitolo (cnr España & Ecuador; mains US\$2.50-4.50) A popular eating, drinking and socializing spot. It offers somewhat pricey soup, salad and pasta, among other more imaginative fare. Open at night only.

La Cantonata (España & Mayor Rocha; mains US\$5-10) One of the city's best restaurants, one of the country's best Italian splurges.

Also recommended:

Restaurant Marvi (Cabrera at 25 de Mayo; lunch US\$1.50) A nice, family-run place. At dinner you'll pay a bit more for hearty helpings of *comida típica*.

Cristal (Av de las Heroínas E-352) Try this place for a big breakfast, great juice, eggs, coffee, pancakes and *salteñas*.

Gopal (España N-250) Vegetarian lunch or dinner with an Indian take.

Drinking

CAFÉS

Café Express ('Clac'; Aguirre S-443; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-9pm Mon-Fri) Pours Cochabamba's best espresso drinks (starting price US\$1.50). Other good coffee spots include **Café Francés** (España N-140) and **Café Express Bolívar** (Bolívar E-485).

BARS

The liveliest nightlife is found up España and 25 de Mayo, which feature restaurants, bars, discos and revelers. The Prado (Av Ballivián) has a range of nightclubs. There's more drinking and less eating at **Top Chopp** (Av Ballivián), a Bolivian beer barn, and the **Viking Pub** (Av Ballivián), which showcases loud music. Or, sing and boogie at any of the strip's discos and karaoke bars.

Entertainment

Pancho's (España N-460; cover US\$2) The hard-rocking scene jams on Saturday nights here, when live bands cover Kiss, Metallica and Deep Purple.

Big, bright **Cine Heroínas** (Av de las Heroínas E-347) and **Cine Astor** (cnr Sucre & 25 de Mayo) both screen first-run movies.

Getting There & Around

AIR

To reach Aeropuerto Jorge Wilsterman (CBB) take *micro* B from the main plaza or a taxi (around US\$3 per person). The airport is served regularly by **AeroSur** (☎ 440-0911; Villarroel 105) and **LAB** (☎ 425-0750; office at airport). LAB flies daily to La Paz, Santa Cruz and Sucre, and several times a week to Tarija and Trinidad. **TAM** (☎ 458-1552; Hamiraya N-122) lifts off from the military airport twice weekly to La Paz.

BUS & CAMIÓN

Cochabamba's **central bus terminal** (☎ 155; Av Ayacucho) is just south of Av Aroma. There's a US25¢ terminal fee and comfortable *bus cama* service is available on the main routes for roughly double the regular price. There's

frequent service to La Paz (US\$2 to US\$3, seven hours) and Oruro (US\$2.50, four hours). Most buses to Santa Cruz (US\$3.15 to US\$6, 10 to 13 hours) leave before 9am or after 5pm. Several daily buses depart for Sucre (US\$8, 10 to 11 hours) and Potosí (US\$8, 10 to 11 hours).

Micros and buses to Villa Tunari (US\$2.50, three to four hours) and Puerto Villarroel (US\$3, seven hours) in the Chapare region leave every hour or so from the corner of Avs 9 de Abril and Oquendo.

AROUND COCHABAMBA

Two to three hours' walk from the village of **Sipe Sipe**, 27km southwest of Cochabamba, are the ruins of **Inca-Rakay**. It makes a good side trip for the scenery, rather than any archaeological grandeur, but there have been several serious reports of campers being assaulted here.

Sunday is market day. Sipe Sipe is accessible by *micro* from **Quillacollo**, which is reached by *micro* from Cochabamba.

About 160km northeast of Cochabamba is the steamy, relaxed Chapare town of **Villa Tunari** and **Inti Wara Yassi** (Parque Machía; www.intiwarayassi.org), a wildlife refuge and mellow place to chill out and warm up after the *altiplano*. Volunteers are welcome (15-day minimum) and you can camp for US\$2. In town, there are numerous places to stay and eat, though there is no bank.

SUCRE

☎ 04 / pop 215,000

Dazzling whitewashed buildings. Decorative archways. Rooftop views of terracotta. The stunning city of Sucre has a rich colonial heritage, evident in its buildings, streetscapes and numerous churches. In 1991 Unesco declared it a Cultural Heritage site. Although the city has expanded rapidly over recent years, the center maintains a cozy, convivial atmosphere, with colorful indigenous markets, upmarket shops and diverse eateries. The flowery plazas, the city's social and focal points, truly reflect the diverse colors of the city and its people, many of whom are indigenous.

Sureños are proud people, and maintain that the heart of Bolivia beats in their city, despite the fact that La Paz usurped Sucre's capital status to become the governmental capital. But Sucre remains as the judicial capital; the supreme court still convenes here.

BOLIVIA

SUCRE

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

<p>INFORMATION</p> <p>Banco de Santa Cruz (ATM).....1 C4</p> <p>Banco Nacional de Bolivia (ATM).....2 C4</p> <p>Cafe Maya (Internet).....3 B4</p> <p>Casa de Cambio Ambar.....4 C4</p> <p>Entel.....5 C4</p> <p>Immigration.....6 C6</p> <p>Laverap.....7 C5</p> <p>Peruvian Consulate.....8 C5</p> <p>Post Office.....9 B4</p> <p>Tourist Information Office.....10 C5</p>	<p>SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES</p> <p>Academiá Latinoamericana de Español.....11 B5</p> <p>Casa de la Cultura.....12 B4</p> <p>Casa de la Libertad.....13 B4</p> <p>Caserón de la Capellaniá.....14 D5</p> <p>Cathedral.....15 B5</p> <p>Centro Boliviano-Americano.....16 D5</p> <p>Convento de San Felipe Neri.....17 B5</p> <p>Eclipse Travel.....18 C5</p> <p>Iglesia de la Merced.....19 B5</p> <p>Iglesia de la Recoleta & Museo de la Recoleta.....20 D6</p> <p>Iglesia de San Francisco.....21 C4</p> <p>Iglesia de San Miguel.....22 B4</p> <p>Instituto Cultural Boliviano-Alemán (ICBA).....23 C5</p> <p>Museo Catedralico.....24 B5</p> <p>Museo de Art Indígena (ASUR).....(see 14)</p> <p>Museo de Historia Natural.....(see 10)</p> <p>Museo de los Niños Tanga-Tanga.....25 D6</p> <p>Museo Gutiérrez Valenzuela.....(see 10)</p> <p>Museo y Convento de Santa Clara.....26 C5</p> <p>Museos Universitarios.....27 C5</p> <p>Sur Andes.....(see 43)</p>	<p>SLEEPING 🏠</p> <p>Alojamiento El Turista.....28 B4</p> <p>Candelaria Tours.....29 C4</p> <p>Casa de Huéspedes San Marcos.....30 C3</p> <p>Grand Hotel.....31 C4</p> <p>Hostal Charcas.....32 B4</p> <p>Hostal Copacabana.....33 B3</p> <p>Hostal San Francisco.....34 C4</p> <p>Hostal Veracruz.....35 B3</p> <p>Lavaya.....36 C5</p> <p>Residencial Bolivia.....37 C4</p> <p>EATING 🍴</p> <p>Arco Iris.....38 B5</p> <p>Café Mirador.....(see 25)</p> <p>Cafe Tetulias.....39 C4</p> <p>El Germén.....40 C4</p> <p>Kultur Café Berlin.....(see 23)</p> <p>La Repizza.....41 B5</p> <p>La Taverne.....42 B4</p> <p>La Vieja Bodega.....43 B5</p> <p>Locot's.....44 C4</p> <p>Pizza Napolitana.....45 C5</p> <p>Salon de Té Las Delicias.....46 B4</p> <p>DRINKING 🍷</p> <p>Bibliocafé.....(see 38)</p> <p>Biblioconcert.....47 B5</p> <p>Joy Ride Café.....48 B5</p> <p>TRANSPORT</p> <p>AeroSur.....49 B4</p> <p>Buses to Tarabuco.....50 C4</p> <p>Cal Orcko (Fancesa) Dino Truck Stop.....51 B5</p> <p>LAB.....52 C4</p>
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Sucre was founded in 1538 (under the name La Plata) as the Spanish capital of the Charcas. In 1776, when new territorial divisions were created by the Spaniards, the city's name was changed to Chuquisaca. During this time, it was the most important center in the eastern Spanish territories and heavily influenced Bolivia's history. Independence was declared here on August 6, 1825, and the new republic was created here and named after its liberator, Simón Bolívar. Several years later, the name of the city was changed again to Sucre in honor of the general who promoted the independence movement, but you could be forgiven for thinking that it means 'sugar,' for it is a sweet treat.

Information

EMERGENCY

Tourist police (☎ 648-0467)

IMMIGRATION OFFICES

Immigration (Argandoña 4; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm) Can extend your stays.

Peruvian consulate (☎ 645-5592; Avaroa 462; ☎ 9:30am-2:30pm Mon-Fri) Issues visas.

INTERNET ACCESS

Sucre has many internet places.

Cafe Maya (Arenales) A reliable internet café but watch your bags!

LAUNDRY

Both of these are reliable and efficient laundries, charging about US\$1 to US\$1.20 per kilo.

Lavaya (Audiencia 81)

Laverap (Bolívar 617)

MONEY

Casas de cambio are around the main market. Street money changers operate along Hernando Siles, behind the main market.

Banco de Santa Cruz (cnr España & San Alberto) Has an ATM and also does cash advances.

Banco Nacional de Bolivia (cnr España & Ravelo) Changes traveler's checks (3% commission); there is an ATM here.

Casa de Cambio Ambar (San Alberto) Changes traveler's checks at good rates.

POST

Post office (cnr Junín & Estudiantes) Also has internet access.

TELEPHONE

Entel (cnr España & Urcullo) Also has internet access.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Casa de la Cultura (Argentina s/n) You may be able to extract some tourist information from the friendly English-speaking staff here.

Tourist information office (Estudiantes 49) The university's Tourism Faculty runs this office, which is sometimes staffed by enthusiastic English speakers; ask here about guided city tours.

Sights

Ride the Dino Truck to Fancesa's cement quarry, **Cal Orcko** (☎ 645-1863; admission US\$3.80), a sort of Grauman's Chinese Theater for large and scaly types with hundreds of dinosaur tracks measuring up to 80cm in diameter. It departs from the plaza at 9:30am, noon and 2:30pm Monday to Saturday.

For a dose of Bolivian history, visit the **Casa de la Libertad** (☎ 645-4200; Plaza 25 de Mayo 11; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 9-11.45am & 2:30-6:30pm Tue-Sun), an ornate house-cum-museum where the Bolivian declaration of independence was signed in 1825; it displays the era's artifacts.

The excellent **Museo de Arte Indígena** (ASUR; ☎ 645-3841; museo@asur.org.bo; San Alberto 413; admission US\$2; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 2:30-6pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-noon Sat) displays fine Candelaria, Potolo and Tarabuco weavings; ask for English translations of the labels. It's part of a successful project to revitalize handwoven crafts. You can see weavers in action and browse the superb works for sale.

The **Museos Universitarios** (☎ 645-3285; Bolívar 698; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 2:30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat) are three separate rooms housing colonial relics, anthropological artifacts and modern art. The university also operates the **Museo Gutiérrez Valenzuela** and **Museo de Historia Natural** (☎ 645-3828; Plaza 25 de Mayo; admission US\$1.35; ☎ 8:30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat) in the southeast corner of the plaza; the former is an old aristocrat's house with decorative 19th-century decor. The **Museo de los Niños Tanga-Tanga** (☎ 644-0299; Plaza La Recoleta; adult/child US\$1/65¢; ☎ 9am-noon & 2:30-6pm Tue-Sun) hosts cultural and environmental programs for kids, including theater performances and ceramic classes. The museum's Café Mirador is open from 9am to 7pm. The museum is in the northwest corner of the plaza.

The wonderful **Casa de la Cultura** (Argentina 65) has regular art exhibitions, music and dance recitals, and a library.

Sucre boasts several lovely colonial churches but opening hours are unpredictable. The

cathedral (entrance at Nicolas Ortiz 61; ☎ mornings only) dates from the 16th century, though major additions were made in the early 17th century. Just down the block is the **Museo Catedralico** (admission US\$1.25; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat), which holds an interesting collection of religious relics.

Iglesia La Merced (Pérez 512; admission US80¢; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) has the finest interior of any Sucre church, but it's rarely open. Both **Iglesia de San Miguel** (Arenales 10; ☎ 6am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, Mass on weekends) and **Iglesia de San Francisco** (Ravelo 1; ☎ 6am-noon & 3-8pm) reflect Mudejar influences, particularly in their ceiling designs. The beautiful **Convento de San Felipe Neri** (Nicolas Ortiz 165; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 3-6pm Mon-Fri, Sat during high season) has good rooftop views. If you're interested in sacred art or antique musical instruments, the 1639 **Museo y Convento de Santa Clara** (Calvo 212; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has a renowned collection.

For spectacular city views, trek up to the **Iglesia de la Recoleta & Museo de la Recoleta** (Plaza Anzures; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 9:30-11:30am & 2:30-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 3-5pm Sat), which houses many religious paintings and sculptures.

Activities

Sucre's surrounding valleys offer the perfect venues for action-packed adventure, from hiking, mountain biking, tubing and horse-riding. Paragliding is the latest thrill on the adventure menu. Popular destinations include the Crater of Maragua via the pre-Hispanic Chataquila (Inca) trail, rock paintings, waterfalls, and villages of Yotala, Ñucchu, and Q'atalla.

There are as many prices as there are trip combos. Based on a group of four people, (shorter) hiking trips start at about US\$6, mountain-bike trips US\$14 per person, and horse-riding US\$17 upwards.

Recommended operators:

Joy Ride (☎ 642-5544; www.joyridebol.com; Nicolas Ortiz)
Locot's (☎ 691-5958; www.locotsbolivia.com; Bolivia 465)
Eclipse Travel (☎/fax 644-3960; eclipse@mara.scr.entelnet.bo; Avaroa 310).

See also operators listed on p236.

Courses

The number of language courses available here has exploded over recent years. There are several reliable options.

Academia Latinoamericana de Español (☎ 646-0537; www.latinoschools.com/bolivia; Dalence 109) Has a comprehensive program that features language, dance and cooking lessons, homestay options and volunteer opportunities.

Centro Boliviano-Americano (CBA; ☎ 644-1608; www.cba.com.bo in Spanish; Calvo 301) Gives referrals to private teachers.

Instituto Cultural Boliviano-Alemán (ICBA; ☎/fax 645-2091; www.icba-sucre.edu.bo in Spanish; Calle Avaroa 326) Offers excellent Spanish, Quechua and even dance lessons. Homestay options are available.

Recommended Spanish teachers:

Aida Rojas (☎ 728-66966; aida_1122@hotmail.com)
Sofía Sauma (☎ 645-1687; fsauma@hotmail.com; Loa 779)

Festivals & Events

Sucre loves an excuse for a party or parade and it's worth checking out the list at the tourist office for the many religious festivals. **Festival de la Cultura** attracts many artists and intellectuals who give theatre, music, dance, literature and folkloric performances.

Sleeping

Sucre has plenty of budget accommodations around the market and along Ravelo and San Alberto, but it's also a good place to splurge on something a bit more stylish. The *casas de huéspedes* (guesthouses) offer a more distinctive, homey feel.

Alojamiento El Turista (☎ 645-3172; Ravelo 118; s/d US\$2.50/3.70) If budget's your aim, you might be game. (But don't poke your nose into the toilet and shower first up.)

La Plata (☎ 645-2102; Ravelo 32; s/d US\$3/5) This older central option offers surly service and basic, but adequate – if a little noisy – rooms.

Casa de Huéspedes San Marcos (☎ 646-2087; Aniceto Arce 233; r per person US\$4, with bathroom US\$4.30) The deceptive entrance hides tranquil surroundings: clean, quiet rooms with kitchen and laundry access for guests. Travelers report motley mattresses.

Hostal Veracruz (☎ 645-1560; Ravelo 158; s/d incl breakfast US\$3.70/7) A modern, popular tour-group choice with a variety of rooms.

Residencial Bolivia (☎ 645-4346; res_bol@cotes.net.bo; San Alberto 42; s/d/tr US\$3.70/7/9.50, with bathroom s/d/tr US\$6.20/10.50/15) A traveler's treat. It's slightly worn, but its two garden-filled courtyards, central position, and spacious (if

empty) rooms make it a favorite. Breakfast is included and it has an excellent travel information board.

HI Sucre Hostel (☎ 644-0471; www.hostellingbolivia.org; Loayza 119; dm US\$4.30, s/d US\$12.50/23; 📺) By far Bolivia's swankest hostel: full-service hostel with Rococco-style dining rooms to boot. It's not the most central, but handy to the bus station (follow the signs). Some private rooms have cable TV.

Hostal Charcas (☎ 645-3972; hostalcharcas@yahoo.com; Ravelo 62; s/d/tr US\$5/8/11, with bathroom US\$8/12.50/19) The rooftop views of this clean and central spot are reminiscent of Florence. The owner runs an efficient, clean and friendly place and ensures it's one of Sucre's best-value spots.

Hostal San Francisco (☎ 645-2117; hostalsf@cotes.net.bo; Aniceto Arce 191; r with bathroom per person US\$6) The rooms don't quite live up to the light, bright and sunny exterior, with its fancy balustrades, but it's a safe option. Breakfast extra (US\$1).

Hostal Copacabana (☎ 644-1790; Av Hernando Siles; s/d US\$8/12.30) If you want 'colonial' avoid this place – the series of Louvre-like glass pyramids are 'cutting edge' for Sucre. But with modernity comes good clean rooms, cable TV and operational plumbing.

Hostal Los Pinos (☎ 645-5639; Colón 502; s/d US\$8.70/12.50) More like a house than a hotel, this place has eight clean rooms in a less touristy part of town. House rules apply: you pay for kitchen use and there's an 11:30pm curfew.

Grand Hotel (☎ 645-2104/2461; grandhot@mara.scr.entelnet.bo; Aniceto Arce 61; s/d US\$12.50/16) This glowingly recommended, refurbished old building houses comfortable rooms in a great location. Unventilated bathrooms can create bronchial bothers, however.

Reasonable places across from the bus terminal include the following:

Residencial Gloria Sur (☎ 645-2847; r per person US\$2.50) Clean and modernish.

Austria Hostal (☎ 645-4202; r per person US\$4.30/5.60) With a range of comfy rooms.

For homestay options (usually on a longer term basis), see Lizbeth Rojas at **Candelaria Tours** (☎ 646-1661; www.candelariatours.com; Audiencia 1).

Eating

With many quality restaurants and relaxing cafés catering to the town's students, locals and tourists, Sucre is ideal for lounging around and lingering about.

Upstairs in the market, you'll find delicious *api* and *pasteles* (pastries) while downstairs there's fruit salads and juices, mixed to your taste.

Head downhill from the plaza along Nicolas Ortiz for an interesting selection of bars and eateries.

Café Mirador (Plaza La Recoleta, in Museo de los Niños Tanga-Tanga; ☎ from 9am) The place for a suntan. Great garden, better views, and the food's not bad either.

Cafe Tetulias (Plaza 25 de Mayo; mains US\$1.50-6; ☎ 6pm-late) An artsy place offering tasty light meals, coffee and snacks. It's on the north side of the plaza.

La Taverne (Aniceto Arce 35; mains US\$3) Francophiles will enjoy this pleasant and refined place, run by Alliance Française, and serving international gourmet dishes (but with French *panache*). Films (mostly French) are screened several times a week.

Locot's (☎ 691-5958; Bolivar 465; mains US\$2-5; ☎ 8am-late) A friendly Dutch-Bolivian team runs this new laid-back place with super outdoor dining and a fun bar. Occasional live music.

El Germén (San Alberto 231) Serves vegetarian food and has great *almuerzos* and German pastries.

Pizza Napolitana (Plaza 25 de Mayo) Has cheap set lunch, reasonably priced standard pizza and pasta, excellent ice cream and a good mix of locals and visitors. It's on the east side of the plaza.

Kultur Café Berlin (Avaroa 326; mains US\$4.30-5.60) A German coffee shop and restaurant with tasty pastries and light meals; try the *papas rellenas* (stuffed potatoes).

La Vieja Bodega (Nicolas Ortiz) For US\$7.50 for two, you can fiddle with a fondue, or have a lasagna prepared.

Arco Iris (Restaurant Suizo; Nicolas Ortiz) For delights such as *roeshti* (Swiss hash browns), fondue and chocolate mousse. Vegetarian meals are available and there's occasional live music.

La Repizza (cnr Dalence & Nicolas Ortiz) Serves pizza and cocktails and hosts live music on Friday and Saturday nights.

Salon de Té Las Delicias (Estudiantes 50; snacks US\$40¢-1.20) For an authentic Bolivian experience, join the locals here in the late afternoon for tea and cakes or *empanadas*.

For back-to-basics Bolivian, check the chicken-and-chips shops on Av Hernando Siles, between Tarapaca and Junín.

Drinking

Some of the bars and restaurants on and near the plaza have live music and *peña* nights.

Joy Ride Café (☎ 642-5544; www.joyridebol.com; Nicolas Ortiz; ☎ from 7:30am Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat & Sun) It may be 'gringofied' but it's also the current 'it' place among Sucre's gilded youth. This Dutch-run enterprise – bar, restaurant (mains US\$2 to US\$5) and cultural space – features three popular and vibey 'spaces' depending on your mood: a bar, a patio-come-café, and a laid-back beanbag hangout for watching the big screen. For the homesick there's imported beers and deli fixes. The Joy Ride salad is a must (US\$2.50).

Bibliocafé (Nicolas Ortiz; ☎ 10am-11pm) Head here for a warm, chilled and publike atmosphere. It also serves good pastas (mains US\$2 to US\$2.50) and snacks. Open on Sundays.

The neighboring Biblioconcert hosts live music on Friday and Saturday nights.

Entertainment

For discos and karaoke, check Calle España just up from the plaza. The Teatro al Aire Libre, southeast of the center, is a wonderful outdoor venue for music and other performances. There are several cinemas around town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 6km northwest of the city center. **AeroSur** (☎ 645-4895; Arenales 31) and **LAB** (☎ 691-3181; España) have flights to most major cities.

BUS & SHARED TAXI

The bus terminal, located 2km northeast of the city center, is accessed by *micro* A or 3 or 4 from the center (you can flag it down anywhere along Hernando Siles near the market), but the *micros* are too tiny to accommodate lots of luggage. There are numerous daily buses to Cochabamba (US\$5 to US\$8, 12 hours), leaving around 6pm or 7pm. Direct buses to Santa Cruz (ie not via Cochabamba) run daily (US\$7 to US\$10, 15 hours). Numerous companies leave daily for Potosí (US\$2 to US\$2.50, three hours) throughout the day; some continue to Tarija (US\$10, 15 hours), Oruro, Villazón and Uyuni. Alternatively, most hotels can arrange shared taxis to Potosí (US\$4 per person with four people). There is frequent *bus cama* service to La Paz (US\$7 to US\$10, 14 to 16 hours).

Getting Around

Local *micros* (US30¢) take circuitous routes around Sucre's one-way streets. Most eventually converge on the stop on Hernando Siles, north of the market, but they can be waved down virtually anywhere. You can reach the airport on *micro* F or 1 (allow an hour) or by taxi (US\$3.50).

AROUND SUCRE

Tarabuco

This small, predominantly indigenous village, 65km southeast of Sucre, is known for its beautiful weavings and colorful, sprawling Sunday market, and is famous for the festival of Phujllay. This is the most photogenic of places, but be aware of the locals' reactions to the long lenses. It's best to request a shot beforehand. Take care of your things. The spitting scam is, unfortunately, becoming more common (see p189).

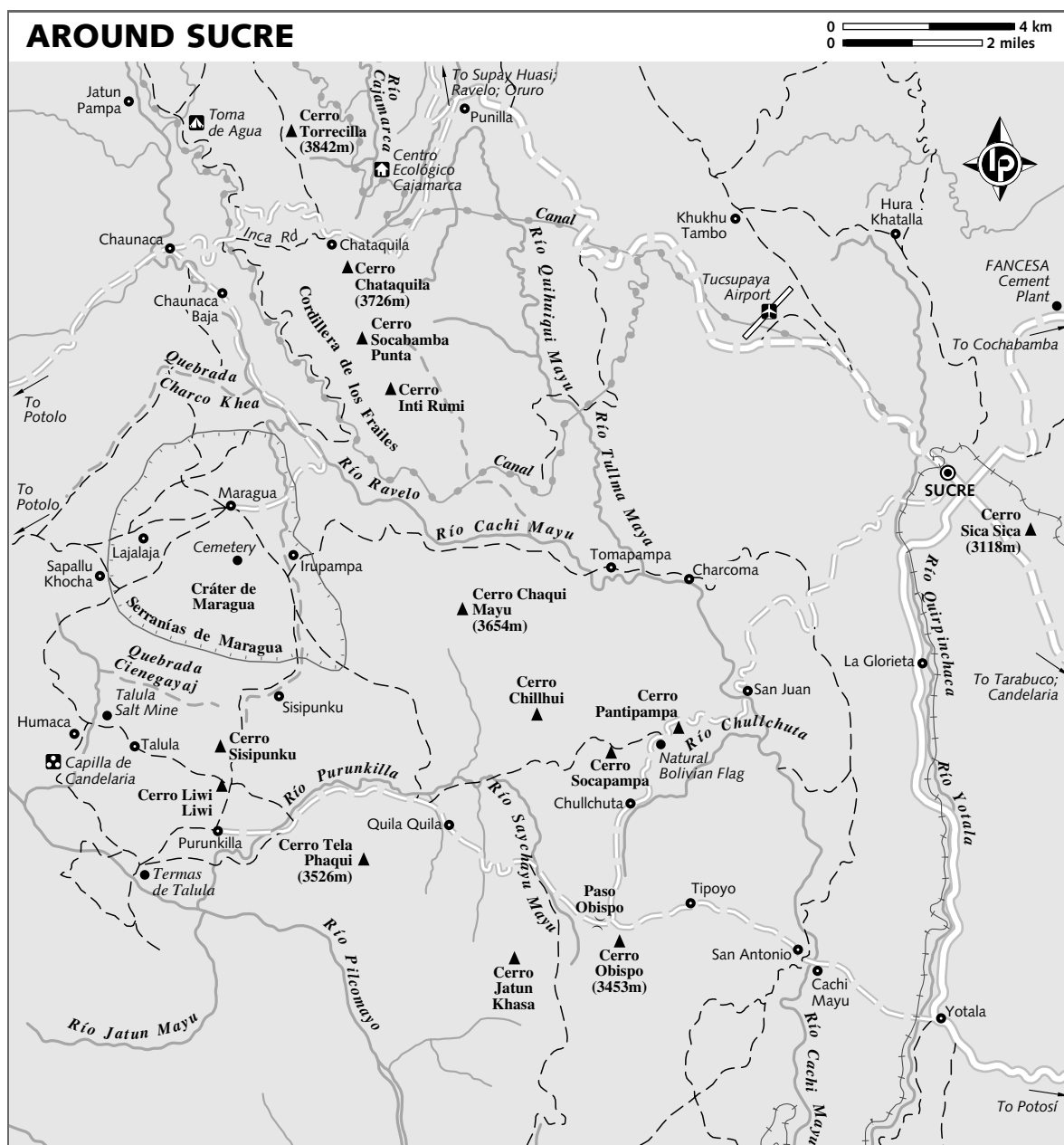
Plenty touristy, the **market** is overflowing with amazing woven ponchos, bags and belts as well as *charangos* (buy only wooden ones – have mercy on endangered armadillos). However, much of the work for sale is not local but acquired by traders, so don't expect many bargains.

Phujllay (meaning 'to play' in Quechua) takes place on the third Sunday of March. The town becomes the gathering place for hundreds of indigenous people from the surrounding countryside, beginning with a Mass, followed by a procession around the main plaza, the selection of the *ñusta* and the ritual of the *pucara*, a magical spiritual symbol.

You can visit Tarabuco with a tour (US\$3) or take a *micro* from Sucre (on Ravelo in front of the market) at 8am on Sunday (US\$1, one to two hours). **Trans Real** (☎ 644-3119; 73 San Alberto St) buses depart on Sundays at 8am from their office. Buses and *camiones* returning to Sucre leave from the main plaza in Tarabuco between 1pm and 3pm. A taxi charges around US\$22.

Cordillera de los Frailes

This range runs through much of western Chuquisaca and northern Potosí departments and offers scenic trekking opportunities. Sites in the Sucre area worth visiting include **Capilla de Chataquila**, the 6km **Camino del Inca**, the rock paintings of **Pumamachay**, the weaving village of **Potolo**, pastoral **Chaunaca**, dramatic **Maragua Crater** and the **Talula hot springs**.



There are plenty of **trekking routes**, but they traverse little-visited areas; to minimize cultural impact and avoid getting hopelessly lost, hire a registered guide. Several Sucre travel agencies also arrange excursions. See those operators listed under Activities (p234) or try **Sur Andes** (☎ /fax 645-2632; Nicolas Ortíz 6) or **Candelaria Tours** (☎ 646-1661; www.candelariatours.com; Audiencia 1). The latter is more upmarket, but backpacker rates can be arranged.

POTOSÍ

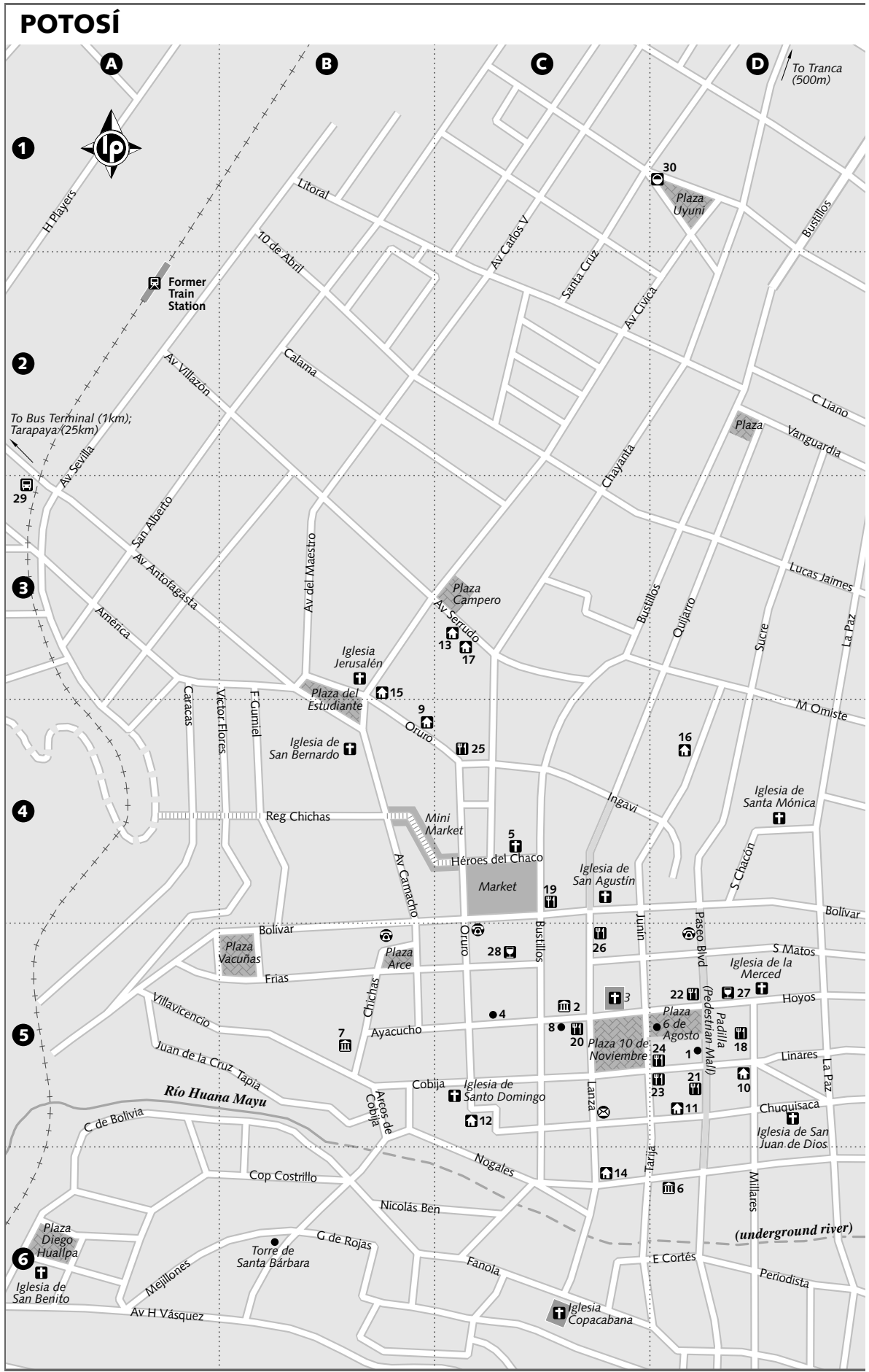
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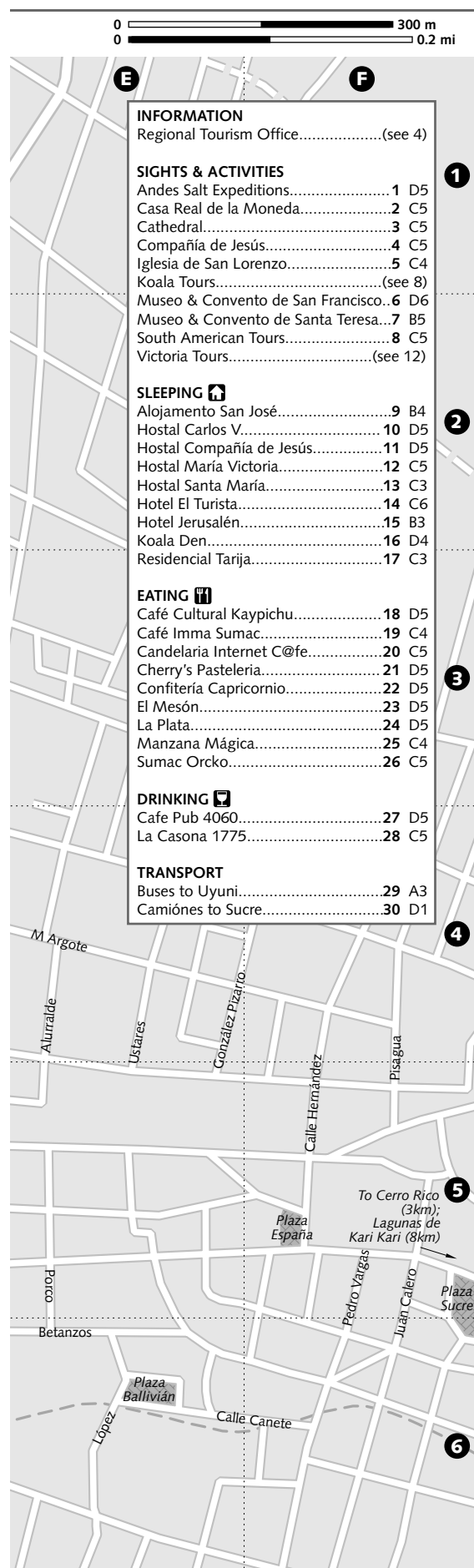
Potosí shocks. A visit to the world's highest city (4060m), a Unesco World Heritage site, reveals a former and current splendor and past and present horror, tied to its one pre-

cious metal – silver. Potosí is set against the backdrop of a rainbow-colored mountain, the Cerro Rico. The city was founded in 1545 following the discovery of ore deposits in the mountain, and Potosí veins proved the world's most lucrative. By the end of the 18th century the streets were 'paved' with silver; it grew into the largest and wealthiest city in Latin America, underwriting the Spanish economy for over two centuries.

Millions of indigenous people and imported African slaves laborers were conscripted to work in the mines in appalling conditions, and millions of deaths occurred. Today thousands continue to work in the mines: although the silver has been depleted, they continue to work in spine-chilling conditions to extract

BOLIVIA





minerals. To protect them in their hell below, they worship their devil, known as *Tío*. Above ground, echoes of the once-grand colonial city reverberate through the narrow streets, bouncing from the formal balconied mansions and ornate churches. This city is not to be missed, but go slowly, be prepared for the harsh climate, and brace yourself for a jolt.

Information

Internet access is available for US\$50¢ per hour at several places along the pedestrian mall.

Lots of businesses along Bolívar, Sucre and in the market change US dollars at reasonable rates. ATMs are common in the center.

There is a **tourist information center** (☎ 262-2643; cnr Ayacucho & Bustillos) in the Compañía de Jesús.

Sights

Potosí's central area contains a wealth of colonial architecture. At the time of research, the **cathedral** was closed for long-term restoration, but you can see the **Iglesia de San Lorenzo** (Heroes del Chaco), famous for its classic mestizo facade.

The **Casa Real de la Moneda** (Royal Mint; Ayacucho; admission for mandatory 2hr guided tour US\$2.50; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun, last tour 4.30pm) is worth its weight in silver; it's one of Bolivia's finest museums. Constructed between 1753 and 1773 to control the minting of colonial coins, the restored building now houses religious art, Tiahuanaco artifacts, ancient coins, wooden minting machines and the country's first locomotive.

The highlight of the **Museo & Convento de San Francisco** (Nogales; admission US\$1.85; ☎ 9-11am & 2:30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) is the view from the roof. The **Museo & Convento de Santa Teresa** (Villavicencio; admission US\$2.60; ☎ 9am-12:30 & 3-6:30pm) is a must for flagellation fans, but tours are in Spanish only.

The **Compañía de Jesús on Ayacucho** (☎ 8:30am-noon & 2-6pm) affords great views of the terracotta rooftops and beyond.

Activities

COOPERATIVE MINE TOURS

A visit to the cooperative mines is demanding, shocking and memorable. Tours typically involve scrambling and crawling in low, narrow, dirty shafts and climbing rickety ladders – wear your gnarliest clothes. Working practices are medieval, safety provisions nearly

nonexistent and most shafts are unventilated; chewing coca helps. Note: tours aren't recommended for claustrophobes or asthmatics. Work is done by hand with basic tools, and underground temperatures vary from below freezing to a stifling 45°C (113°F). Miners, exposed to myriad noxious chemicals, often die of silicosis pneumonia within 10 years of entering the mines. They work the mine as a cooperative venture, with each miner milking his own claim and selling his ore to a smelter through the cooperative. (Look out for the multi-award-winning US-made film *The Devil's Miner*; 2005.)

Most tours start at the **miners' street market** where you buy gifts for the miners: coca leaves, alcohol and cigarettes to start; dynamite and fuses if you're after an explosive experience. You may also visit a **mineral refinery**. Then you're driven up to **Cerro Rico** where guides often give a **demonstration blast**. After donning a jacket and helmet, the scramble begins. You can converse with the miners (language permitting), take photos (with flash) and share gifts as a tip.

All guides work through tour agencies, and all must be licensed. Most guides speak Spanish – ask around the agencies if you need an English speaker – and some are former miners themselves. Expect to pay around US\$6 to US\$7.50 per person for a three- to five-hour group tour. A group of 10 people or fewer is best. There are many agencies; some of those recommended by travelers include:

Andes Salt Expeditions (☎ 622-5175; 3 Alonso de Ibañez) Recommended by readers and run by an ex-miner.

Koala Tours (☎ 622-4708; Ayacucho 7) Repeatedly recommended for its professional, personable service. Worth every bit of the US\$10 per person price.

South American Tours (☎ 622-28919; Ayacucho 11) Also has tours to the *lagunas*.

Victoria Tours (☎ 622-2132; Chuquisaca 148) Also runs *Lagunas de Kari Kari* and hot-springs trips.

LAGUNAS & HOT SPRINGS

The artificial lakes **Lagunas de Kari Kari**, 8km southeast of town, were constructed in the late 16th and early 17th centuries by indigenous slaves to provide water for the city and hydropower to run its 132 *ingenios* (smelters). You can trek there, although you need be a confident orienteer: you could walk there and back in a long day or get a lift at least part of the way. Pick up the 1:50,000 topo map 6435-II, *Potosí (Este)*, at an IGM office.

Travel agencies offer full- and half-day tours to these (and other) lakes.

Outside Potosí are several **hot spring resorts**; the most popular is **Tarapaya**, 25km north of the city. There are a dozen similar pools in the surrounding area. *Camiones* leave every half hour or so from Mercado Chuquimia near the bus terminal. *Micros* (US50¢, 20 minutes) also run all day and continue to Miraflores (there are also pools here). Ask to get off at the crossroads for the Laguna Tarapaya, and walk for 20 minutes.

Festivals & Events

The most popular annual party is the **Entrada de Chu'tillos** on the last Saturday in August. It features traditional dancing from all over South America as well as special performances from other continents. Booking accommodations for this period is essential. Alternatively, show up a week early; the week preceding the festival is given over to practicing for the big event and can be nearly as exciting as the real thing.

Sleeping

Only top-end hotels have heating, and there may be blanket shortages in the cheapies, so you'll want a sleeping bag. Hard-core budget places may charge extra for hot showers.

Hotel Jerusalém (☎ 622-4633; hoteljer@cedro.pti.entelnet.bo; Oruro 143; r incl breakfast US\$2.30-3.50) This good-value, friendly and mellow place has a cafeteria with a view. Can be packed with tour groups and prices vary seasonally so 'confirm and be firm.'

Residencial Tarija (☎ 622-2711; Av Serrudo 252; per person without/with bathroom US\$2.60/6.50) Plain, but perfectly presentable with pebbled parking point.

Hostal Carlos V (☎ 622-5121; Linares 42; r per person US\$3.25) You'll feel peachy in this plant-filled colonial building with a covered patio. It guarantees a quieter stay (there's a midnight curfew). There's also a book exchange.

Alojamiento San José (622-4394; Oruro 171; r per person US\$3.70) A shag-pile-filled entrance gives way adequate rooms. The mattresses have lumps bigger than a miner's coca-filled cheek.

Koala Den (☎ 622-6467; ktourspotosi@hotmail.com; Junín 56; dm US\$3.70-5, d US\$7.50) As the name implies, it's warm and cozy with everything you need. Despite the rather high dorm price (and overpriced doubles!), the travelers' infrastructure – kitchen, DVDs, tours on tap – make this a more social traveler's favorite.

Hostal María Victoria (☎ 622-2144; Chuquisaca 148; sUS\$4-6, dUS\$9) A beautiful colonial mansion with clean rooms facing onto a courtyard; worth staying for views from an underutilized roof terrace.

Hostal Compañía de Jesús (☎ 622-3173; Chuquisaca 445; r per person US\$5, with bathroom & breakfast US\$6) With its lovely historical entrance, this place is better on the outside (by day) than the cold inside (by night). A passable – but not the best – option.

Hostal Santa María (☎ 622-3255; Av Serrudo 244; s/d US\$10/12.35) An overlooked excellent option, in a lovely colonial home, lined with geranium pots and squeaky hospital-style corridors. You might be praying for warmth, however.

Hotel El Turista (☎ 622-2492; Lanza 19; s/d US\$10/16.50) The owner takes his job very seriously: a clean spacious place, but no smiling please.

Eating & Drinking

The market *comedor* offers inexpensive breakfasts, and a couple of small bakeries along the pedestrian stretch of Padilla do continental breakfasts.

La Plata (Plaza 10 de Noviembre; snacks US\$1.50-2.20) A favorite, hip and comfortable gringo hangout, with great hot chocolates (US\$0.80) and games to fill in the colder hours.

Sumac Orcko (Quijarro 46; lunch US\$1.50, mains US\$3) One of the best-value places in town, it offers filling, four-course *almuerzos* and evening meals.

Café Cultural Kaypichu (Millares 24; mains US\$1.70-2.20; ☎ 7am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun) Overlooked by the café's religious icon, this is for pure veggie vultures.

Confitería Capricornio (Padilla at Hoyos) Notable for its affordable meals and snacks.

Cherry's Pastelería (Padilla) The spot for apple strudel, chocolate cake and lemon meringue pie; the coffee is mediocre.

Candelaria Internet C@fe (Ayacucho 5; lunches & dinners US\$2.70; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Ethnic-style café and internet.

El Mesón (cnr Linares & Junín; mains US\$3-5) For a more formal treat, try this tableclothed place, where US\$3.70 gets you spicy meat dishes ('to warm you up' says the waiter).

Manzana Mágica (cnr Oruro & Ingavi; breakfasts B\$7-15; ☎ 7:30am-10pm) A vegetarian café serving muesli and yogurt for breakfast, as well as dinners and snacks.

Café Imma Sumac (Bustillos 987) For great *salt-eñas*, hit this spot.

Cafe Pub 4060 (Hoyos 1) 'Cuatro mil seisenta' is the altitude of Potosí, and this new funky bar in town reaches the heights in quality. Excellent snacks available. Evenings only.

The best place for cocktails is **La Casona 1775** (Frias 41).

Getting There & Around

The bus terminal is 1km northwest of town (30 minutes' walk downhill from the center), reached by frequent *micros* (US\$15¢) from the west side of the cathedral or by taxi (US\$50¢ per person). Several companies serve La Paz (US\$5 to US\$10, 11 hours) daily. There are morning and evening buses to Oruro (US\$4, eight hours), with connections to Cochabamba.

Most buses to Sucre (US\$2, three hours) leave daily at 6:30am and 7am. There are shared taxis to Sucre (US\$5 per person, two hours) if you're rushed, and slow *camiones* and *micros* that leave from Plaza Uyuni if you're not.

Heading south, buses leave for Tupiza (US\$6, eight hours) daily around 7:30pm and several continuing to Villazón at 7am, 8am, 6:30pm, 7pm and 8pm (US\$6, 10 to 12 hours). A few daily services go to Tarija (US\$6, 14 hours) and there are daily departures for Camargo, Yacuiba and Bermejo. For Santa Cruz, it's best to go to Sucre or Cochabamba.

Buses to Uyuni (US\$2 to US\$3.50, six to seven hours) depart between 11am and 6pm – a scenic and popular route. Emporador buses go from the terminal at noon and 2pm, the others from Av Universitario.

THE SOUTHEAST

The vast lowlands of the Bolivian Oriente are rich and varied, and home to much of the country's natural resources. Numerous cultural highlights include stunning Jesuit missions and natural wonders like Parque Nacional Amboró and the more remote Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado. Che Guevara fans can follow his footsteps, while stalwart travelers can venture into Paraguay through the wild Chaco. Brazil is a hop, skip and a train ride away.

SANTA CRUZ

☎ 03 / pop 1.3 million

Santa Cruz de la Sierra (elevation 415m) prides itself on being more Brazilian than Bolivian. Indeed, thanks to the warm and tropical ambience, the *cambas*, as the locals

SANTA CRUZ

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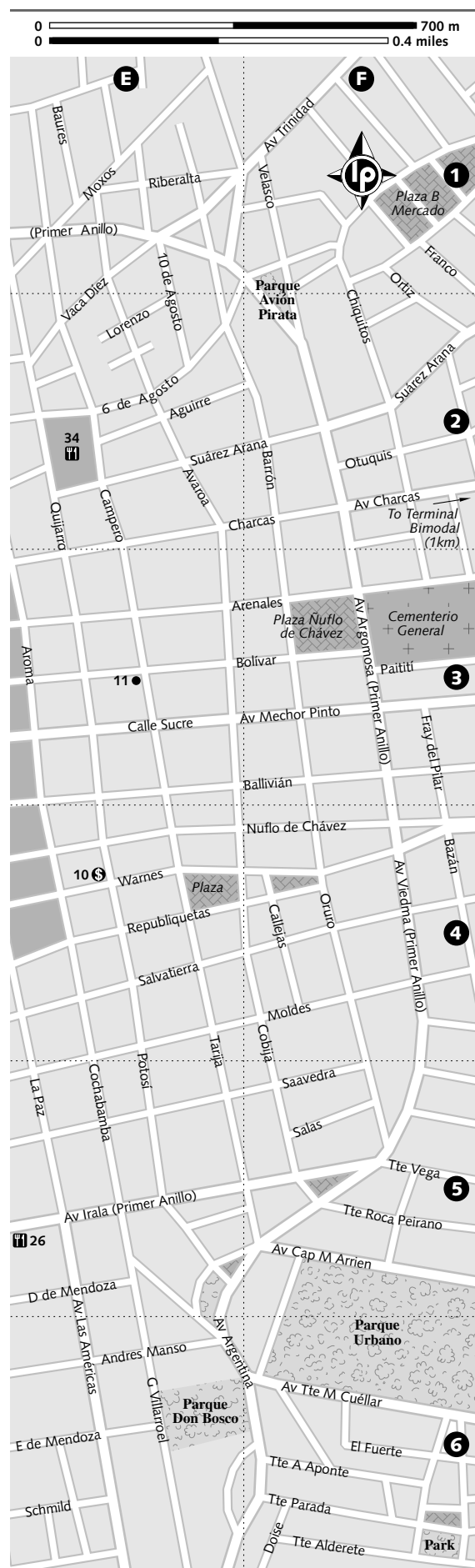
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BOLIVIA

call themselves, seem more laid-back than their *kolla* (Andean) countrymen.

The city was founded in 1561 by Spaniard Ñuflo de Chaves, 220km east of its current location. It proved vulnerable to indigenous attack and was moved to its present position, near the Cordillera Oriental foothills. Santa Cruz mushroomed from a backwater town to Bolivia's largest city. Renowned as one of the main centers of the cocaine trade, today it is more in the news as the center of the controversial energy sector.

The modern area to the north, with its stylish shops and smart cafés, has not monopolized the city's colonial center; the terracotta-tiled and balconied buildings maintain a delightful colonial ambience, particularly around the tree-lined plaza. (If you're lucky you might see a sloth. Despite their relocation, the odd one makes an appearance.)

Santa Cruz is an excellent base for exploring still-pristine rainforests, the Che Guevara trail, and 18th-century Jesuit missions.

Orientation

The city center is laid out in a straightforward grid. Ten numbered *anillos* (ring roads) form concentric circles around the compact city center, indicating separate suburbs or regions. *Radiales* (spokes) connect the rings. The city's cheaper options are in the centre, within the first *anillo*; the smarter restaurants and hotels are on Av San Martín to the north.

Information

BOOKSTORES

Lewy Libros (Junín 229) Stocks travel guides and has a selection of maps and used English- and German-language paperbacks.

Los Amigos del Libro (Ingavi 114) Slim pickings.

EMERGENCY

Tourist police (☎ 322-5016; Plaza 24 de Septiembre) Inside the Palacio Prefectural, on the north side of the plaza.

IMMIGRATION OFFICES

The main immigration office is north of the center, opposite the zoo's entrance. If you're arriving overland from Paraguay, pick up a length-of-stay stamp here. There's a more convenient office at the **train station** (🚉 10am-noon & 1:30-7pm) but the station is plagued by phony officials; use as a last-ditch resort. The most reliable office is at the airport. For

those braving the Death Train (see p246), exit stamps are reportedly only available at the Brazilian frontier; ask around before departing.

For information on consulates in Santa Cruz, see p258.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet places are dotted all over the city center, with several options at Entel offices.

LAUNDRY

España Lavandería (España 160) Same-day service (drop off before noon) costs around US\$1 per kilo.

Lavandería La Paz (La Paz 42) Central, efficient wash 'n' dry.

Nameless lavandería (Bolívar 490) Efficient wash 'n' dry (US\$1 per kilo); ring the bell.

MONEY

Banco de Santa Cruz (Junín) Cash advances and ATM. Less efficient but may have slightly better rates for changing traveler's checks.

Casa de cambio Aleman (Plaza 24 de Septiembre) Changes cash or traveler's checks (2% to 3% commission).

Magri Turismo (☎ 334-5663; cnr Warnes & Potosí) American Express agent; doesn't cash traveler's checks.

TELEPHONE

There are telecom stores along Bolívar for making cheap international internet calls.

Punto Entel (Junín 284) Near the plaza; has land lines.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Departamental de Turismo (☎ 336-8901; Plaza 24 de Septiembre) Inside the Palacio Prefectural, on the north side of the plaza.

Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN; ☎ 355-6800; www.fan-bo.org; Km7, Carretera a Samaipata) Dispenses information on Amboró and Noel Kempff Mercado national parks. West of town (*micro* 44) off the old Cochabamba road.

Main tourist office (☎ 336-9595; Plaza 24 de Septiembre). On the ground floor of the Casa de la Cultura, west side of the plaza.

Sights

There are few attractions in Santa Cruz proper, but the shady **Plaza 24 de Septiembre** with its **cathedral** is an attractive place to relax by day or night. On the plaza's west side, the **Casa de la Cultura Raúl Otero Reiche** (☎ 8am-noon & 3-5:30pm Mon-Fri) hosts free music and contemporary art exhibitions in addition to theater performances.

Locals relax around the lagoon at **Parque El Arenal**, north of the center, where there's a handicrafts market and paddle boats for rent. Overlooking the lagoon is the **Museo Etno-Folklorico** (admission US\$75¢), with a small collection of regional anthropological finds. Don't dawdle here at night.

The underfunded **Jardín Zoológico** (☎ 342-9939; adult/child US\$75¢/50¢; ☎ 9am-6pm) is worth a visit. The collection includes South American birds, mammals and reptiles – don't miss the sloths. Take any 'Zoologico' *micro* from the center. Discover the wonder of sequins, big hats and gold rope trim at the cathedral's air-conditioned **Museo de Arte Sagrado** (Plaza 24 de Septiembre; admission US\$60¢), with a dazzling collection of gowns, jewels and spooky paintings upstairs.

Sleeping

In a bind, there are several cheap, indistinguishable places to crash across from the terminal bimodal. Otherwise, there are few reasonable cheapies.

Alojamiento Santa Bárbara (☎ 332-1817; Santa Bárbara 151; r per person US\$3.70) You'll be blown away by the industrial-sized fans (but less impressed by the beds) at this very basic, but friendly place, with sunny courtyard.

Residencial Bolívar (☎ 334-2500; Calle Sucre 131; dm US\$5.50, s/d/tr US\$9/15/19) The two pet toucans add to the color of this highly recommended place. Inviting courtyard with hammocks and excellent communal showers. Call ahead or arrive early.

Hotel Bibosi (☎ 334-8548; bibosi@scbbs-bo.com; Junín 218; s/d US\$10/12.35) Hotel Bibosi has a great rooftop view and clean, spacious rooms with fan, phone and bathroom.

Hotel Amazonas (☎ 333-4583; leanch@bibosi.scz.entelnet.bo; Junín 214; s/d US\$10/12.35) Next door to Bibosi, with plants, clean corridors and 'brown-tile' kind of rooms.

Hotel Copacabana (☎ 332-9924; Junín 217; s US\$12.35-18, d US\$19-23) Lots of red lacework and red plants add color to the small, '70s disco rooms with ceiling fans. A pleasant, if unremarkable, stay. Some rooms with air-con. Avoid the noisy ground-floor rooms.

Eating

For simple, cheap eats, try Mercado La Ramada or the mall-like Mercado Los Pozos with food stalls on the top floor. The latter is especially good for unusual tropical fruits.

Mercado Florida is wall-to-wall blender stalls serving exquisite juices and fruit salads for US\$50¢.

Cuerpamente Sano (Av Irala 437; per kg US\$4) Healthy-mind-healthy-body type place – full on and fabulous vegetarian buffet.

Beats & Cream (Av Ayacucho & 21 de Mayo) Come here for the finest of fine ice creams. Locals rave.

La Casa del Camba (Av Cristobal de Mendoza 1355, 2nd anillo; buffet US\$3, mains US\$2.50-3.70) All sorts of *cambas* (and visitors) come here for Bolivian specialties and Argentinean meat. Nightly traditional music, plus dance performances on Fridays and Saturdays.

La Casona (☎ 337-8495; Arenales 222; mains US\$5-7; ☎ Mon-Sat) Can't look at another *empanada*? Lash out on international gourmet numbers at this tasteful and relaxed German-run eatery.

La Bella Napoli (Independencia 683; pizza & mains US\$6-8) A pleasant vine-covered terrace and fine pasta dishes deliver the flavors of Italy.

Yorimichi (☎ 334-7717; Av Busch 548; mains around US\$10) You should give this place a try if you're craving sashimi or udon. It's not cheap, but it's sushi. It's near the Campus Universitario.

Crêperie El Boliche (☎ 333-9053; Arenales 135) A splash-out option serving dinner only.

Naturalia (Independencia 452) Organic grocery store with a wide selection of healthy goodies.

Also recommended:

Café Sofia (Velasco 40) Very simple, but with cooked-on-the-premises pastries.

La Romana (Velasco 47A) Bakes stunning breads, croissants and addictive sweet buns.

Mama Rosa (Velasco) Serves feisty pizzas, chicken and big *almuerzos*. It's near Av Irala.

Similar in menu and style are **Dumbo's** (Ayacucho 247) and **Kivón** (Ayacucho 267), both a block west of the plaza.

Drinking

Victory Bar (cnr Junín & 21 de Mayo) Upstairs and a block from the plaza, this is one of several central sociable watering holes.

Bar Irlandés (cnr Junín & 24 de Septiembre) There's a hopping gringo scene and good plaza views from the balcony bar.

La Cueva del Ratón (La Riva 173) Barnlike bar with big-screen music videos.

Lorca Cafe (Ave René Moreno 20) Bar-café cultural space with regular program of live music and other cultural performances.

Entertainment

Many *boliches* (nightclubs) are spread out along Av San Martín in Barrio Equipetrol, northwest of the city, between the second and third *anillos*. You'll need to take a taxi (around US\$2). Cover charges start at US\$2 and drinks are expensive.

El Egua (24 de Septiembre 651; ☎ Thu-Sun) One of the most popular Cuban salsa clubs in town.

Cine Palace (Plaza 24 de Septiembre; admission US\$2.50) First-run flicks are shown nightly at this cinema on the plaza's west side.

Cine Arenal (Beni 555; admission US\$2.50) Older releases play at this cinema facing Parque El Arenal.

Aqualand (☎ 385-2500; www.aqualand.com.bo in Spanish; half-day US\$5-8, full-day US\$7.50-10; ☎ 10:30am-5:30pm Thu-Sun) For a real splash, dive into this water park near the airport.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The modern **Viru Viru International Airport** (VVI; ☎ 181), 15km north of the center, handles domestic and international flights.

AeroSur (☎ 385-2151; Av Irala at Colón) and **LAB** (☎ 800-10-3001; Chuquisaca 126) both have flights on most days to Cochabamba, La Paz and Sucre, with connections to other Bolivian cities. **TAM** (☎ 353-2639) flies direct to La Paz on Monday morning as well as a couple more times a week from El Trompillo, the military airport south of the center. Aerosur, AeroCon, Amazonas and Aeroest all operate from there to the Egni and Pando districts, and Puerto Suarez. More expensive air taxis are also available in El Trompillo to any part of the country.

Taxis to the airport charge a standard US\$6.20; a *micro* costs US\$60¢.

BUS

The full-service **Terminal Bimodal** (☎ 348-8382; terminal fee US\$30¢), a combo long-distance bus and train station, is 1.5km east of the center, just before the 3rd *anillo* at the end of Av Brasil. *Micro* 4 heads straight to the center.

There are regular services to Cochabamba (US\$4 to US\$6, 10 to 12 hours), with connections to La Paz, Oruro, Sucre, Potosí and Tarija. Direct overnight buses to Sucre (ie not via Cochabamba) depart between 5pm and 6pm (US\$6 to US\$12, 14 to 17 hours) and to La Paz (US\$10 for *bus cama*, 16 hours) between 5pm and 7:30pm.

There are also afternoon and night buses south to Yacuiba and Bermejo, with connections to Salta. Buses leave daily (during the dry season) at 6:30am for the grueling trip through the Chaco to Asunción (around US\$50, 30 hours minimum), Paraguay. There are morning and evening buses to Vallegrande. At least four companies have nightly buses for Concepción (US\$4, six hours) and San Ignacio de Velasco on the Mission Circuit; 31 del Este has additional daytime departures.

To Trinidad and beyond, several buses leave between 5pm and 7pm nightly (US\$4 to US\$10, at least 12 hours).

TRAIN

There are three opportunities to travel to the Brazilian border: the efficient and upmarket *Ferrobús*, the *Expreso Oriental* (the infamous Death Train; see below), and the *Regional* (or *mixto*), predominantly a cargo train with a few passenger seats.

The most comfortable and efficient option is the *Ferrobús*, which departs on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 7:30pm (*semi-cama/cama* US\$28/33) and returns Monday, Wednesday and Friday. (Note: these schedules change.)

The *Expreso Oriental* runs to Quijarro, on the Brazilian border, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5pm (Pullman/1st class US\$6.50/15.50, 15½ hours), returning on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 4:30pm. Tickets can be scarce and carriages are often so jammed with people and contraband that there's nowhere to sit. Ticket windows (supposedly) open at 8am, and you can only buy your ticket on the day of departure, when lines reach Cuban proportions. An adventurous alternative is to stake out a place in the *bodegas*

(boxcars) of a *treno mixto* (mixed train) and purchase a 2nd-class ticket on board (for 20% of the ticket-window price).

The upmarket option is to buy a 1st-class ticket through a Santa Cruz travel agent. You must pay a small national/international departure tax (US50¢) after purchasing your ticket.

Tickets can be purchased from the English-speaking **Forest Tours** (☎ 337-2042; www.forestbolivia.com; Cuéllar 22), which also offers excellent tours around the region.

A *mixto* train also runs to Yacuiba (on the Argentine border; Pullman/1st-class US\$10.50/4.70, 18 hours) departing at 3:30pm on Monday and Wednesday.

AROUND SANTA CRUZ

Samaipata

☎ 03 / pop 3000

The beautiful village of Samaipata (1650m) is set amid the stunning wilderness surrounds of the Cordillera Oriental. It's a popular weekend destination (especially for partying visitors from Santa Cruz) and the perfect base to chill, hike or explore the numerous sights. Get in early – it's set to become one of *the* places to visit in Bolivia.

INFORMATION

See the town's promotional website, www.samaipata.info.

Sernap has a new office 1km outside of town on the road to Santa Cruz.

Note: there is no ATM in town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Samaipata is a good launching point for **Parque Nacional Amboró**. Highlights include the **Pajcha waterfalls**, giant ferns and the **Cueva Mataral**

THE DEATH TRAIN

El '*tren de la muerte*,' or the Death Train, travels from Santa Cruz to Quijarro, on the Brazilian border. Numerous theories abound as to how it – the *Expreso Oriental* or the *Regional (mixto)* – derived this dark name. The most obvious is that it sums up the trip itself: a bone-jarring, back-breaking journey as the train chugs through soy plantations and scrub to the steamy Pantanal on the Brazilian border. After several hours – despite the magnificent scenery – you'll want to throw yourself onto the rails. Then there are the long delays in swampy areas – bring plenty of food, water and mosquito repellent, and dress warmly in winter season. The more likely interpretation of the name relates to former accidents (especially in the '80s). Locals stored large quantities of contraband goods inside the carriages; they themselves preferred to sit on the roof of the train. Occasionally, an unfortunate soul or three toppled over the edge, especially when the overlaid train derailed, which it did with regularity.

GETTING TO BRAZIL

From Quijarro, taxis shuttle passengers to the Brazilian border town of Corumbá, 2km away. You can change dollars or bolivianos into *reais* (pronounced *hay-ice*) on the Bolivian side, but the boliviano rate is poor. Note that there's no Brazilian consulate in Quijarro, so if you need a visa, get it in Santa Cruz. Bolivian officials may demand a bribe for an exit stamp at Quijarro. From Corumbá there are good bus connections into southern Brazil, but no passenger trains.

Coming from the border the bus runs to Rua Frei Mariano and the local bus terminal on Rua 13 do Junho.

You won't be allowed to enter Brazil without a yellow-fever vaccination certificate: there's a medical van at the border.

For information on travel from Brazil to Bolivia, see p337.

cave paintings. Forays to the site of **Ché's last stand** near Vallegrande are also possible. Many rare bird species are in the area and there is a **condor sanctuary** nearby.

The pre-Inca site of **El Fuerte** (admission US\$4; ☎ 8:30-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 8:30am-4pm Sun), is on a hilltop 10km southeast of town. Hitching from the village is easiest on weekends, but it also makes a fine day-long walk. Taxis for the round-trip, including a one-, two-, or three-hour stop at the ruins, cost around US\$6/7.40/8.65 for up to four people. The ticket for the ruins is also valid for admission to the small **archaeological museum** (☎ 8:30am-12:30pm & 2-6pm) in town.

The following agencies organize trips in the area, including El Fuerte, Amoro National Park, cave paintings, the waterfalls and the condor and Ché Guevara routes (US\$10 to US\$50 per person per day). The highly recommended biologist **Michael Blendinger** (☎ /fax 944-6227; www.discoveringbolivia.com; Bolívar s/n, in front of museum) also does birding tours (in English and German) and specialises in tours to the southern Amoro. Others include the friendly German- and English-speaking Frank and Olaf at **Roadrunners** (☎ 03-944-6294; theroadrunners@hotmail.com); **Bolviajes** (at La Vispera; www.lavispera.org); and **Amoro Tours** (☎ 03-944-6293; erickamoro@yahoo.com) which also rents bikes Spanish-speaking Samaipata native **Don Gilberto** (☎ 03-944-6050) lived inside what is now the national park for many years. For further information see the town's promotional website, www.samaipata.info.

The **FAN office** (www.fan-bo.org; cnr Sucre & Murillo) can arrange trips to the community of La Yunga at the edge of the park.

SLEEPING

Mama Pasquala's (campsites per person by donation; entrance US\$15¢) The basic camping at this secluded

spot, 500m upstream from the river ford en route to El Fuerte, is a deal.

Residencial Chelo (☎ 944-6014; Sucre s/n; r per person from US\$2.50) A basic but adequate place just off the plaza.

Residencial Kim (☎ 944-6161; r per person US\$3, with bathroom s/d US\$3.70/6) A quiet, clean and sunny place (with a penchant for eighties music) just north of the plaza.

Hotel Paola (☎ 944-6903; southwest cnr of plaza; r per person US\$3) The lovely terrace overlooking the plaza makes up for the shortcomings of this messy family-run place. The rooms are OK, and there's a shared kitchen.

Finca La Vispera (☎ /fax 944-6082; www.lavispera.org; camping per person with own tent US\$4, without tent US\$5, guesthouse per person US\$10-18) Fifteen minutes on foot southwest of the plaza is this lovely organic oasis: there's grassy camping, firm beds in the 'backpacker's house,' and charming self-contained guesthouses. The owners rent horses and organize Amoro treks.

Palacio del Ajedrez (Chess Club; ☎ 944-6196; paulin-chess@cotas.com.bo; Bolívar s/n; r per person US\$5, s/d with bathroom US\$8/13) Rooms with good beds and it's a great place to pick up a game of chess with Bolivian junior champions. Next to the archaeology museum.

Land-haus (☎ 944-6033; cabin per person US\$10; ☎) After a morning's hike, relax by the pool in this beautiful garden. Lovely cabins and rooming options.

At Km 100, Las Cuevas is another recommended camping spot with good swimming.

EATING

La Vaca Loca (snacks US\$60¢-\$3.20) 'Mad cow' is possibly not the best choice of name; anyway, this handy place serves better cakes than it does meaty mains. It's on the south side of the plaza.

Latina Café (mains US\$2-3.70) A cozy place to hang out. Good selection and even better views.

Landhaus (mains US\$2.70-6; ☑ dinner Thu-Sun) For gourmet (slightly pricier) fare, try this place near the northern end of town.

Descanso en las Alturas (mains US\$2.50-6.50) Roll from the Mosquito Bar (also a must) onto the massive terrace of this eatery to indulge in pizzas and meats.

La Chakana (Southern Cross) This European-owned place on the west side of the plaza is the main gringo hangout. It has vegetarian options, omelets and pancakes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Four-passenger Expreso Samaipata Taxis (US\$3.20 per person, 2½ hours) leave Santa Cruz for Samaipata when full from the corner of Av Omar Chávez Ortiz and Solis de Olguin. Alternatively, a small bus departs from Av Grigotá at the third *anillo* at 4pm daily (US\$2, three hours). From Samaipata, **shared taxis** (☎ 944-6133/6016) depart for Santa Cruz from the gas station on the highway (US\$12 per cab). *Micros* leave from the plaza daily around 4:30am and between noon and 3pm on Sunday.

Parque Nacional Amboró

This extraordinary park crosses two 'divides': the warmer northern Amazonian-type section, and the southern Yungas-type section, with cooler temperatures (and fewer mosquitoes!). The village of Buena Vista, two hours (100km) northwest of Santa Cruz, is a staging point for trips into the spectacular forested northern lowland section of Parque Nacional Amboró. For a park entry permit and cabin reservations visit Buena Vista's **Sernap office** (☎ 932-2054), two blocks south of the plaza. See p246 for recommended tour companies that visit the park.

There are several places to sleep and eat, and camping is also possible in the park. Try the basic **Residencial Nadia** (☎ 932-2049), where the owner is a good source of park information. For food, Los Franceses has a savory menu and a jovial *très*-French owner.

Jesuit Mission Circuit

From the late 17th century, Jesuits established settlements called *reducciones* in Bolivia's eastern lowlands, building churches, establishing farms and instructing the Indians in religion, agriculture, music and crafts in

return for conversion and manual labor. A circuit north and east of Santa Cruz takes in some mission sites, with buildings in various stages of reconstruction or decay. (Get in now before mass tourism takes over!) Santa Cruz and Samaipata agencies organize tours, or you can do it on your own (allow time). Basic food and lodging are available in most of the towns. Heading clockwise from Santa Cruz are the following:

San Ramón Noteworthy only as a transport junction.

San Javier The oldest mission (1692), recently and sympathetically restored.

Concepción An attractive town with a gaudy restored 1756 church.

San Ignacio de Velasco Much less attractive but still worth a stop, with an elaborate mission and church (1748) demolished in 1948.

San Miguel A sleepy town with a beautiful church (1721) that has been painstakingly restored.

Santa Ana A tiny village with a rustic 1755 church.

San Rafael The 1740s church is noted for its fine interior.

San José de Chiquitos Has an impressive 1748 stone church situated in a complex of mission buildings.

You can take the Santa Cruz–Quijarro train to San José first and then proceed counterclockwise. You can also take buses to San Ignacio, visit the villages south of there as an excursion, skip San José and return by bus from San Ignacio or continue to Brazil. Renting a car in Santa Cruz is another option, affordable between a few people.

Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado

The remote Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado lies in the northernmost reaches of Santa Cruz department. Not only is it one of South America's most spectacular parks, but it also takes in a range of dwindling habitats of world-class ecological significance. Its 1.5 million hectares encompasses rivers, waterfalls, rainforests, plateaus and rugged 500m escarpments. On top of this, there's an awe-inspiring variety of Amazonian flora and fauna.

THE AMAZON BASIN

Bolivia's slice of the magical Amazon Basin encompasses over half of the country's entire territory and is a prime place to experience pristine rainforest and savanna lands. The Amazon includes some of the best-known national parks and reserves, including the incred-

DON'T PAT THE PIRAÑAS!

'Ecofriendly' operators of pampas and jungle tours are increasing faster than mosquito larvae. Unfortunately, many of these undercut the official prices and, despite claiming to be ecofriendly, don't seem to practice what they preach, especially regarding the removal of inorganic waste from campsites, and handling of animals. As much as it's great to see the Amazonian animals, bear in mind that spotting caiman, anaconda, pirañas and the like is a privilege and not a 'right.' Operators and guides should not promise animal sightings (this encourages their unethical capture), are not supposed go looking for wildlife and should under no circumstances feed or handle any animals. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. One reader states: 'ecofriendly-wise, our operator was pretty awful – grabbing hold of anacondas when they found them and capturing baby caimans to show us. We heard of one adult caiman that was captured and in a panic, bit off its own tail.'

Your demands can put the 'friendly' back into the 'eco.' In short, your choice is vital to the ongoing protection of this wilderness area.

ible Parque Nacional Madidi (p253). But the Amazonian paradise is not without its problems: much of the area is heavily populated and degraded through logging and mining. There has been an influx of highland settlers and an upsurge in slash-and-burn agriculture. In the lowland areas, around Trinidad, cattle ranching exists on a large scale.

Boat trips provide a wonderful chance to view life from the water. Be aware that cargo vessels that ply the northern rivers lack scheduled services or passenger comforts – monotonous menus, river water and no cabins are de rigueur. Throw in a hammock or a sleeping bag. Other necessities are snacks, a water container, water-purification tablets, antimalarials and mosquito protection. The most popular river routes are Puerto Villarroel to Trinidad on the Río Ichilo and Trinidad to Guayaramerín on the Río Mamoré. Tour agencies offer comfortable river trips focused on wildlife-watching.

Towns with air services include Cobija, Guayaramerín, Reyes, Riberalta, Rurrenabaque, San Borja and Trinidad, but flights are often delayed or canceled, especially during the rainy season.

RURRENABAQUE

☎ 03 / pop 13,000

The bustling and friendly frontier town of 'Rurre' (elevation 105m) is Bolivia's most beautiful lowland settlement. The town thrives on tourism: travelers head up the Río Bení to visit the surrounding lush jungle and the savannalike grasslands, or to the stunningly precious Madidi National Park and its ecolodges. Hammocks are a way of life and relaxing in

one is part of an otherwise hot, humid (and occasionally mosquito-infested) visit.

Information

Some tour agencies change traveler's checks (4% to 5% commission). Tours can usually be paid for with credit cards, and *simpático* bars, agencies and hotels may be willing to facilitate cash advances. Podem Bank will give Visa and MasterCard cash advances.

PN Madidi/Sernap Office (☎ 892-2540) Across the river at San Buenaventura. Has information on the park; independent visitors must pay a US\$10 entrance fee.

Cactri (Santa Cruz) Cash dollars can be changed here, next to Bala Tours.

Camila's (Santa Cruz s/n; per hr US\$2.20) Pricey internet service.

Immigration (☎ 892-2241; Plaza 2 de Febrero) Extend your stay here. It's on the plaza's northeast corner.

Laundry Service Rurrenabaque (Vaca Diez) Recommended. Same-day laundry service (US\$1.20 per kg).

Municipal tourist office (cnr Vaca Diez & Avaroa)

Number One (Avaroa) Around the corner from Laundry Service Rurrenabaque. Same-day laundry service (US\$1.20 per kg).

Punto Entel (cnr Santa Cruz & Comercio) For telephone calls.

Sights & Activities

You can relax in Rurre's glorious **Balenario El Ambaibo** (swimming pool; Santa Cruz; admission US\$2). Just south of town, a short uphill trek away, there's a **mirador**.

Tours**JUNGLE & PAMPAS**

Jungle and pampas tours are Rurre's bread and butter. Operators are as common as mos-

quitos. To choose an operator, the best bet is to speak to other travelers who've returned from trips – some operators are less than impressive. There are two main types of tours: jungle and pampas.

Jungle tours typically include a motorized canoe trip up the Beni and Tuichi rivers, with camping and rainforest treks along the way. Basic huts or shelters (with mosquito nets) are the main form of accommodation. (Note: rain, mud and insects can make the wet season – especially January to March – unpleasant for some jungle tours.)

If you're more interested in watching wildlife, opt for a pampas tour, which visits the wetland savannas northeast of town. They include rewarding guided walks and

daytime and evening animal-viewing boat trips.

Jungle and pampas tours officially cost US\$30 per person per day, including transport, guides and food. These are great trips, but the guides' (often poor) treatment of the wildlife depends upon travelers' demands. In short, animals should not be fed, disturbed or handled. Stock up on bottled water and insect repellent. Ask to see the guide's *autorización* (license). The best guides can provide insight on the fauna, flora, indigenous people and forest lore without pushing the boundaries. Most agencies have offices on Avaroa. Recommended agencies:

Fluvial Tours/Amazonia Adventures (☎ 892-2372; Avaroa s/n) At Hotel Tuichi. The longest-running agency.

BOLIVIA

RURRENABAQUE

0 ————— 600 m
0 ————— 0.4 miles

To Airport (2km)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Balenario El Ambaibo.....5 B3
- Swimming Pool).....7 B2
- Chalalán Ec lodge Office.....6 A3
- Fluvial Tours/Amazon Adventures.....(see 18)
- Indigena Tours.....7 B2
- Madidi Travel.....8 A3
- Mapajo Lodge.....9 A3
- San Miguel del Bala Office.....10 B3

SLEEPING 🏠

- El Curichal Guesthouse.....11 A1
- Hostal América.....12 A3
- Hostal Beni.....13 A2
- Hostal Turístico Santa Ana.....14 B3
- Hotel Oriental.....15 A4
- Hotel Rurrenabaque.....16 B3
- Hotel Safari.....17 A1
- Hotel Tuichi.....18 B3
- Los Tucanes de Rurre.....19 B2
- Residencial Jislene.....20 A1

EATING 🍽️

- Cafe Piraná.....21 B3
- La Cabaña.....22 A3
- La Chocita.....23 A3
- La Perla de Rurre.....24 B3
- Mercado Municipal.....25 B2
- Micro Market.....26 B3
- Pizzeria Italia.....27 A3
- Playa Azul.....28 A3
- Restaurant Camila.....29 B3

INFORMATION

- Cactri.....(see 4)
- Camila's.....(see 29)
- Immigration.....1 B3
- Laundry Service Rurrenabaque.....(see 2)
- Municipal Tourist Office.....(see 31)
- Number One.....2 B3
- Podem Bank.....3 A3
- Punto Entel.....4 A3

DRINKING 🍷

- Jungle Bar Moskitto.....30 B3

TRANSPORT

- Amazonas.....31 B3
- Bus Terminal.....32 C1
- Ferries to/from San Buenaventura.....33 A3
- TAM.....34 A3

SPLURGE!

The Bolivian Amazonia's most notable community-based ecotourism project is Chalachán Ecolodge, fronting a wildlife-rich lake five hours up the Río Tuichi from Rurre. Since 1995 it has provided employment for the Tacana villagers of San José de Uchupiamonas and is often cited as a model for sustainable tourism, with the profits going directly back into the community. It's an awesome place, with an extensive trail system, excellent meals and night hikes. An all-inclusive three-day, two-night stay costs around US\$280 per person, minimum four people. For details, visit the office in **Rurrenabaque** (☎ 892-2419; www.chalalan.com in Spanish; Comercio btwn Vaca Diez & Campero) or contact America Tours (p189) in La Paz.

Indigena Tours (☎ 892-2091; indigenaecologico6@hotmail.com; Avaroa s/n)

COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM

Other outstanding alternatives are the community-run and community-based ethno-ecotourism projects. Most are based several hours upriver and offer all-inclusive (comfy individual cabañas, *simpático* guides, food) overnight visits to the local communities, and activities such as bow-and-arrow fishing and rainforest trekking. Projects include the following:

Madidi Travel (www.madidi-travel.com; per person per day US\$40-60) La Paz (☎ 02-245-0069; Jimenez 806); Rurrenabaque (☎ 892-2153; Comercial btwn Santa Cruz & Vaca Diez) Working within the private protected area of Serere. Volunteering opportunities available.

Mapajo Lodge (☎ 892-2317; www.mapajo.com; Santa Cruz btwn Avaroa & Comercio; per person per day US\$65) Overnight visits to the Mosestén Chimán communities.

San Miguel del Bala (☎ 892-2394; www.sanmigueldelbala.com; Av Comercio; per person per day US\$50-60) Opened at the end of 2005 and project of the Tacana community.

Inquire at the tourist office about day-long **Day for the Community tours** (tours US\$25), which visit four *altiplano* immigrant colonies and highlight alternative sustainable development efforts, including agroforestry, organic foods and *artesanía* (handicrafts) projects.

Sleeping

Hostal América (☎ 892-2413; Santa Cruz; r per person US\$2) This basic *hostal* is worthwhile only for its top-floor rooms, which afford a superb view of the river and the hills.

El Curichal Guesthouse (☎ 892-2647; elcurichal@hotmail.com; 1490 Comerico; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$4.30) It's worth the effort to swing by

this brand-new, spotless place, located behind the owner's house. And yes, swingin' hammocks, too.

Hotel Oriental (☎ 892-2401; Plaza 2 de Febrero; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$10) Another sedate, good-value place with garden hammocks. It's on the south side of the plaza.

Residencial Jislene (☎ 892-2552; Comercio; r per person from US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$3.70) The Caldera family's riverside 'retreat': a bit rough around the edges, but makes up what it lacks in creature comforts with hospitality. It's located near Beni.

Hotel Tuichi (☎ 892-2372; Avaroa s/n; dm US\$2.50, r per person US\$4-5) Classic, party-hearty backpackers haunt with plain, decent rooms in an unkempt yard.

Hostal Turístico Santa Ana (☎ 892-2399; Avaroa btwn Diez & Campero; r per person US\$3, s/d with bathroom US\$6/8.65) You'll be hard pushed to clamber out of the hammocks in this peaceful, leafy and clean place.

Hotel los Tucanes de Rurre (☎ 892-2039; tucanesderurre@hotmail.com; cnr Bolívar & Aniceto Arce; r US\$5, with shared bathroom US\$3) The eccentric Anna runs a neat ship, complete with the ubiquitous hammocks. Breakfast included.

Hotel Rurrenabaque (☎ 892-2481, in La Paz 02-279-5917; Vaca Diez; s/d incl breakfast US\$8/13.35, without bathroom US\$4.65/9) Friendly and far from the maddening late-night disco crowd. It has basic but clean rooms with fan and hammocks on a breezy balcony.

Other midrange places include the clean and recommended **Hostal Beni** (☎ 892-2408; Comercio at Arce; s/d US\$3/6.20, d with bathroom & TV US\$9; ☺), near the river; and **Hotel Safari** (☎ /fax 892-2210; s/d US\$25/34; ☺), in a pretty setting right on the river.

Eating & Drinking

The Mercado Municipal is full of good *comedores* and juice bars.

Several fish restaurants occupy shelters along the riverfront – they're all pretty good; try Playa Azul or La Chocita or La Cabaña.

Cafe Piraña (Santa Cruz; ☎ 7am-2pm) Relaxed joint with great vegetarian options. It's next to the Amazonas office.

Restaurant Camila (Santa Cruz s/n) A travelers hotspot with a full menu and massive jungle mural.

Pizzería Italia (Commercio s/n) Good you-know-what in a social indoor-outdoor setting.

Club Social (Commercio s/n; lunch US\$1.25, mains US\$3-5) A pleasant place to enjoy à la carte lunch or dinner, and cocktails from outdoor tables overlooking the river.

La Perla de Rurre (Bolívar s/n; fish dinners US\$3) Join the schools of fish-lovers at this raved-about place. Tasty fish dinners.

Jungle Bar Moskkito (Vaca Díez) Rurre doesn't see a lot of action, but this is an undisputed travelers' favorite. Happy hour runs 7pm to 9pm, and there are pool tables and good music. Great spot to form tour groups.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The number of flights to Rurre is increasing all the time, but they are often sold out. Note, too, they're often delayed or canceled in the rainy season for safety reasons: the planes cannot land or take off from muddy air strips. Have your tour agency purchase your return ticket in advance.

In theory, **TAM** (☎ 892-2398; Santa Cruz) has flights between La Paz and Rurre (US\$60) to changing schedules. **Amazonas** (☎ 892-2472; www.amazonas.com; Santa Cruz) attempts to fly to and from La Paz (US\$60) three to four times daily. The humble airport is a grassy landing strip a few kilometers north of town. Airport transport costs US\$4.30, whether by bus (which drops you in the center), packed taxi or, if you're traveling light, on the back of a motorcycle.

BOAT

Thanks to the new Guayaramerín road, there's little cargo transport down the Río Beni to Riberalta. Taxi ferries across to San Buenaventura (US15¢) sail frequently all day.

BUS

When the roads are dry, buses run daily between Rurrenabaque and La Paz (US\$6.20, 16 hours), but it's best to break the journey at Coroico, which is 'only' 14 hours from

Rurre; actually, you get off at Yolosa, 7km west of Coroico, where there's an *alojamiento* if you get stranded. Caranavi, with a couple of basic places to sleep and eat, is a less desirable stopover option and the transfer point for minibuses to Guanay (US\$2, 2½ hours).

Daily buses to Trinidad (US\$15, *bus cama* US\$17, 18 hours) go via Yucumo, San Borja and San Ignacio de Moxos when the road is clear. There are also daily buses to Riberalta (US\$15, 20 hours) and one to Guayaramerín (US\$17, 20 hours to three days!).

AROUND RURRENABAQUE Parque Nacional Madidi

The remarkable Río Madidi watershed features the greatest biodiversity of the earth's protected regions. The most ecologically sound section is protected by Parque Nacional Madidi (US\$10 entry), which encompasses a huge range of wildlife habitats, from torrid rainforests to Andean glaciers at 6000m. Researchers have observed over 1000 bird species – 10% of the world's known species.

The park's populated sections along the Río Tuichi remain *territorio comunitario original*, which allows indigenous people to continue with their traditional practices: hunting, fishing and utilizing other forest resources. So far, the Quechua, Araona and Tacana communities are coexisting successfully with the park.

Logging activity along the Tuichi and at the northern end of the park, however, is a major threat, with rogue timbermen still felling mahogany, cedar and other valuable trees. A proposed dam project has been slated for the Bala Gorge area for years, just upstream from Rurre, which would flood vast tracts of rainforest, destroy settlements and obliterate native flora and fauna. The kibosh appears to have been put on the dam, but a more pressing threat is the proposed road from Apolo to Ixiamas, which would bisect the park.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The most accessible and popular access point is Rurre. The easiest way to visit the park is a trip to Chalalán Ecodge (see opposite) or one of the ecotourism projects (see opposite). Those erring on the side of adventure can visit the park's fringes independently, but must register with the Sernap office (see p250) in San Buenaventura and must be accompanied by an authorized guide. Penetrating deeper into Madidi will depend on luck, patience and

the generosity of your hosts. Ixiamas-bound trucks, *micros* and buses depart daily from San Buenaventura for Tumupasa, 50km north of Rurre. From Tumupasa, it's a 30km trek through the forest to San José de Uchupiamonas. Travelers making this trip should be entirely self-sufficient. For a taste of just how wrong things can go, read *Return from Tuichi* (also published as *Heart of the Amazon*) by Yossi Ghinsberg.

TRINIDAD

☎ 03 / pop 80,000

There's more than meets the eye to 'Trini' (elevation 235m), Beni's capital. Founded on June 13, 1686, by Padre Cipriano Barace as La Santísima Trinidad (the Most Holy Trinity), it was southern Beni's second Jesuit mission. The town's open drains don't help its reputation as a backwater, but it's an enjoyably lazy town, and with a bit of effort there is plenty to do: from the mission route to the prehispanic route, featuring the unique system of water channels attributed to the *Moxeñas*.

There's a new Spanish-funded **ethno-archaeological museum** (admission US\$60¢; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6pm) at the university, 1.5km out of town. Motorbikes are not merely transport, but a pastime: for US\$1.20 per hour you can rent a bike and join the youth in their mechanical flirtations.

The lovely Ignaciano Indian village of **San Ignacio de Moxos** is 89km west of Trinidad. The annual **Fiesta del Santo Patrono de Moxos** (July 31) attracts revelers from around the country. Boat passages can be arranged at Puerto Almacén.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 462-4831) has lifted its game and has good brochures on surrounding sights and a town map. Enter through the Prefectura building. ATMs are near the main plaza.

Tours

Agencies arrange horse-riding trips, fishing and river outings, trekking, visits to local communities and bird-watching. Try **Moxos Turismo** (☎ 462-1141; turmoxos@sauce.entelnet.bo; 6 de Agosto 114) or **Paraíso Travel** (☎ 462-0692; paraíso@sauce.ben.entelnet.bo; 6 de Agosto 138).

Sleeping

Hostal Palmas (☎ 462-0182; La Paz 365; per person US\$3.70, with bathroom US\$6.50) Ask for a room up-

stairs; those downstairs don't have external windows.

Hotel Paulista (☎ 462-0018; cnr 6 de Agosto & Suárez; r per person US\$3.70) This basic but adequate hotel comes with its own shrine and US\$1 lunches.

Hostal Sirari (☎ 462-4472; Santa Cruz 538; s/d US\$8.65/15) Run by a house-proud mother-and-daughter team, this indoor-outdoor living space is the best-value option around. Ask the resident toucan.

Hotel Copacabana (☎ 462-2811; Villavicencio 627; s with air con US\$10-19, d with air-con US\$17-23) A friendly, good-value hotel with a range of prices. No-frills rooms US\$5.

Eating & Drinking

Trinidad is cattle country, so beef is bountiful. If budget is the priority, hit the Mercado Municipal, where for a pittance you can try the local specialty, *arroz con queso* (rice with cheese), plus shish kebabs, *yuca* (cassava), plantain and salad. There are several decent places around the plaza. Extravaganza and Palo Diablo are the places to party. Live music on weekends.

La Casona (east side of plaza) This welcoming place has sidewalk tables, good pizza and inexpensive *almuerzos*.

Restaurant Brasileiro (18 de Noviembre s/n) A help-yourself tasty extravaganza by the kilo (US\$4.30 per kilogram).

Club Social (plaza; almuerzos US\$1.20) These generous *almuerzos* are more than you can eat in the heat.

El Moro (Bolívar & Velasco) Feeling fishy? Drop anchor here.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The airport is northwest of town, a feasible half-hour walk from the center. Taxis charge around US\$2 per person, but if you don't have much luggage, a motorcycle taxi is only US90¢. **AeroCon** (☎ 462-4442; Vacadiez, cnr 18 de Noviembre) and **Amazonas** (☎ 852-3933; 18 de Noviembre 267) fly daily to Santa Cruz, Riberalta and Guayaramerín. **LAB** (☎ 462-1277; La Paz 322) flies to Cochabamba, and **TAM** (☎ 462-2363; Bolívar at Santa Cruz) has less frequent flights to all these destinations, plus La Paz.

BOAT

The closest ports are Puerto Almacén, on the Ibare, 8km southwest of town, and Puerto Barador, on the Río Mamoré 13km in the

GETTING TO BRAZIL

Frequent motorboats (around US\$90) link the two ports of Guayaramerín and Guajará-Mirim (Brazil). There are no restrictions entering Guajará-Mirim for a quick visit, but if you intend to travel further into Brazil, you must pick up an entry/exit stamp. A yellow-fever vaccination certificate is officially required to enter Brazil; have it handy in case of a 'spot (the tourist) check'.

For departure stamps from Bolivia head to the **Policia Federal in Bolivian immigration** (📞 8am-8pm) by the dock. For information on travel from Brazil to Bolivia, see p397.

same direction. (Note: at the time of research, the Río Mamoré was a lagoon due to drought conditions so boats were not departing from Puerto Barador.) Trucks charge around US\$1 to Puerto Almacén and US\$2 to Puerto Barador.

For boats heading north to Guayaramerín or south to Puerto Villarroel, inquire at *La Capitania*, the port office in Puerto Almacén. Speak to the captain for the boat schedule and ask around in the village for Lidia Flores Dorado, the Sub-Alcaldeza, who will confirm the boat captain's reliable reputation. The Guayaramerín run takes up to a week (larger boats do it in three to four days) and costs around US\$30 to US\$35, including food. To Puerto Villarroel, smaller boats take eight to 10 days.

BUS

The rambling bus terminal is on Rómulo Mendoza. *Flotas* depart nightly for Santa Cruz (normal/*cama* US\$3.70/7.40, 10 hours) and road conditions permitting, several companies head daily to Rurrenabaque (12 to 24 hours) via San Borja. In the dry season the daily Flota Copacabana beelines direct to La Paz (US\$24 *bus cama*, 30 hours). Frequent *micros* and *camionetas* run to San Ignacio de Moxos (US\$3.70, three to five hours) from the corner of Mamoré and 18 de Noviembre. There are also daily dry-season departures to Riberalta and Guayaramerín.

RIBERALTA

📞 03 / pop 76,000

You may not go nutty over Riberalta (elevation 115m), despite it being one of the major Brazil nut processors. As Bolivia's major northern frontier settlement, located on the Brazilian river border, the town's importance as a Río Beni port has faded since the opening of the La Paz road.

Riberalta is cursed with open drains, but otherwise it's a laid-back place. It's hammock heaven – in the paralyzing heat of the

day, both strenuous activity (and you) are suspended. Chilling in the Club Náutico's sparkling riverside pool (two blocks north of the plaza) is highly touted. On fine evenings backlit by Technicolor sunsets, the plaza buzzes with cruising motorcycles, while the anomalous cathedral stands watch.

There are a couple banks (but no ATM) and a reasonable internet place on the plaza.

Sleeping

Palace Hotel (📞 852-2680; Molina 79; r per person US\$2) The eccentric *señorita*, her knick-knacks and cabaña create the atmosphere. Basic but fun.

Residencial Los Reyes (📞 852-2615; General Sucre 393; r per person US\$2.50, with bathroom US\$3.70) Spotless, near the airport, good hammocks but no fans.

Residencial Las Palmeras (📞 852-2353; r-laspalmeras@hotmail.com; Nicolás Suarez 391; s/d US\$12.50/16.50, with air-con US\$23/25) the nearest thing to a B&B: a 'pretty and pink,' neat and clean, family-run suburban home.

Hotel Colonial (📞 852-3018; s/d US\$19-22.50/21-25, ste s/d/tr US\$30/33/35; 🚻) The town's upmarket option is this stunningly renovated colonial home, complete with antique furniture, delightful garden, and what else, hammocks. Near the plaza.

Eating

The market is the best place to cobble together a classic breakfast of *api*, juice and *empanadas*. There are several ice-cream places on the plaza.

Club Social (Dr Martínez; set lunches US\$1.20) Serves inexpensive set lunches.

Horno Camba (mains US\$1.30-2) Popular for lunch and dinner on the plaza near the cathedral.

La Parilla (Dr Martínez; mains US\$2.20) Meaty portions in every BBQ's meaty shape and form. Highly recommended by the locals.

La Cabaña de Tío Tom (Sucre; mains US\$2.20-2.70) A small veranda on the street is a pleasant setting for pleasant meals.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 15 minutes from the main plaza. **Amaszonas** (☎ 852-3933; Chuquisaca s/n), **TAM** (☎ 852-3924; Chuquisaca) and **AeroCon** (☎ 852-2870; Plaza Principal Acera Norte 469) have several flights a week to Trinidad. The companies connect to either La Paz, Santa Cruz or Cochabamba, plus a few per week to Cobija. TAM's 20-minute, four-times-a-week Riberalta to Guayara flight (US\$15) is surely one of Bolivia's cheapest thrills.

BOAT

Boats up the Río Beni to Rurrenabaque are rarer than jaguar, but sometimes run when the road becomes impassable in the wet season. If you do find something, budget on US\$100 per day (three people) for the five- to eight-day trip in an 'expreso.' For details, visit the port captain's office.

BUS & CAMIÓN

Several *flotas* run daily between Riberalta and Guayaramerín (US\$2.50, three hours), or you can wait at the *camión* stop on Av Héroes del Chaco. Daily *flotas* from Guayaramerín to Cobija, Rurrenabaque and La Paz stop at Riberalta en route. *Flotas* to Trinidad (US\$25) leave Monday to Thursday with two different companies.

GUAYARAMERÍN

☎ 03 / pop 40,444

The cheerful little town of Guayaramerín (elevation 130m) is Bolivia's back door to Brazil. It lies on the banks of the Río Mamoré. This frontier settlement thrives on legal and illegal trade with the Brazilian town of Guajará-Mirim, just across the river. A road links Guayaramerín to Riberalta, connecting south to Rurrenabaque and La Paz, and west to Cobija.

Information

Exchange US dollars at the Banco Mercantil, Hotel San Carlos (also does traveler's checks) or the *casa de cambio* on the plaza. There is internet on the plaza.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Litoral (☎ 855-3895; 25 de Mayo; r per person US\$3.20, without bathroom US\$2, tr with bathroom US\$6.20) Mellow and pleasant with a homely flavor.

Hotel Santa Ana (☎ 855-3900, 25 de Mayo 611; r per person US\$3.50, without bathroom US\$2.65) This quiet, shady hotel is an attractive choice.

Hotel San Carlos (☎ 855-3555; 6 de Agosto; r per person US\$20) This clean and modern option resembles a '70s-style tile factory, such are the range of decorative ceramics. It even has a pool with a '70s slide...if there's water.

On the plaza, both Snack Antonella and Restaurant Los Bibosis serve yummy juices and snacks. Restaurant Brasileiro off the plaza has a US\$2 all you can eat.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Amaszonas (☎ 855-3731; Federico Román) and **AeroCon** (☎ 855-3882; Oruro s/n) both have daily flights from/to Guayaramerín–Riberalta–Trinidad–Santa Cruz (US\$134). **AeroSur** (☎ 855-3731) serves Cobija a couple times a week. **TAM** (☎ 855-3924) flies twice a week from La Paz to Riberalta and Guayaramerín, twice a week to Trinidad and once a week to Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

BOAT

Boats up the Río Mamoré to Trinidad leave almost daily (around US\$25 with food). Speak to the port captain. Fishing trips may be possible.

BUS & TAXI

The bus terminal is at the western end of town, beyond the market. Buses go to Riberalta (US\$2.50, three hours) several times daily. Shared taxis to Riberalta (US\$3.70, two hours) leave from the terminal when they have four passengers. In the dry season, several foolhardy *flotas* head out daily for Rurrenabaque (US\$18, 14 to 36 hours) and La Paz (US\$23, 30 to 60 hours). There are five buses weekly to Cobija (US\$13, 13 hours) and seven to Trinidad (US\$23, 24 hours).

BOLIVIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Bolivian accommodations are among South America's cheapest, though price and value are hardly uniform. Prices in this chapter reflect standard, high-season rates; rates can double during fiestas. Negotiate during slow times; a three-night stay may net you a deal. Room availability is only a problem during fiestas (especially Carnaval in Oruro) and at popular weekend getaway destinations (eg Coroico).

The Bolivian hotel-rating system divides accommodations into *posadas*, *alojamientos*,

residenciales, *casas de huéspedes*, *hostales* and *hoteles*. This rating system reflects the price scale and, to some extent, the quality.

Posadas are the cheapest roof and bed available. They're frequented mainly by *campesinos* visiting the city, cost between US\$1 and US\$2 per person and provide minimal cleanliness and comfort. Shared bathrooms are stinky, some have no showers and hot water is unknown.

A step up are *alojamientos*, which are marginally better and cost slightly more, but are still pretty basic. Bathing facilities are almost always communal, but you may find a hot shower. Some are clean and tidy, while others are disgustingly seedy. Prices range from US\$1.25 to US\$5 per person.

Quality varies at *residenciales*, *casas de huéspedes* and *hostales*. Most are acceptable, and you'll often have a choice between shared or private bathroom. Plan on US\$5 to US\$20 for a double with a private bathroom, about 30% less without. Bolivia also has plenty of midrange places and five-star luxury resorts when you're ready for a splurge.

In this chapter, we assume that *residenciales* and *casas de huéspedes* (and some *hostales*, depending on the city) have shared bathroom facilities, while hotel rooms come with separate bathroom.

Hostelling International (HI; www.hostellingbolivia.org) is affiliated with eight or so accommodations around the country. Atypical of 'hostelling' networks in other countries, members range from two-star hotels to camping grounds, but few offer traditional dorm beds or amenities like shared kitchens. HI membership cards may be for sale at HI Sucre Hostel, the flagship hostel in Sucre, or at Valmar Tours in La Paz.

Bolivia offers excellent camping, especially along trekking routes and in remote mountain areas. Gear can be rented in La Paz and popular trekking towns like Sorata. There are few organized campsites, but you can pitch a tent almost anywhere outside populated centers. Remember, however, that highland nights are often freezing. Theft from campers is reported in some areas; inquire locally about security.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking, trekking and mountaineering (see p264) in and around the Andes top the to-do list; opt for camping or fishing if you're feeling

lazy. The most popular treks (see p203) begin near La Paz, traverse the Cordillera Real along ancient Inca routes and end in the Yungas. Jungle treks (see p250) are all the rage around Rurrenabaque.

An increasing number of La Paz agencies organize technical climbs and expeditions into the Cordillera Real and to Volcán Sajama (6542m), Bolivia's highest peak.

Mountain biking (p193) options around La Paz are endless. Kayaking and white-water rafting are gaining popularity near Coroico and in the Chapare (in the lowlands around Cochabamba).

Countrywide, Bolivians are loco for karaoke, racquetball, billiards, chess, *cacho* and *fútbol*.

BOOKS

For in-depth coverage, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Bolivia*.

If walking is on your itinerary, add LP's *Trekking in the Central Andes*, or *Trekking in Bolivia*, by Yossi Brain, to your kit. *Bolivian Andes*, by Alain Mesili, is a must for madcap mountaineers.

For a good synopsis of Bolivian history, politics and culture, check out *Bolivia in Focus*, by Paul van Lindert. If you'll be in-country for the long haul, pick up *Culture Shock! Bolivia*, by Mark Cramer. Another fascinating read is *Marching Powder*, by Rusty Young, an account of life in La Paz' San Pedro Prison. *The Fat Man from La Paz: Contemporary Fiction from Bolivia*, a collection of 20 short stories edited by Rosario Santos, makes great roadside reading.

English-, German- and French-language publications are available at Los Amigos del Libro in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The books are pricey. There's an ample selection of popular novels, Latin American literature, dictionaries and coffee-table books.

Bibliophiles rejoice: used-book outlets and dog-eared book exchanges are now commonplace along the Bolivian part of the gringo trail.

BUSINESS HOURS

Few businesses open before 9am, though markets stir awake as early as 6am. Cities virtually shut down between noon and 2pm, except markets and restaurants serving lunch-hour crowds. Most businesses remain open until 8pm or 9pm. If you have urgent business to

attend to, don't wait until the weekend as most offices will be closed.

CLIMATE

Bolivia has a wide range of altitude-affected climatic patterns. Within its frontiers, every climatic zone can be found, from stifling rain-forest heat to arctic cold.

Adventurers will likely encounter just about every climatic zone, no matter when they visit. Summer (November to April) is the rainy season. The most popular, and arguably most comfortable, time to visit is during the dry winter season (May to October).

The high season is from June to September, and the low season runs from October to May.

The rainy season lasts from November to March or April (summer). Of the major cities, only Potosí receives regular snowfall (between February and April), though flakes are possible in Oruro and La Paz toward the end of the rainy season. On the *altiplano* and in the highlands, subzero nighttime temperatures are frequent.

Winter in Cochabamba, Sucre and Tarija is a time of clear skies and optimum temperatures. The Amazon Basin is always hot and wet, with the drier period falling between May and October. The Yungas region is cooler but fairly damp year-round.

For more information and climate charts, see p1062).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Sadly, Bolivia no longer lives up to its reputation as one of the safest South American countries for travelers. Crime against tourists is on the increase, especially in La Paz and, to a lesser extent, Cochabamba, Copacabana and Oruro (especially during festival times). Scams are commonplace and fake police, false tourist police and 'helpful' tourists are on the rise. Be aware, too, of circulating counterfeit banknotes. (See p189 for a detailed rundown of *en vogue* cons.)

There is a strong tradition of social protest: demonstrations are a weekly occurrence and this can affect travelers. These are usually peaceful, but police occasionally use force and tear gas to disperse crowds. *Bloqueos* (roadblocks) and strikes by transportation workers often lead to long delays.

The rainy season means flooding, landslides and road washouts, which means more delays. Getting stuck overnight behind a slide can

happen: you'll be a happier camper with ample food, drink and warm clothes on hand.

Emergencies

Emergency service numbers in major cities:

Ambulance (☎ 118)

Fire department (☎ 119)

Police (RadioPatrol; ☎ 110)

Tourist Police (☎ 02-222-5016)

DRIVER'S LICENSE

Most car-rental agencies will accept a home driver's license, but it's wise to back it up with an International Driver's License. (The more official papers in this official-paper-loving country, the better!)

ELECTRICITY

Electricity operates on 220V at 50Hz. US-type plugs are used throughout Bolivia.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

See relevant city and town maps for the position of embassies and consulates.

Embassies & Consulates in Bolivia

Argentina Cochabamba (☎ 04-422-9347; Blanco 0-929); La Paz (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-241-7737; Aspiazu 497); Santa Cruz (Map pp242-3; ☎ 03-334-7133; Junín 22); Tarija (Map p223; Ballivian N-699; ☎ 8:30am-12:30pm Mon-Fri); Villazón (Map p226; Saavedra 311; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) The Santa Cruz branch is above Banco de la Nación Argentina facing Plaza 24 de Septiembre. The Tarija branch issues visas and entry stamps.

Australia (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-243 3241; Aspiazu 416, La Paz)

Brazil Cochabamba (Map pp228-9; ☎ 04-425-5860; Edificio Los Tiempos II, 9th fl); Guayaramerín (☎ /fax 03-855-3766; cnr Beni & 24 de Septiembre; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri); La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-244-0202; embajadabrasil@acelerate.com; cnr Av Ancieto Arce & Gutierrez, Edificio Multicentro); Santa Cruz (Map pp242-3; ☎ 03-334-4400; Av Busch 330)

Canada (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-241-5021; lapaz@international.gc.ca; Sanjinéz 2678, Edificio Barcelona, 2nd fl, La Paz)

Chile La Paz (☎ 02-279-7331; Calle 14, Calacoto); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-343-4272; 5 Oeste 224, Barrio Equipetrol) Northwest of the city center.

Colombia (☎ 02-278-6841; 9 No 7835, Calacoto, La Paz)

Ecuador (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-231-9739; Av 16 de Julio s/n, Edificio Herrmann, 14th fl, La Paz)

France La Paz (☎ 02-278-6114; cnr Siles 5390 & Calle 8, Obrajes); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-343-3434; 3rd Anillo btwn San Martin & Radial, 23)

Germany Cochabamba (☎ 04-425-4024; Edificio La Promontora, 6th fl); La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-244-0066, 1133/66; www.embajada-alemana-bolivia.org; Av Ancieto Arce 2395); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-336-7585; Nuflo de Chavez 241); Tarija (Map p223; ☎ 04-664-2062; Campero 321)

Italy La Paz (☎ 02-243-4955; 6 de Agosto 2575 btwn P Salazar & Pinilla); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-353-1796; El Trompillo, Edificio Honnen, 1st fl)

Netherlands La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-244-4040; Av 6 de Agosto 2455, Edificio Hilda, 7th fl); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-358-1866; Aguilera 300, 3rd Anillo); Cochabamba (☎ 04-525-7362; Av Oquendo 654)

Paraguay Cochabamba (☎ 04-458-1081; Edificio America, Av Ayacucho, btwn Santivañez & General Acha); La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-243-3176; cnr Av 6 de Agosto & P Salazar, Edificio Illimani)

Peru Cochabamba (☎ 04-4486-556; Edificio Continental, Av Santa Cruz); La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-244-0631; Av 6 de Agosto 2455, Edificio Hilda); Santa Cruz (☎ 03-336-8979; Edificio Oriente, 2nd fl)

Spain (☎ 02-243-0118; Av 6 de Agosto 2827, La Paz)

UK (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-243-3424; www.embassyofbolivia.co.uk; Av Ancieto Arce 2732, La Paz)

USA Cochabamba (Map pp228-9; ☎ 04-425-6714; Oquendo E-654, Torres Sofer, Rm 601); La Paz (Map pp186-7; ☎ 02-216-8216; lapaz.usembassy.gov; Av Ancieto Arce 2780)

Bolivian Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Bolivia has diplomatic representation in most South American countries and also in the following countries:

Australia (☎ 02-9247 4235; Suite 305, 4 Bridge St, Sydney)

Canada (☎ 613-236-5730; www.boliviaembassy.ca; 130 Albert St, Suite 416, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5G4)

France (☎ 01 42 24 93 44; embolivia.paris@wanadoo.fr; 12 Ave du President Kennedy, F-75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030 2639 150; www.bolivia.de; Wichmannstr 6, PLZ-10787 Berlin)

UK (☎ 020-7235 4248/2257; www.embassyofbolivia.co.uk; 106 Eaton Sq, London SW1W 9AD)

USA (☎ 202-483-4410, 202-328-3712; 3014 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, 20008)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bolivian fiestas are invariably of religious or political origin and typically include lots of music, drinking, eating, dancing, processions, rituals and general unrestrained behavior. Water balloons (gringos are sought-after targets!) and fireworks (all too often at eye-level) figure prominently.

Alasitas (Festival of Abundance) January 24. Best in La Paz and Copacabana.

Fiesta de la Virgen de Candelaria (Feast of the Virgin of Candelaria) First week in February. Best in Copacabana.

Carnaval Held in February/March; dates vary. All hell breaks loose in Oruro during la Diablada.

Semana Santa (Easter Week) March/April; dates vary.

Fiesta de la Cruz (Festival of the Cross) May 3.

May or may not have anything to do with the cross Jesus hung on.

Corpus Christi May; dates vary.

Fiesta de la Virgen de Urcupiña (Festival of the Virgin of Urcupiña) August 15 to 18. Best in Quillacollo.

FOOD & DRINK Bolivian Cuisine

Generally, Bolivian food is palatable, filling and ho-hum. Figuring prominently, potatoes come in dozens of varieties, most of them small and colorful. *Chuño* or *tunta* (freeze-dried potatoes) often accompany meals and are gnarled looking and tasting, though some people love them. In the lowlands, the potato is replaced by *yuca* (cassava).

Beef, chicken and fish are the most common proteins. Campesinos eat *cordero* (mutton), *cabrito* (goat), llama and, on special occasions, *carne de chancho* (pork). The most common *altiplano* fish is *trucha* (trout), which is farmed in Lake Titicaca. The lowlands have a great variety of freshwater fish, including *sábalo*, *dorado* and the delicious *surubí* (catfish). Pizza, fried chicken, hamburgers and *chifas* (Chinese restaurants) provide some variety.

The tastiest Bolivian snack is the *salteña*. These delicious meat and vegetable pasties originated in Salta, Argentina, but achieved perfection in Bolivia. They come stuffed with beef or chicken, olives, egg, potato, onion, peas, carrots and other surprises – watch the squirting juice. *Empanadas*, pillows of dough lined with cheese and deep fried, are toothsome early morning market treats.

Standard meals are *desayuno* (breakfast), *almuerzo* (lunch; the word normally refers to a set meal served at midday) and *cena* (dinner). For *almuerzo*, restaurants – from backstreet cubbyholes to classy establishments – offer bargain set meals consisting of soup, a main course and coffee or tea. In some places, a salad and simple dessert are included. *Almuerzos* cost roughly half the price of à la carte dishes: less than US\$1 to US\$5, depending

on the class of restaurant. Reliable market *comedores* (basic eateries) and street stalls are always the cheapest option.

Some popular Bolivian set-meal standbys include the following:

Chairo Lamb or mutton stew with potatoes, *chuño* and other vegetables.

Fricasé Stew of various meats with ground corn.

Milanesa Breaded and fried beef or chicken cutlets.

Pacumutu Grilled beef (or sometimes fried chicken) chunks.

Pique a lo macho Heap of chopped beef, hot dogs and French fries topped with onions, tomatoes and whatever else.

Saice Spicy meat broth.

Sajta Chicken served in hot pepper sauce.

Silpancho Thinly pounded beef schnitzel.

Drinks

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Bolivia's wine region is centered around Tarija. The best label is La Concepción's Cepas de Altura (from the world's highest vineyards). The same winery also produces *singani*, a powerful spirit obtained by distilling grape skins and other by-products. The most popular cocktail is *chufly*, a refreshing blend of *singani*, 7-Up (or ginger ale), ice and lemon.

Bolivian beers aren't bad either; popular brands include Huari, Paceaña, Sureña and Potosina. Beer is ridiculously fizzy at the higher altitudes, where it can be difficult to get the brew from under the foam.

The favorite alcoholic drink of the masses is *chicha cochabambina*, a fermented corn brew. It is made all over Bolivia, especially in the Cochabamba region. Other versions of *chicha*, often nonalcoholic, are made from sweet potato, peanuts, cassava and other fruits and vegetables.

NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Beyond the usual coffee, tea and hot chocolate, *mate de coca* (coca leaf tea) is the most common boiled drink. *Api*, a supersweet, hot drink made of maize, lemon and cinnamon, is served in markets; look for *mezclado*, mixed yellow and purple *api*. Major cola brands are available and popular. Don't miss *licuados*, addictive fruit shakes blended with milk or water. Be sure to request the *yapa* or *aumento*: the second serving remaining in the blender. *Zumos* are pure fruit and vegetable juices. *Mocachinchi* is a ubiquitous market drink made from dried fruit and more sugar than water.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Naturally, homosexuality exists in Bolivia. In short, discretion is still in order – even in cities, people are conservative.

Although homosexuality is legal (though the constitution does prohibit same-sex marriages), the overwhelmingly Catholic society in Bolivia tends to both deny and suppress it. To be openly gay can limit social opportunities. Gay bars and venues are limited to the larger cities. Sharing a room in a hotel is no problem as long as you don't request a double bed.

Gay rights lobby groups are active in La Paz (MGLP Libertad), Cochabamba (Dignidad) and most visibly in progressive Santa Cruz. In June 2003 Santa Cruz organization La Comunidad Gay, Lésbica, Bisexual y Travestí (GLBT) replaced their fourth annual Marcha de Colores on Día del Orgullo Gay (Gay Pride Day, June 26) with a health fair called Ciudadanía Sexual in an effort to gain wider public acceptance. In La Paz, watch for flyers advertising drag performances by La Familia Galan, the capital's most fabulous group of cross-dressing queens.

HEALTH

Sanitation and hygiene are not Bolivia's strong suits, so pay attention to what you eat. Most tap water isn't safe to drink; stick to bottled water if your budget allows (your bowels will thank you). Carry iodine if you'll be trekking.

The *altiplano* lies between 3000m and 4000m, and many visitors to La Paz, Copacabana and Potosí will have problems with altitude sickness. Complications like cerebral edema have been the cause of death in otherwise fit, healthy travelers. Diabetics should note that only the Touch II blood glucose meter gives accurate readings at altitudes over 2000m.

Bolivia is officially in a yellow-fever zone, so a vaccination is recommended; it may be obligatory for onward travel (such as Brazil, which requires the certificate). Anyone coming from a yellow-fever infected area needs a vaccination certificate to enter Bolivia. Take precautions against malaria in the lowlands.

While medical facilities might not be exactly what you're used to back home, there are decent hospitals in the biggest cities and passable clinics in most towns (but *not* in remote

parts of the country). For more information on altitude sickness and other critical matters, see the Health chapter (p1090).

HOLIDAYS

On major holidays, banks, offices and other services are closed and public transport is often bursting at the seams; book ahead if possible.

Año Nuevo (New Year's Day) January 1.

Día del Trabajador (Labor Day) May 1; watch out for dynamite in plazas.

Días de la Independencia (Independence Days) August 5 to 7.

Día de la Raza (Columbus Day) October 12.

Día de Todos los Santos (All Souls' Day) November 2.

Navidad (Christmas Day) December 25.

Not about to be outdone by their neighbors, each department has its own holiday: February 22 in Oruro, April 1 in Potosí, April 15 in Tarija, May 25 in Chuquisaca, July 16 in La Paz, September 14 in Cochabamba, September 24 in Santa Cruz and Pando, and November 18 in Beni.

INTERNET ACCESS

Nearly every corner of Bolivia has a cybercafé. Rates run from US30¢ to US\$1.25 per hour. In smaller towns, check the local Entel office for access.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bolivia Web (www.boliviaweb.com) Makes a good starting point, with good cultural and artistic links.

Bolivia.com (www.bolivia.com in Spanish) Current news and cultural information.

Enlaces Bolivia (www.enlacesbolivia.net) Reasonable collection of up-to-date links.

LEGAL MATTERS

Regardless of its reputation as the major coca provider, drugs – including cocaine – are highly illegal in Bolivia, and possession and use brings a gaol sentence. Foreign embassies are normally powerless to help (or won't want to know!). In short, don't even think about it.

MAPS

Government topographical and specialty maps are available from the Instituto Geográfico Militar (IGM; see p185 for details). For Cordillera Real and Sajama trekking maps, the contour maps produced by Walter Guzmán are good. Good climbing maps

are published by the Deutscher Alpenverein and distributed internationally. The excellent *New Map of the Cordillera Real*, published by O'Brien Cartographics, is available at various travelers' hangouts. O'Brien also publishes the *Travel Map of Bolivia*, which is about the best country map. South American Explorers distribute the O'Brien maps, plus maps of major cities.

MEDIA Newspapers & Magazines

Major international English-language news magazines are sold at Amigos del Libro outlets. Bolivian towns with daily newspapers include Cochabamba, La Paz, Potosí and Sucre.

Radio

Bolivia has countless radio stations broadcasting in Spanish, Quechua and Aymara. Recommended listening in La Paz includes noncommercial FM96.5 for folk tunes and FM100.5 if you're after a good English-Spanish-language pop mix. In Cochabamba, Radio Latina at FM97.3 spins a lively mix of Andean folk, salsa and rock. For a good selection of recorded typical music, try **Bolivia Web Radio** (www.boliviaweb.com/radio).

TV

There are two government-run and several private TV stations. Cable (with CNN, ESPN and BBC) is available in most midrange and upmarket hotels.

MONEY

Bolivia's unit of currency is the boliviano (B\$), which is divided into 100 centavos. Bolivianos come in 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 denomination notes; the coins are worth 10, 20 and 50 centavos. Often called pesos (the currency was changed from pesos to bolivianos in 1987), bolivianos are extremely difficult to unload once you're outside the country. See also p20.

ATMs

Just about every sizable town has a *cajero automatico* (ATM). ATMs dispense bolivianos in 50 and 100 notes (sometimes US dollars as well) on Visa, Plus and Cirrus cards. Be aware that some British and European travelers have reported access problems with this system outside of larger cities.

Cash

Finding change for bills larger than US\$10 is a national pastime as change for larger notes seems to be scarce countrywide. When you're exchanging money or making big purchases, make sure you request small denominations. If you can stand waiting in the lines, most banks will break large bills.

Credit Cards

Brand-name credit cards, such as Visa, MasterCard and (less often) American Express, may be used in larger cities at better hotels, restaurants and tour agencies. Cash advances of up to US\$1000 per day are available on Visa (and less often MasterCard) with no commission from Banco de Santa Cruz, Banco Mercantil and Banco Nacional de Bolivia. Travel agencies in towns without ATMs will often provide cash advances for clients for 3% to 5% commission.

Exchanging Money

Visitors generally fare best with US dollars. Currency may be exchanged at *casas de cambio* and at some banks in larger cities. You can often change money in travel agencies. *Cambistas* (street money changers) operate in most cities but only change cash dollars, paying roughly the same as *casas de cambio*. They're convenient after hours, but guard against counterfeits. The rate for cash doesn't vary much from place to place and there is no black-market rate. Currencies of neighboring countries may be exchanged in border areas and at *casas de cambio* in La Paz. Beware of mangled notes; unless both halves of a repaired banknote bear identical serial numbers, the note is worthless.

Exchange rates at press time included the following:

Country	Unit		B\$ (boliviano)
Australia	A\$1	=	5.98
Canada	C\$1	=	7.09
euro zone	€1	=	10.07
Japan	¥100	=	6.71
New Zealand	NZ\$1	=	5.30
UK	UK£1	=	14.90
United States	US\$1	=	8.03

International Transfers

The fastest way to have money transferred from abroad is with Western Union. It has

offices in all major cities but charges hefty fees. Your bank can also wire money to a cooperating Bolivian bank for a smaller fee, but it may take a couple of business days.

Traveler's Checks

The rate for traveler's checks (1% to 3% commission) is best in La Paz, where it nearly equals the rate for cash; in other large cities it's 3% to 5% lower, and in smaller towns it's sometimes impossible to change checks at all. American Express is the most widely accepted.

POST

Even small towns have post offices; some are signposted Ecobol (Empresa Correos de Bolivia). The post is generally reliable from major towns, but when posting anything important, pay the additional US20¢ to have it certified.

Reliable free *lista de correos* (poste restante) is available in larger cities. Mail should be addressed to you c/o Poste Restante, Correo Central, La Paz (or whatever the city), Bolivia. Using only a first initial and capitalizing your entire last name will help to avoid any confusion. Mail is often sorted into foreign and Bolivian stacks, so those with Latin surnames should check the local stack.

A postcard costs from US45¢ to US\$1.15 depending on where you are sending it. A 2kg parcel will cost about US\$50 to the USA or US\$80 by air; to airmail it to Australia costs US\$150. Posting by sea is s-l-o-w but considerably cheaper.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Traveling responsibly in Bolivia is a constant struggle. Trash cans (and recycling bins) are few and far between and ecological sensitivity is a relatively new – but growing – concept. Nearly every tour operator in the country claims to practice 'ecotourism,' but don't take their word for it. The best thing to do is grill agencies about their practices and talk to returning travelers to see if their experiences match the propaganda.

On the level of personal behavior, there are several things you can do to leave minimal impact (or maximize your positive impact) on the country. If you're taking a jungle or pampas tour around Rurrenabaque, request that your guide does not catch or feed wildlife for the benefit of photo opportunities. Before visiting an indigenous community, ask if the guide is from the community or make sure

that the agency has permission to visit. On the Salar de Uyuni, encourage drivers to carry garbage and to follow existing tire tracks to minimize damage to the fragile salt flats. In the Beni, don't eat fish out of season and resist the urge to purchase handicrafts made from endangered rain-forest species.

When it comes to dealing with begging, think twice about indiscriminately handing out sweets, cigarettes or money. Instead, teach a game, share a photograph of family or friends, or make a donation (basic medical supplies, pens or notebooks) to an organization working to improve health, sanitation or education. If invited to someone's home for a meal, take something that won't undermine the local culture, such as a handful of coca leaves or fruit.

SHOPPING

Compact discs and cassettes of *peñas*, folk and pop music make good souvenirs. Cassettes, however, may be low-quality bootlegs; higher-quality CDs cost around US\$10. Selection is best in La Paz.

Traditional instruments (eg *charangos*, *zampoñas*) are sold widely throughout the country but avoid buying ones made from endangered armadillos.

Bolivian woven ware is also a good buy. Touristy places such as Calle Sagárnaga (La Paz) and Tarabuco (near Sucre) have the greatest selection, but may be more expensive than buying direct from a craftsperson. Prices vary widely with the age, quality, color and extent of the weaving: a new and simple *manta* might cost US\$20, while the finest antique examples will cost several hundred. Another good buy is alpaca goods, either finished or raw wool.

STUDYING

Sucre, Cochabamba and La Paz are all loaded with Spanish schools. Private lessons are starting to catch on in smaller retreats like Sorata and Samaipata. In bigger cities, it's also possible to find one-on-one music, weaving and other arts lessons. Instruction averages around US\$5 an hour.

TELEPHONE

Entel, the Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones, has telephone offices in nearly every town (as increasingly does Cotel, Viva and other competing companies), usually open 7am to late. Local calls cost just a few bo-

livianos from these offices. *Puntos* are small, privately-run outposts offering similar services. Street kiosks are often equipped with telephones that charge B\$1 for brief local calls.

One-digit area codes change by province: ☎ 2 for La Paz, Oruro and Potosí; ☎ 3 for Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando; and ☎ 4 for Cochabamba, Sucre and Tarija. When making a long distance call from a public telephone, you must dial a '0' before the codes. In this chapter, a 0 has already been added to the codes and these are presented – as two digits – at the start of each town section. Drop the initial code if you're calling within a province. If you're calling from abroad, drop the 0 from the code. If you're ringing a local mobile phone, dial the 8-digit number; if the mobile is from another city, you must first dial a three-digit carrier number. These range from 010 to 021.

Bolivia's country code is ☎ 591. The international direct-dialing access code is 00. Some Entel offices accept reverse-charge (collect) calls; others will give you the office's number and let you be called back. For reverse-charge calls from a private line, ring an international operator (beware that these calls are bank breakers):

Canada (☎ Teleglobe 800-10-0101)

UK (☎ BT 800-10-0044)

USA (☎ AT&T toll-free 800-10-1111, MCI 800-10-2222)

Calls from Entel offices are getting cheaper all the time to the USA (US60¢ per minute), more expensive to Europe (US\$1 per minute), Asia, Australia and Oceania (US\$1.50 per minute). Reduced rates take effect at night and on weekends. Much cheaper Net2Phone internet call centers, charging US15¢ a minute to the USA and less than US\$1 a minute to anywhere else in the world, are springing up in major cities.

TOILETS

Take your 'toilet humor' – stinky *baños públicos* (public toilets) abound. Learn to live with the fact that toilet facilities don't exist in many buses. Carry toilet paper with you wherever you go at all times! That, and learn to hold your breath.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The national tourist authority, the Vice-Ministerio de Turismo, has its head office in La Paz. It assists municipal and departmental

tourist offices. These are merely functional and, when open, distribute varying amounts of printed information.

TOURS

Tours are a convenient way to visit a site when you're short on time or motivation, and are frequently the easiest way to visit remote areas. They're also relatively cheap but the cost will depend on the number of people in your group. Popular organized tours include Tiahuanaco, Valle de la Luna, Uyuni, and excursions to remote attractions such as the Cordillera Apolobamba. Arrange organized tours in La Paz or the town closest to the attraction you wish to visit.

There are scores of outfits offering trekking, mountain-climbing and rain-forest adventure packages. For climbing in the Cordilleras, operators offer customized expeditions, including guides, transport, porters, cooks and equipment. Some also rent trekking equipment. Recommended La Paz-based agencies include the following:

America Tours (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-237-4204; www.america-ecotours.com; Av 16 de Julio 1490, Edificio Av, No 9) Highly recommended English-speaking agency specializing in community-based ecotourism: PN Madidi, PN Sajama, Rurrenabaque and the Salar de Uyuni.

Andean Summits (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-242-2106; www.andeansummits.com; Aranzaes 2974, Sopocachi) Mountaineering and trekking all over Bolivia, plus adventure tours and archaeology trips.

Colibri (Map pp190-1; ☎ 242-3246; Calle Manuel Caseres 1891; cnr Alberto Ostría) Offers comprehensive trekking, mountaineering, mountain biking, jungle trips and 4WD tours, and also rents gear. French and English spoken.

et-n-ic (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-246-3782; www.visita-bolivia.com; Illampu 863) Recently opened Swiss-run agency. Offers good-quality rental equipment, plus adventure trips to just about anywhere.

Fremen Tours (☎ 02-240-7995; www.andes-amazonia.com; Santa Cruz & Socabaya, Galeria Handal, No 13) Upmarket agency specializing in the Amazon and Chapare; there is also an office in Cochabamba (Map pp228-9; ☎ 04-425-9392; Tumusla 0245).

Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking (Map pp190-1; ☎ 02-231-3849; www.gravitybolivia.com; Av 16 de Julio 1490, Edificio Av, No 10) Downhill mania on two wheels, from the 'World's Most Dangerous Road' to stylin' singletrack. Ask about exploratory adventures. Best to book ahead on the 'net.

Tawa Tours (☎ 02-232-5796; tawa@ceibo.entelnet.bo; Sagárnaga 161) French-speaking company with a wide selection of adventure options including mountaineering, jungle trips, trekking, horse-riding and mountain biking.

Zig-Zag (☎ 245-7814, 715-22822; www.zigzagbolivia.com; Illampu 867) Delightful and knowledgeable English-speaking owner offers trips to Choro and Takesi and is happy to help with custom-made trips. Also rents gear – tents, sleeping bags and boots.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

The sad fact is that Bolivia's infrastructure is ill-equipped for disabled travelers. You will, however, see locals overcoming all manner of challenges and obstacles while making their daily rounds. If you encounter difficulties yourself, you're likely to find locals willing to go out of their way to lend a hand.

VISAS

Passports must be valid for one year beyond the date of entry. Entry or exit stamps are free. Attempts at charging should be met with polite refusal; ask for a receipt if the issue is pressed. Always carry a photocopy of your passport (and visa), and if possible, store your valuables safely elsewhere when not in transit.

Bolivian visa requirements can be arbitrarily interpreted. Each Bolivian consulate and border crossing may have its own entry requirements, procedures and idiosyncrasies.

Citizens of most South American and western European countries can get a tourist card on entry for stays up to 90 days. Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Israel and many other countries are usually granted 30 days; if you want to stay longer, ask at the point of entry for 90 days and officials will likely oblige. Otherwise, you have to extend your tourist card (easily accomplished at the immigration office in any major city; some nationalities pay for extensions) or apply for a visa. Visas are issued by Bolivian consular representatives, including those in neighboring South American countries. Costs vary according to the consulate and the nationality of the applicant: up to US\$50 for a one-year multiple-entry visa.

Overstayers can be fined US\$2 per day and may face ribbons of red tape at the border or airport when leaving the country. See the website of the **Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto** (www.rree.gov.bo) for a complete list (in

Spanish) of overseas representatives and current regulations.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer organizations in Bolivia include the following:

Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi (www.intiwarayassi.org; Parque Machía, Villa Tunari, Chapare) Volunteer-run wild-animal refuge. The minimum commitment is 15 days and no previous experience working with animals is required.

Volunteer Bolivia (Map pp228-9; ☎ 04-452-6028; www.volunteerbolivia.org; 342 Ecuador btwn 25 de Mayo & España, Cochabamba) Runs Cafe La Republika cultural center and arranges short- and long-term volunteer work, study and homestay programs throughout Bolivia.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women's rights in Bolivia are nearing modern standards. That said, avoid testing the system alone in a bar in a miniskirt. Conservative

dress and confidence without arrogance are a must for foreign women. Men are generally more forward and flirtatious in the lowlands than in the *altiplano*.

WORKING

There are many voluntary and nongovernmental organizations working in Bolivia, but travelers looking for paid work shouldn't hold their breath. Qualified English teachers can try the professionally run Centro Boliviano-Americano (see p187) in La Paz; there are also offices in other cities. New, and as yet unqualified, teachers must forfeit two months' salary in return for their training. Better paying are private-school positions teaching math, science or social studies. Accredited teachers can expect to earn up to US\$500 per month for a full-time position.