



Central Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ El Huerto (p201)
- ➔ Casa de Campo (p180)
- ➔ Café Gourmet Mirador (p200)
- ➔ Terra (p180)
- ➔ Pukari Wasi (p205)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Casa Verde (p199)
- ➔ Samary Boutique Hotel (p199)
- ➔ Hacienda Cayara (p221)
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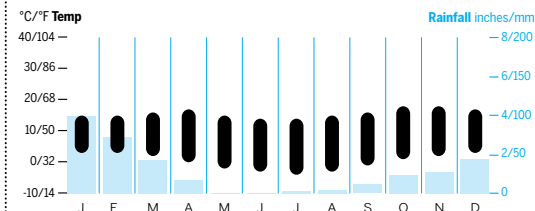
Why Go?

Geographically – and some would say metaphorically – the heart and soul of the country, the Central Highlands are a mix of lively urban centers and vast pastoral and mountainous regions dotted with remote villages. Gorgeous white-washed Sucre is where independence was declared in 1825. Potosí 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.

Throughout, 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.

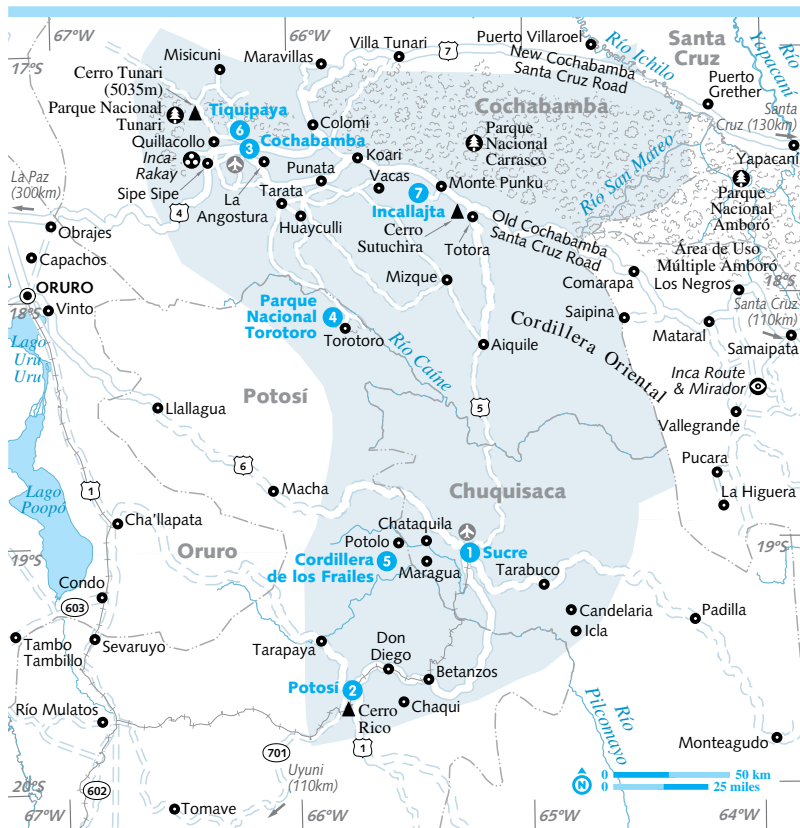
Aug Catch merry-making at the Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña.

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

History

Prior to Spanish domination, the town of Charcas (now Sucre), was the indigenous capital of the valley of Choque-Chaca. It served as the residence of local religious, military and political leaders, and its jurisdiction extended to several thousand inhabitants. When the Spanish arrived, the entire 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 conquered



Central Highlands Highlights

- 1 Goggle at the colonial beauty of **Sucre** (p191), Bolivia's most attractive city.
- 2 Admire the churches of **Potosí** (p210), filled with evocative religious artworks.
- 3 Pack on the pounds or party hard in **Cochabamba** (p171), which boasts some

- of the country's best restaurants and bars.
- 4 Home in on remote and wild **Parque Nacional Torotoro** (p188), stomping ground of dinosaurs.
- 5 Roam the **Cordillera de los Frailes** (p2056), with

its intriguing Jal'qa weaving culture.

- 6 Take in one of the whacky festivals in little **Tiquipaya**. (p184)
- 7 Visit Bolivia's version of Machu Picchu, the mystical ruins of **Incallajta** (p186).