

Understand Bolivia

BOLIVIA TODAY 310

With a new mandate to continue the 'indigenous revolution,' Evo Morales' Bolivia continues to go from strength to strength.

HISTORY 312

From pre-colonial times to modern currents, follow the social, cultural and political ripples that shaped a nation.

LIFE IN BOLIVIA 321

What is it like to be Bolivian? Catch up on the trends, fads and tried-and-true constants of modern life.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE 323

The traditions, languages, cultures and challenges of Bolivia's 36 unique indigenous groups come to life.

THE NATURAL WORLD 327

Explore Bolivia's natural world with insightful looks at flora, fauna, geography, environmental challenges and more.

Bolivia Today

In Bolivia, crisis is the status quo. Protests, poverty, inequality, social change and slow economic progress are part of everyday life. Battling to change all that is president Evo Morales and his state-of-the-art constitution, reforms, and policies that have marked the nation's revolutionary movement toward socialism. All of these political and social changes are combining to create what is one of the most interesting chapters in Bolivian history.

Best Films

The Devil's Miner (2005) Fascinating documentary on a young boy working in Potosí's silver mine.

Cocalero (2007) A home-spun documentary on Morales' run for the presidency.

Amargo Mar (Bitter Sea; 1984) Highly regarded look at the loss of Bolivia's coastline to Chile.

Best Books

Fat Man from La Paz: Contemporary Fiction from Bolivia (edited by Roasario Santos; 2003) Excellent collection of modern fiction.

Whispering in the Giant's Ear: A Frontline Chronicle from Bolivia's War on Globalization (William Powers; 2006) Humorous and incisive look at battles over natural resources.

Best Artists

Kalamarka Contemporary Andean music at its best.

Mamani Mamani Aymará art made for the 21st century.

Los Kjarkas A top folk act featuring traditional Bolivian instruments.

Marina Núñez del Prado The legacy of Bolivia's beloved sculptor lives on.

Ukamau y Ké El Alto's hip-hop act is outrageous and intense.

Economy

The nationalization of energy and mining interests was applauded by Bolivia's poor, but it has soured relations with foreign investors and some foreign governments. Bolivia has sought closer ties with Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC powers), and has distanced itself more from the USA. While this has been welcomed in some parts of society, others, particularly in the Santa Cruz region, have reacted negatively.

The export of raw materials remains the nation's bread and butter, and with the world's largest lithium deposits, plenty of natural gas and minerals, Bolivia could very well continue to see good economic progress for the foreseeable future. The stumbling blocks will include environmental conditions (deforestation, desertification and climate change), depressed foreign markets, and the reluctance of some foreign companies to invest money and expertise in a country with a growing track record of nationalizations.

Society

An improving economy has allowed for investment in social projects that have made a positive impact on poverty levels. The number of people living below the poverty line is down from 70% in 1999 to 45% in 2014, and for the time being all the progress indicators are moving in the right direction. The government must now work hard to ensure that these improving figures are sustainable when the inevitable economic downturn finally comes.

These new measures have succeeded in reframing Bolivia's social structure. There is now a spark of self-awareness and hope that's never been more evident among the nation's indigenous majority. And indigenous people today, especially highlands groups, are playing a significant role in politics and policy. The role of women is also slowly evolving, as they step out