



La Paz & Around

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Best Places to Eat

- » Pronto (p52)
- » Mercado Uruguay (p54)
- » Mongo's (p55)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Rosario (p48)
- » Casa Fusion (p48)
- » Wild Rover (p50)
- » A La Maison Appart-Hotel (p49)

Why Go?

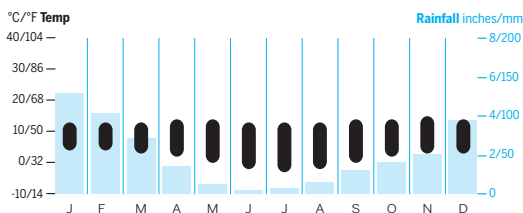
La Paz is a city of Gothic proportions, world-class views and a multi-ethnic cultural imprint unique to the Americas. It's sinister and serendipitous – often at the same time. While there's plenty of petty crime, traffic and pollution, La Paz is somehow so unique and so odd that it could very well become the highlight of your trip.

Most of the city lies within a preposterously steep valley at around 3660m. Medieval-looking buildings ascend the slopes with Seussian haphazardness finally spilling over the edge into the rough commerce hub of El Alto, while to the south the three-peaked Illimani (6402m/21,003ft) watches over it all in stately serenity.

A few days wandering the frenetic markets, high-quality museums, crafts stalls, cloistered nightclubs and winding alleyways will not disappoint. This is also the staging center for many hikes, bike trips and excursions into the fascinating Andean wilderness areas that surround the city.

When to Go

La Paz



Nov–Apr Rain most afternoons turns the steep streets into torrents.

May–Oct Winter days are cool but sunny, making this La Paz' high season.

Jan–Jun Festival season includes Alasitas, Gran Poder, Carnaval and Aymará New Year.

Lay of the Land

The La Paz metropolitan area is divided into three very distinct zones. North of the city center is the separate municipality of **El Alto** (where you arrive if coming by plane). This fast-growing commercial and industrial city is the center for Aymará culture, has fascinating markets and few tourist attractions. Down from here in the valley is the city of **La Paz**, where most travelers spend their time. On the west side of the valley are the notable commercial districts Rosario, Belen, San Pedro and Sopocachi. To the east, the action centers on the Plaza Murillo, Santa Bárbara and Miraflores neighborhoods. If you get lost in La Paz, head downhill. You'll soon enough find yourself somewhere along the main thoroughfare, **El Prado**. Further down the valley to the south is the Zona Sur. This is where the city's wealthy live and, with safety a concern in the town proper, many businesses (and businesspeople) are moving here. There's a good collection of upscale restaurants and hotels.

IMMERSING YOURSELF

La Paz will give you what you put in. But the true heart of the city lies behind closed doors, and the only way to really break through is by learning the language and engaging with locals.

Several **language courses** will give you the vocabulary you need to learn about La Paz' unique history, culture and arts scenes. An especially recommended experience is setting up a homestay, which you can arrange through some hostels or language schools.

Volunteering is another way to learn about the city. Many travelers end up spending a few extra weeks in La Paz either working for their hostel or donating their time to one of the many nonprofits in the area.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Most travelers will arrive either at El Alto International Airport or the main bus terminal. Buses from within Bolivia may also drop you in Villa Fátima or the Plaza 1 de Mayo area. For more information, see Getting There & Away (p61).

Fast Facts

- » Telephone area code: 2
- » Population: 1.4 million
- » Elevation: 3660m (12,007ft)

Top Tips

- » Bring a jacket as at this altitude it's cold at night year-round.
- » Drinking lots of water helps with altitude sickness.
- » There's quite a bit of petty theft in La Paz (and violent attacks are on the rise), so leave your valuables in the hotel. For more information, see p58.

La Paz' Best Views

- » Mirador Laikakota (p41) is a *mirador* (lookout) set above the city's largest park. It's popular with young lovers and old dreamers alike.
- » The Radisson Plaza Hotel's top-floor Aransaya Restaurant (p49) has spectacular city views. The food can be overpriced and formal, but the views more than make up for it.
- » Get vertical with the new rappelling adventures hundreds of feet up a downtown skyscraper with Urban Rush (p45).

Resources

- » Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/bolivia/la-paz)
- » Boliviaweb (www.bolivia-web.com)
- » Bolivia Online (www.bolivia-online.net)
- » La Razón (www.la-razon.com/salimos-hoy.html) Events calendar in Spanish
- » Eventos Bolivia (www.eventosbolivia.com.bo) Entertainment listings in Spanish