



Central Highlands

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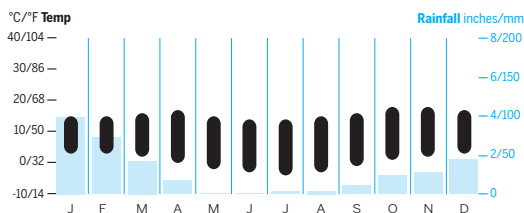
Why Go?

The Central Highlands are located at the heart of the country and for many represent the heart of the nation. Gorgeous whitewashed Sucre, with elegant patioed houses and noble churches, is where independence was declared in 1825. Potosí, on the other hand, is a powerful symbol of the natural wealth of the country, built on the silver deposits extracted from nearby Cerro Rico. At a much lower altitude, Cochabamba is one of Bolivia's most pleasant cities, with a perfect climate and modern vibe.

But it's not all about cities here. Throughout the region there are lovely, little-known colonial towns gently crumbling with age. It's well worth eschewing the city-to-city mode of travel to explore them. A more distant past is evoked by the Inca ruins in the Cochabamba valley, but Parque Nacional Torotoro has the last laugh on the age front; it's bristling with dinosaur footprints and fossils, some of which date back 300 million years.

When to Go

Potosí



Mar Indigenous festival Pujllay bursts into life on the third Sunday in March.

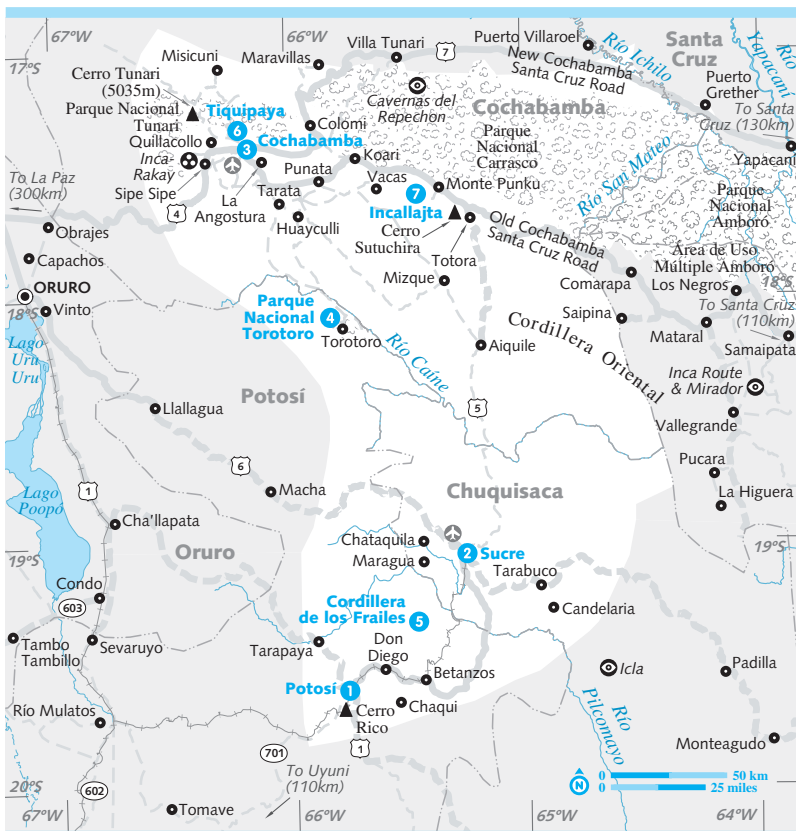
Aug Catch merry-making at the Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña.

Oct–Mar Target the summer months to avoid the worst of Potosí's chills.

History

Prior to Spanish domination, the town of Charcas (nowadays Sucre) was the indigenous capital of the valley of Choque-Chaca. As the residence of local religious, military and political leaders, its jurisdiction extended to several thousand inhabitants. When the Spanish arrived, the area from southern Peru to the Río de la Plata in present-day Argentina came to be known as Charcas.

In the early 1530s Francisco Pizarro, the conquistador who felled the Inca empire, sent his brother Gonzalo to the Charcas region to oversee indigenous mining activities that might prove to be valuable to the Spanish realm. He was not interested in the Altiplano and concentrated on the highlands east of the main Andean cordilleras. As a direct result, in 1538 a new Spanish capital of the Charcas was founded. Following in the



Central Highlands Highlights

- 1 Admire the churches of **Potosí** (p205), filled with evocative religious artworks
- 2 Goggle at the colonial beauty of **Sucre** (p187), Bolivia's most attractive city
- 3 Pack on the pounds or party hard in **Cochabamba** (p168), which boasts

- some of the country's best restaurants and bars
- 4 Home in on remote and wild **Parque Nacional Torotoro** (p184), stomping ground of dinosaurs
- 5 Roam the **Cordillera de los Frailes** (p200),

- with its intriguing Jal'qa weaving culture
- 6 Take in one of the whacky festivals at little **Tiqipaya** (p180)
- 7 Visit Bolivia's version of Machu Picchu, the mystical ruins of **Incallajta** (p182)