



LA PAZ

La Paz, the city, that touches the sky, is an apt description. Located high above sea level, La Paz sits in a bowl surrounded by the high altiplano. La Paz as it grows climbs the hills resulting in varying elevations from 3000 to 4100. Overlooking the city is towering triple-peaked Illimani, always snow covered and majestic.

La Paz is the legislative capital of Bolivia, the largest city. The legal capital, home of the Supreme Court, is in Sucre. Not as often visited as other countries, Bolivia is the most Indian country in South America, and you'll experience the language, primarily Quechua, the culture and customs first hand.

TIWANAKU

"Bolivia's most impressive archeological site is located 40 miles west of La Paz. Tiwanaku (also spelled Tiahuanaco) was the center of one of the America's most ancient city-building cultures, one that emerged around 600 BC and endured for 1,800 years before suddenly disappearing.

The megalithic sun gate, part of the Kalasasaya ritual platform, is thought to be a solar calendar. This solid andesite structure (estimated to weigh 44 tons) stands as testimony to the genius of the Tiwanaku's builders. Other large blocks at the site weigh as much as 25 tons each, and were transported at least 25 miles from the most likely quarry location.

Although Tiwanaku is located approximately 20 miles from Lake Titicaca today, it is likely that the city was built at or very near the lake shore. One theory suggests the decline of Tiwanaku was tied to a decline in lake levels that stranded the city far from water.



SUCRE: BOLIVIA'S BIRTHPLACE

"The most beautiful city in Bolivia is also its judicial capital. Set in a valley in the Central Highlands, this is the city where Simon Bolivar founded Bolivia and wrote its constitution after defeating the Spanish army in the 1820's. In 1991, UNESCO declared Sucre a World Heritage Site, helping to protect its fine collection whitewashed colonial churches and mansions.

The city's historic center is compact and accessible. The central Plaza 25 de Mayo is the location of the cathedral and the historic Casa de la Libertad, where Bolivian independence was declared. A short distance to the southwest is the Convento de San Felipe Neri, famous for its catacombs, rooftop terraces, and bell tower. Farther to east is an excellent textile museum and shop, where modern versions of traditional tapestries can be purchased.

Tarabuco, a small indigenous community located 40 miles to the southeast, is home to a colorful Sunday market where handicrafts are sold alongside traditional remedies and farm products.

UYUNI AND THE SOUTHWEST

"Surrounded by the altiplano of Southwestern Bolivia, Salar de Uyuni is the largest salt flat on earth. Its surface area extends for an astonishing 3,510 square miles. The salar is the remnant of a huge lake, which is thought to have covered 7,800 square miles. As the waters evaporated and leached into the earth, they left the salt and other minerals that form this vast white plain.

Uyuni is renowned for its scenery. A few small islands rise above the barren flats, providing an oasis of habitable soil for cacti and other hardy plants. After rains, a thin layer of water covers the salar, reflecting the sky with perfect clarity. The sunrises and sunsets here are breathtaking. If you are at all interested in photography, come armed with you camera gear.



To the south the great salt flats are areas of spectacular geothermal activity. Volcanoes and mineral tinted lakes (ranging from deep red to sky blue) can be visited by travelers en route to San Pedro de Atacama in Northern Chile.

Southeast of Uyuni, near the border with Argentina, is the charming town of Tupiza. The surrounding landscape is reminiscent of southern Utah and Arizona, with red rocks and deep canyons. This comparison is especially remarkable

because, in November 1908, after robbing a payroll courier 30 miles north of Tupiza, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid reportedly made their last stand in the nearby town of San Vicente.