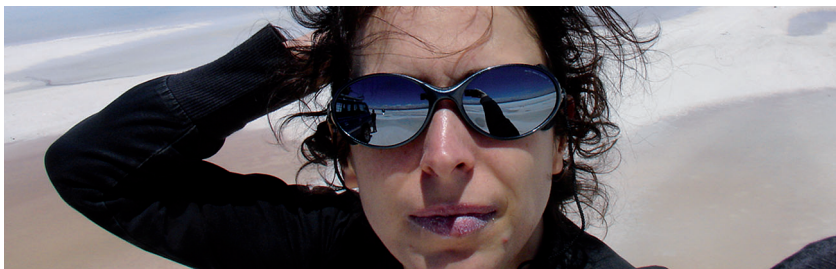


On the Road



ANJA MUTIĆ *Coordinating Author*

Here I am standing on the crusty salts of Salar de Uyuni (p174), in awe of my surroundings but at the same time wondering if I'll reach my destination for the night. It's the rainy season and the jeep driver is nervously navigating the salty terrain riddled with water puddles and cracks. I've heard of people getting stuck in the Salar for days during the rains so I'm quite happy and relieved once we reach solid ground at the edge of salt.



KATE ARMSTRONG I'm at heady heights overlooking La Paz (p60), amazed at the incongruity of this thriving city, the melting pot of both the modern and traditional. I love its harsh environment. In awe of its sprawling urbanization, I am also conscious that this reflects both the threats and opportunities of globalization. On the edge of La Paz, I ponder how the city, too, is on a rocky precipice in a quest to balance both its future and its past.



PAUL SMITH Here I am killing time in the 40°C heat of the Chaco (p256) as the bus drivers try to dig us out of the hole they have just driven us into. Everybody seemed to have a helpful piece of advice on how to get us out of the fix, but nobody was prepared to put their money where their mouth was and physically help dig the bus out of the deep sand it was trapped in. It was far too much like hard work!

Destination Bolivia

A place of mind-boggling superlatives, landlocked Bolivia really packs a punch. The hemisphere's highest, most isolated and most rugged nation, it's among the earth's coldest, warmest and windiest spots, with some of the driest, saltiest and swamiest natural landscapes in the world. It's also a land of paradoxes: South America's poorest country, Bolivia is the richest on the continent in natural resources. But the superlatives don't end here. Over 60% of the population claim indigenous heritage, including Aymará, Quechua and Guaraní, making it South America's most indigenous country.

Bolivia's natural treasures are many and marvelous, from soaring mountain peaks and surreal salt flats to steamy jungles and wildlife-rich grasslands. Exploring the cultural aspect – the country's vibrant ancient traditions and preserved colonial cities – offers unparalleled delight. Most visitors stick to the well-worn paths of the Altiplano, but there's plenty to see and do elsewhere, from dense rainforests to snowcapped cordilleras. While Bolivia is now well and truly on the travelers' radar, it's still largely raw and undeveloped. This may be a boon for intrepid travelers, but it's a perennial source of problems for Bolivians – notable changes have been sweeping Bolivia's formidable landscapes in the last few years.

Since 2005, Bolivia has been undergoing a revolution of sorts virtually synonymous with former *cocalero* (coca grower) Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president. In January 2009, he pushed through a groundbreaking new constitution. Approved in a nationwide referendum by 67% of the population, it grants previously unheard-of rights to the country's indigenous majority and allows the president to seek a second five-year term in office.

This was stellar news for the working classes and the indigenous population of the western highlands but not for everyone in Bolivia. In fact, many middle- and upper-class Bolivians, especially in the energy-rich eastern provinces, are vehemently critical of Morales' anticapitalist stands and socialist ideologies. This opposition led to violent protests in autonomy-hungry Santa Cruz in September 2008 (with 11 dead), and the alleged attempt at presidential assassination in April 2009.

Another hot topic is the trial of former president, 'Goni' Sánchez de Lozada, who stands accused, together with 16 members of his cabinet, for 67 deaths during the 2003 protests in La Paz. The trial opened in May 2009 in absentia; Goni still lives in Maryland and the unheeded request to the US for extradition is one of several sore points (including the controversial coca) between Bolivia and the USA. Since the diplomatic talks in spring 2009, the worn ties between the two have been on the slow mend.

In addition to Bolivia's internal strife, Morales has other things on his plate, such as the management of Bolivia's so far untapped lithium reserves (the world's largest) and the election in December 2009. With his approval ratings still high, at presstime it looked like he was in for a second term. How he will manage to keep his polarized country in check remains to be seen. As the Bolivians themselves say, *vamos a ver...*

Getting Started

Travelers can no longer be smug about ‘discovering’ Bolivia; it’s well and truly on the traveler’s map for those who visit South America. Having said that, most stick to the more accessible and well-worn routes and don’t give it the attention it warrants. For the more motivated and curious traveler, this means there will be plenty of stimulation if you venture off the tourist track – it’s so easy to do. All travelers to Bolivia will be delighted by the multilayered, rich and varied cultures, stunning natural beauty, and unforgettable experiences and characters. Adventure nuts will also be well sated: there are plenty of opportunities for outdoor action, with a wide variety of luxury levels and travel choices on offer. The going isn’t always easy, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

See climate charts (p330) for more information.

WHEN TO GO

Travelers will encounter just about every climatic zone, from stifling humidity and heat to arctic cold. Summer (November to April) is the rainy season, when overland transportation becomes difficult if not impossible in some areas. The most popular, and arguably most comfortable, time for exploring the whole country is during the dry, clear days of winter (May to October).

Most of Bolivia lies as near to the equator as Tahiti or Hawaii, but its elevation and unprotected expanses result in unpredictable weather. Bolivia’s two poles of climatic extremes are Puerto Suárez with its overwhelming heat, and Uyuni with its icy, cold winds. But there are no absolutes; there are times when you can sunbathe in Uyuni and freeze in Puerto Suárez.

Summer (rainy season) in the lowlands can be utterly miserable, with mud, high humidity, biting insects and relentless tropical downpours. However, washed-out roads means there is an increase in river transportation, making this the best time to hop on a cargo boat. Winter in the Altiplano means extreme heat during the day, and freezing winds and subzero temperatures at night. The highland valleys are refuges, having a comfortable climate and little rain year round.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT

- Checking the visa situation (p339)
- Checking travel advisory warnings (p330)
- Proof of vaccination for yellow fever (p356)
- A copy of your travel insurance policy details (p334)
- Plug adaptor for your camera battery charger (p329)
- Binoculars for wildlife watching
- Sunscreen and a hat for the clear skies at 4000m
- First aid kit (p352)
- Ear plugs for disco nights you want to sleep through
- A pack lock or other luggage security for peace of mind
- Your sense of humor – both patience and courage will be tested in queues and on bus rides

August is the most popular month of the high tourist season, which runs from late May to early September. High season sees the most reliable weather and coincides with European and North American summer holidays. It's also when most of Bolivia's major festivals take place, so many Bolivians and South Americans travel at this time as well. This can be an advantage if you are looking for people to form a travel group, but prices are generally higher than during the rest of the year.

COSTS & MONEY

HOW MUCH?

Dorm bed US\$2-8

Almuerzo (set lunch)

US\$1-2.50

Internet per hour

US\$0.15-2

Hotel room (double)

US\$25

City taxi fare

US\$0.75-1.50

See also the Lonely

Planet Index, inside front cover.

Overall, prices are slightly lower here than in neighboring countries. The biggest cost in any trip to Bolivia will be transportation, especially getting there (and, to a lesser extent, getting around, as the distances involved are great).

While ultrabudget travelers can get by on less than US\$17 per day, most people will spend between US\$25 and US\$50. Visitors who want to enjoy the best Bolivia has to offer can easily travel comfortably for US\$150 a day (this would include hire of private transportation). Most prices in this book are quoted in bolivianos (B\$). Avoid over-bargaining with local people for goods and services just for the sake of it. While Bolivians themselves might bargain among their friends at markets, bargaining is not actually a common cultural practice. In any case, be realistic about how much you are actually saving – the few bolivianos you might save can be worth a great deal more to the locals than to you. If you feel uncomfortable about pricing issues, ask locals for a ballpark idea of what you can expect to pay for something, including taxis. Always agree on food, accommodations and transportation prices beforehand to avoid any unpleasant situations.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Sitting at the top of the South American travelogue list is the humorous and well-written *Inca-Kola*, by Matthew Parris. It follows the meanderings of several Englishmen on a rollicking circuit throughout Peru and parts of Bolivia.

A great read, especially if you're traveling in the lowlands, is *Jungle: A Harrowing True Story of Survival* (originally published as *Back from Tuichi*) by Yossi Ghinsberg; it's about an Israeli traveler who gets lost in the Parque Nacional Madidi in the early 1980s and how he finds his way out of the jungle. Other travel books that are worth noting include *Chasing Ché: A Motorcycle Journey in Search of the Guevara Legend*, by Patrick Symmes, and *The Incredible Voyage: A Personal Odyssey*, by Tristan Jones, which follows the intrepid sailor's journey through landlocked Bolivia on Lake Titicaca and beyond. An offbeat historical character is portrayed in *Lizzie: A Victorian Lady's Amazon Adventure*, compiled by Anne Rose from the letters of Lizzie Hessel, who lived in the Bolivian Amazon settlement of Colonia Orton during the rubber boom of the early 20th century. *Exploration Fawcett*, by Percy Fawcett, is a fabulous jungle travel book from the early 20th century.

Less travelogue and more history book is the comprehensive synthesis of recent Bolivian political history, *Bolivia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, by Pete Good, which provides the most up-to-date commentary on Bolivia. You can find copies for sale in many travel agencies and hotels in La Paz. *The Fat Man from La Paz: Contemporary Fiction from Bolivia*, a collection of short stories edited by Rosario Santos, is a widely recommended read. For a good synopsis of Bolivian history, politics and culture, check out *Bolivia in Focus*, by Robert Werner.

Some good suggestions for books in general are available if you look on the excellent website www.libreriaaboliviana.com (in Spanish).

TOP PICKS



FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Thanks to their rich culture, imbibed with tradition, Bolivians are big on celebrating. There's almost always something fascinating going on, from saints' days in small villages to nationwide events. The following is a list of our favorites. See p332 for more details of festivals and events throughout the country.

- El Gran Poder (La Paz), May/June (p76)
- Carnaval (nationwide, p332; best in Oruro, p157, and Tarija, p249), February/March
- Pujllay (Tarabuco), March (p223)
- Fiesta de la Cruz (Lake Titicaca), May 3 (p104)
- Fiesta del Santo Patrono de Moxos (San Ignacio de Moxos), July 31 (p311)
- Fiesta de San Bartolomé; Chu'tillos (Potosí), August (p236)
- Fiesta del Espíritu (Potosí), June (p235)
- Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña (Quillacollo), August 15–18 (Cochabamba; p197)
- International Theater Festival (Santa Cruz), April (p268)
- International Festival of Baroque Music (Santa Cruz), April (p268)

EXTREME ADVENTURES

Bolivia's rugged landscape and outgoing, knowledgeable tour guides offer innumerable thrilling adventures. Whether you want to hang off a precipice or walk on the wild side in the jungle, Bolivia's got it all.

- Hike the Mapiri trail, a demanding but superb walking trek (p138)
- Do the tandem mountain bike and raft trip from Sorata to Rurrenabaque (p135)
- Tackle the remote Quimsa Cruz range – not to be missed if you're a serious climber (p150)
- Shoot the rapids from Class II–V in the Yungas (p121)
- Float the Río Mamoré through pristine Amazon jungle (p314)
- Conquer the 6088m Huayna Potosí (p141)
- Soak in hot springs at the base of Nevado Sajama (p164)
- Go wild by heading upriver to a jungle-based community ecolodge (p306)
- Trek the Trans Cordillera route from Sorata to Huayna Potosí and Illimani (p134)
- Head to the most remote of remote national parks, Noel Kempff Mercado, for an awesome nature experience (p318)

MOUTH-WATERING EATS

There are some excellent countrywide eateries, as well as plenty of must-try local Bolivian specialties. To tantalize your taste buds, try the following five eateries and five taste sensations.

- El Huerto, Sucre – a classy garden-party eating experience (p220)
- La Estancia, Cochabamba – for lovers of meat, this is hard to beat (p198)
- Casa Típica de Camba, Santa Cruz – for an authentically Bolivian experience (p270)
- La Comedie Art-Café Restaurant, La Paz – French/Bolivian fusion cuisine with a touch of class (p82)
- Nayjama, Oruro – renowned for the local Oruro specialty, boiled sheep's head (p160)
- *Salteñas* – heavenly pastry parcels filled with chicken, beef and vegetables (p42)
- *Tamales* – those from the Tupiza market are especially scrumptious (p184)
- *Trucha* – the famed (and now farmed) Lake Titicaca trout satisfies any fish cravings (p105)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bolivia.com (www.bolivia.com, in Spanish) Current news and cultural information.

Bolivia web (www.boliviaweb.com) Good portal with a variety of cultural and artistic links, and more.

Bolivian.com (www.bolivian.com, in Spanish) Spanish-language portal with a slew of links and some travel info.

Boliviacontact.com (www.boliviacontact.com) Thorough, searchable index of Bolivian sites.

GBT Bolivia (www.gbtbolivia.com) Solid commercial site with travel links.

Noticias Bolivianas (www.noticiasbolivianas.com, in Spanish) Comprehensive news site with links to major media.

South America Explorers Club (www.saexplorers.org) Interesting trip reports and travel bulletins.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

CULTURE VULTURES & NATURE NOMADS

Two to Three Weeks

Stimulate your senses around the streets of **La Paz** (p60) before heading by bus to **Sucre** (p210). It's worth going via **Cochabamba** (p190), a great place to eat and get your cultural fill. Sucre is *the* place to visit churches and museums, and offers fascinating short sojourns to nearby villages, famous for their craftworks; try **Tarabuco** (p222). From here, head by bus to **Potosi** (p227), a starkly beautiful Unesco World Heritage city, situated at 4070m. Visit and learn about the cooperative mines, still in operation. You can thaw your chills in the nearby Tarapaya **hot springs** (p242). Jump on an overnight bus to **Tupiza** (p180), former territory of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Here, there's a choice of hikes and horseback or bike rides among the colored rocks of the surrounding *quebradas* (ravines). Join a tour from here to **Uyuni** (p166) and to cruise your way around a three- or four-day Southwest Circuit tour of the **Salar de Uyuni** (p174) and the **Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** (p173). From Uyuni make your way up to **Oruro** (p153), famed for its Carnival. Alternatively, from Tupiza head to **Tarija** (p245) and its surrounds, a relaxing town and region, and Bolivia's heart of paleontology and viticulture. From Tarija you can fly or bus to La Paz; from Oruro it's an easy three-hour bus ride.



For those who love a mix of culture and action, Bolivia has it all. A visit to colonial towns, craft centers and mining regions will tantalize your traveling taste buds. You can skate across salt plains one day, and dance with the devils the next.

FROM HIGH TO LOW

Two to Three Weeks

The most popular way to enter Bolivia is to come in overland from Peru, following the exciting tourist path, with a developed tourist infrastructure. Start by enjoying the views of Lake Titicaca from white-washed **Copacabana** (p99), eating the local trout dishes and getting some R&R. After a day or two, hike to the tiny port of **Yampupata** (p109), visiting the villages along the way for a reed-boat ride. From Yampupata (or nearby villages) or Copacabana, you can take a boat across Lake Titicaca to tranquil **Isla del Sol** (p109). Walk from the island's north to south and explore the Inca ruins. Marvel at Illampu in the distance over Isla de la Luna and then head back to the mainland.

Back on the mainland, jump on a tourist bus for a trip across the stunning Cordillera Real toward **La Paz** (see p60). For a side trip to the remarkably tranquil **Sorata** (p133), catch another bus at the Sorata turn-off. Chill in this oasis or do some serious hiking or downhill mountain biking. Once in La Paz, spend a few days acclimatizing and absorbing the smells and sights in the hectic markets, fascinating museums and top-class restaurants and cafés. Take a day out to take in the ancient ruins of **Tiwanaku** (p93).

From here, the adventurous can take on the **Takesi** (p127) or **Choro Treks** (p124), or ride a bike (or bus) down the **World's Most Dangerous Road** (p75) to **Coroico** (p119) in the Yungas. Alternatively, you could fly to **Rurrenabaque** (p301) and spend a few days chilling in a hammock and exploring the surrounds (add on an extra five to seven days for this to allow for 'plane delays' and jungle visits).

The area around La Paz is jam-packed with highlights and activities, including the sun-filled Lake Titicaca, ancient Inca ruins and tranquil oases. Two weeks will give you a brief taste of adventure and relaxation, and the opportunity to experience a diverse range of environments.

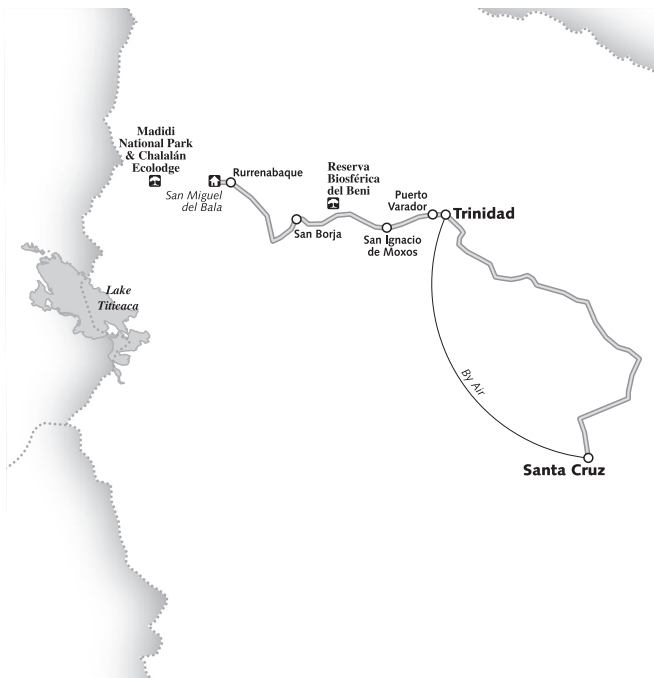


ROADS LESS TRAVELED

AMAZONIAN ADVENTURE

10 Days to Two Weeks

A wonderful way to get off the beaten tourist track (but still enjoy an element of comfort) is to start in **Santa Cruz** (p263), a sophisticated and cosmopolitan city with a dreamy (sometimes steamy) climate and tropical atmosphere. From here, fly or catch the overnight bus to **Trinidad** (p312), a sleepy town with a pretty plaza. After whirling around on a motorcycle, take a side trip to **Puerto Varador** (p317) for a local fish meal, a visit to a museum or two and a much-needed siesta or three – it gets hot. A three-hour bus ride will take you to the Jesuit mission village of **San Ignacio de Moxos** (p310) – plan your trip around the town's colorful, not-to-be-missed festival in July. Take a side trip into **Reserva Biosférica del Beni** (p309) and then make the long slog via **San Borja** (p308) to **Rurrenabaque** (p301), hammock country, from where you can set out for a couple of days on a jungle or pampas tour. Alternatively, get your jungle fill at the **San Miguel del Bala** (p307) ecoresort, just upriver from Rurrenabaque. Whatever you do, don't miss a trip to **Madidi National Park** (p308), a wild, little-trodden utopia and a must for wildlife-watchers. Finally, leave enough time to stay in the highly regarded, community-run **Chalalán Ecolodge** (p306).



The sights and sounds of the jungle make for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Start sophisticated and go wild, with a tour from the city to the remote reserves. After a few rough but adventurous trips, you can laze away the days in a hammock in tropical temperatures.

TAILORED TRIPS

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

Bolivia has protected 18% of its territory in 22 national parks and reserves. From **Reserva Biológica Cordillera de Sama's** (p254) slice of the Altiplano, to the inundated savannas of the remote, but spectacular, **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** (p318), flora and fauna fans will be in their element. Although some of these protected areas can be difficult to access, the following places are worth every ounce of the effort they take to reach.

Parque Nacional Sajama (p163) with its vicuñas, soaring volcanoes (including Bolivia's highest peak) and heavenly hot springs was Bolivia's first reserve. **Parque Nacional Madidi** (p308) is possibly now the best known, encompassing one of the most biodiverse habitats in the world and featuring numerous protected species.

Parque Nacional Carrasco (p300) and **Parque Nacional Tunari** (p201) are two of the more accessible, middle-altitude cloud forests, while **Parque Nacional y Área de Uso Múltiple Amorbó** (p276) is a prime place for bird-watching.

Área Natural de Manejo Integrado Nacional Apolobamba (p146) is one of the least visited national parks, while the most popular, **Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** (p173), receives tens of thousands of visitors per year and is part of the Southwest Circuit.



PLANES, TRAINS & CAMIONES

In Bolivia, getting there is an important part of the travel experience, and often half the fun! The means of transportation can be the highlight (okay, and sometimes lowlight) of your adventure.

From the sluggish **Trans-Chiquitano train** (p292) to the most remote **Río Mamoré river journeys** (p314), you're spoiled for choice when it comes to mobility options.

Foolhardy mountain-bike adventurers shouldn't pass up the chance to conquer the **World's Most Dangerous Road** (p75) or settle instead for single-track pistes around **La Paz** (p60), **Sorata** (p133) and **Sucre** (p210). **Flying** (p322) in a small plane into remote Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado will satisfy the most snap-happy traveler. In Trinidad, piling yourself and your gear on to a chauffeured **moto-taxi** (p315) is as much fun as renting one independently.

Several days of bumping around the **Southwest Circuit** (p173; including the Salar de Uyuni) by 4WD is worth it for the scenery alone. Romantic reed-boat journeys or hydrofoil cruises on **Lake Titicaca** (p97) provide a tranquil change of pace. Or, for those wanting a rush, you can **raft** (p297) into the Amazon Basin.

Let's not forget our humble feet, the best form of mobility in Bolivia. Awe-inspiring trekking includes via Inca trails to the **Yunga Cruz trek** (p129). As for the inevitable travel on buses or **camiones** (flatbed trucks)? This can be as adrenaline-inducing as anything.



The Authors



ANJA MUTIĆ

Coordinating Author, Southern Altiplano

While growing up in Croatia, New York-based Anja Mutić had a deep fascination with the ancient civilizations and mysterious rainforests of South America. In 2002, she spent six weeks traveling around Bolivia, immediately enchanted with its remote landscapes and indigenous cultures. She descended into the mines of Potosí, swam in Inca hot springs, found herself in the midst of a coca peasants' roadblock and got lost in the Amazon. For this book, she was repeatedly hit by water balloons leading up to Carnival. Still, she'd go back in a snap.



KATE ARMSTRONG

La Paz, Lake Titicaca

Kate first wandered to Bolivia during a year-long backpacking trip through South America. Captivated by the country's flavors, she holed up in Sucre to study Spanish and inadvertently joined a folkloric dance troupe after two ungraceful *cueca* lessons in her hiking boots. She returns regularly to Bolivia to search for the perfect *salteña*, hike in the highlands and brush up on her *castellano*. When not wandering the markets of La Paz, the Altiplano or Amazonian jungle, Kate is a freelance writer in Australia.



PAUL SMITH

**The Cordilleras & Yungas, Central Highlands,
South Central Bolivia & the Chaco, Santa Cruz &
Gran Chiquitania, Amazon Basin**

From an early age, and with a vague and naive ambition to be the next David Attenborough, Paul dreamed of exploring the remotest corners of South America in search of wildlife. After spending two months at the Beni Biological Station as a student, that dream started to come true but, with David Attenborough still going strong, he changed his career plans, became a travel writer and moved to South America (Paraguay) permanently in 2003. While researching this edition, Paul spent a night on a bus in a mosquito-infested swamp somewhere between Rurre and Riberalta, overcame his fear of light aircrafts in Pando, learnt how to take his *singani* like a man in Tarija, and saw his first Red-fronted Macaw in Saipina.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

Dr David Goldberg MD completed his training in internal medicine and infectious diseases at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City, where he has also served as voluntary faculty. At present, he is an infectious diseases specialist in Scarsdale NY and the editor-in-chief of the website www.MDTravelHealth.com

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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