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Table of Contents

#75 *Revival*

Editorial #75:
Revival

By: Caroline Risacher

If one had to pick the most notable Bolivian characteristic it would be their resilience and determination. It is not uncommon to come across marches in La Paz; Bolivians chant and protest with an unbreakable zeal, and you can see that they are not about to give up. Bolivia will probably survive any of the incoming end of the world scenarios that are looming over us. There is a good reason for this.

As the immortal chuños on our cover illustrate, there are things in Bolivia that will survive us all. The chuño, a lyophilized potato, goes through successive freezing and sun-drying cycles in order to become the ultimate survival food. It is the epitome of Bolivian nature and exemplifies an intrinsic Bolivian trait. We never give up.

This month, we are celebrating our 75th issue of *Bolivian Express*. As we have explored in the previous 74, Bolivia has an undeniable rich history and culture. But it also has an heritage that it struggles to preserve. The crumbling architecture of Sorata can attest to that. And optimum preservation demands maximum toil.

Undoubtedly, Bolivia's past is filled with lessons for the present, such as Sebastiana, who has come back in 2017. The eponymic heroine of the iconic 1953 film, Vuelve Sebastiana, is returning in graphic novel form, breathing new life to her story and to the Chipayas. Different lessons were learnt when we traveled to the disaffected ski resort of Chacaltaya, to watch olympic participant José Manuel ski down the slope in his Calgary 88 ski gear. Still dusting the snowflakes from our pens, we eased into conversation with *La crítica y el poeta*, whose critical analysis of distant Bolivian poets leaves further food for thought.

While the critics revive the classic, the green areas of La Paz and Bolivia are left to both Bohemia, an initiative that produces biodegradable paper with seeds inside, and Emaverde, who works hard to maintain and replant the trees of La Paz.

Behind these efforts at preservation and regeneration we found people whose work can seem in vain, but whose passion and hope inspired us to produce this issue. Individuals who, against all odds, and in an uncompromising and unfavourable world, fight for a cause: the skiers of Chacaltaya, a city official in Sorata, poets, a film director, a young entrepreneur, green space workers in La Paz and jugglers in Cochabamba.

We invite you in, to read about the past, to understand how it is shaping our present and future. But the future may not be as certain as we would like. Temperatures are raising. And like the glacier on Chacaltaya, the chuños of the **Cumbre** may become another casualty of global warming. With revival comes conservation - otherwise all these efforts will have been short-lived. We can learn from these lessons, to preserve our present and prepare for the future.

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary.

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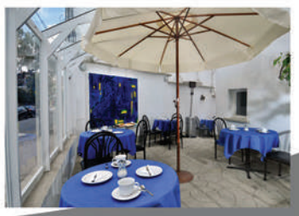

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A COUNTRY OF POETS

BOLIVIAN POETRY IS RECOGNISED IN A NEW COLLECTION – AND FINDS ITS VOICE IN THE STREETS, BARS AND CAFÉS.

TEXT: ROSIE COLLIER

Mónica Velásquez is the general researcher and coordinator of *La crítica y el poeta*, a collection which has carved a space for the poets of Bolivia by providing readers with a series of critical essays on the work of 11 Bolivian writers of the 20th century. Velásquez outlines the aims of the project: to 'establish a canon of Bolivian poets' and 'train young researchers specialising in Bolivian or Latin American poetry'. It reflects a growing interest in Bolivian writing and provides a platform for these writers. The project also marks a regeneration of poetry in Bolivia.

Drawing together a roster of poets deemed 'indisputable' to Bolivian poetic tradition, the collection devotes its first six volumes primarily to writers from La Paz, including Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, Franz Tamayo, Jaime Sáenz, Óscar Cerruto, Edmundo Camargo and Blanca Wietüchter. Then, moving to Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and Tarija, the collection analyses and provides critical commentaries on the works of Adela Zamudio, Raúl Otero Reiche and Octavio Campero Echazú, before focusing on 'living poets who are currently producing writing' – Eduardo Mitre and Pedro Shimose – for the final two editions.

Produced by the Plural Editores publishing house and distributed at cultural venues such as the Centro Cultural de España in La Paz, this collection is not widely available outside the country. Whilst helping grow awareness of Bolivian poetry in Bolivia, how many people are reading Bolivian poetry across the globe? According to Velásquez: 'Very little...I like to travel and carry Bolivian poetry wherever I go – to Spain, Mexico and the United States. It astonishes people that it is such great poetry.' Velásquez says that it is difficult to publish inside of Bolivia, and that, in turn, stunts the growth of homegrown writers both within and outside of the country.

And, according to Velásquez, it's the young, aspiring writers of Bolivia who bear this burden. Velásquez sees many up-and-coming writers whose work is 'very active, very well done and very good', but their writing isn't visible because of the financial pressures of publication. 'You do not see young people write, and that is not because they are not there but because they have to pay for their editions to come out,' she says. Thus the process of publication is inherently elitist, and young writers must find alternative routes to get their writing published.

Yet has the growth of the Internet not provided an alternative platform for writers to publish their own work, outside the confines of competitive publishing houses? Velásquez recognises that the Internet has helped spread poetry throughout Bolivia, but she says it's often not high-quality poetry that's being produced. 'It is very easy to publish work online, and this is a problem,' she adds.

WITH A RICH ALTHOUGH UNRECOGNISED LITERARY LEGACY, BOLIVIAN POETRY MAY SOON REACH OUT INTO UNDISCOVERED DOMAINS.

But as the traditional outlets in which poetry has been published are closing, Bolivian writers and poets have taken to the streets, bars and cafés of their cities, carving a niche for their literary works. 'Lately, many festivals have arisen,' Velásquez says, pointing to the 2005–09 'Poetry in the Streets' programme, in which poets read in the squares of La Paz. In 2010, poet Benjamín Chávez, founded the International Poetry Festival of La Paz and Oruro. In Santa Cruz, many cafés and bars hold poetry readings, and in La Paz, Café Magick features regular readings.

A transformation in the way that poetry lives and breathes is underway in the country. Although public schools may insist that poetry is only to be learnt by rote and recited – not studied, analysed, felt and understood – projects such as *La crítica y el poeta* provide the opportunity for individuals to immerse themselves in the critical study of the Bolivian poetry canon. Though the project was born in the academy, by way of the Literary Research Institute of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, its readership extends to the laypeople. As Velásquez notes, 'At first I thought the publication was going to be only for students of literature, communication or philosophy, but the readership seems to be much wider.'

The ways in which people relate to poetry in Bolivia are changing, and this is a change we should embrace. The future of *La crítica y el poeta* is equally as exciting. Velásquez is enthusiastic at the mention of translating the works of Bolivian writers into English, which will disseminate this writing globally. She mentions plans to provide critical studies of works dating as far back as the 17th century, popularising heretofore unknown handwritten manuscripts. With a rich although unrecognised literary legacy, Bolivian poetry – and the critical study of it – may soon reach out into further undiscovered domains.

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF EL ALTO MARKET

TEXT: ROSIE COLLIER PHOTOS: ESTEBAN TERRAZAS

HERE AT BOLIVIAN EXPRESS WE'RE GIVING YOU A **'DOS AND DON'TS'** GUIDE OF THE BEST SECOND-HAND CLOTHES ON OFFER AT EL ALTO MARKET. FORGET THE ALPACA JUMPERS AND 'GRINGO' TROUSERS AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE VINTAGE HIGHS AND LOWS OF OUR FAVOURITE MARKET IN BOLIVIA.

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JUMPER: 8 BOLIVIANOS

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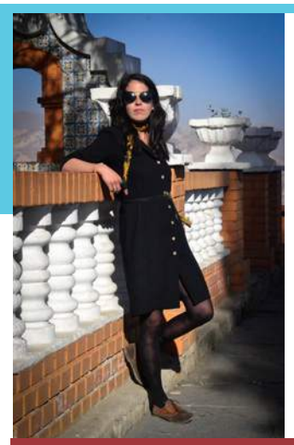

El Alto meets the Champs Élysées. French chic and fabulous— a perfect item for a romantic date or a staged photoshoot at the **Montículo.**

DRESS: 3 BOLIVIANOS
SCARF: 2 BOLIVIANOS

DON'TS

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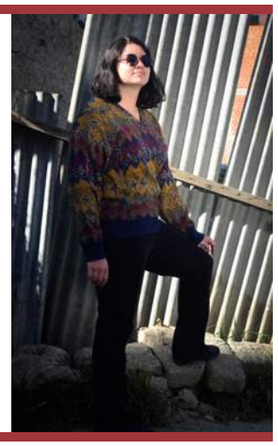
TROUSERS: 3 BOLIVIANOS
SCARF: 2 BOLIVIANOS



Probably one of the most revolting and expensive jumpers on offer in El Alto. We purchased it so that you don't have to come across it yourself when rummaging through the market.

JUMPER: 10 BOLIVIANOS

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JUMPER: 20 BOLIVIANOS

No matter how painful to the eyes this outfit may be, this is a don't that our model makes it look like a do.

SHIRT: 2 BOLIVIANOS
TROUSERS: 3 BOLIVIANOS

THE SLOPES OF **BOLIVIAN SKIING**

IS THERE A FUTURE?

REPORTING: FELIX MEDLOCK **TEXT:** EDITORIAL BOARD

Chacaltaya, an hour and a half north of La Paz, was the highest-altitude ski resort in the world until 2009, when it closed due to lack of snow. The glacier on which its pistes ran had melted away, a casualty of global warming.

But skiing in Chacaltaya is not impossible, but without the glacier sustaining a reliable layer of snow and a functional ski lift, skiing trips have become more of a rare occurrence. Last time the Club Andino came to ski here was in 2012, and some of their members haven't been up there in 20 years.

Carlos Ibañez

Standing at the top of the mountain and listening to the wind howl, José Manuel Bejarano, member of the Club, tells his story of Chacaltaya, how he learnt to ski here long ago when the equipment was still made of wood. 'People would ski here every weekend, a group of 30 or so,' he says. Obsessed with the sport, he attended three different Winter Olympics: Sarajevo in 1984, Calgary in '88 and Albertville in '92. His suit is from Calgary, as are his skis and boots. 'I will now say goodbye to the mountain,' José Manuel declares before descending.

The members of the Club Andino weren't sure if skiing would be possible due to the icy snow, but José Manuel was determined to try. It took him over an hour to hike to the top. Checking the snowpack on his way up, he wanted to see if it was skiable and noted the icier patches. 'It is skiable,' José Manuel says, 'but you can feel places where your foot sinks down low and other spots where the ground is really hard.'

Carlos Ibañez

Sitting on an escarpment at 5,300 metres above sea level, this iconic structure houses the resort's ski-lift motor. It was declared a protected monument of the municipality of La Paz in 2015. It's called the Cabaña Museo Federico Nielsen Reyes, after the Bolivian sportsman and diplomat.

Carlos Ibañez

The ski lift at Chacaltaya hasn't been used in over a decade, and is now nonfunctional. Along with the lack of snow, it is one of the obstacles that prevents the Club Andino members from skiing regularly. At this altitude – the same as the Mount Everest base camp – it's not easy to climb to the top of the slope, and it's even more strenuous if you try to do that in ski gear. The club needs to raise approximately $3,000 to get the ski lift up and running.

Carlos Ibañez

Fabian Zapata

THE GLACIER ON WHICH ITS PISTES RAN HAD MELTED AWAY, A CASUALTY OF GLOBAL WARMING.

José Manuel and the other members of the Club Andino hope that this snow around till next year; if so, next season could provide some good skiing opportunities. With the glacier gone, the rocky terrain heats up under the sun, and the snow melts away much faster.

Back in the chalet, we discuss the difficulties and challenges that the Club Andino has to face. José Manuel and Huascar Pacheco Muñoz, President of the Club Andino, comment on the irony of living in a city with cable cars and snowy mountains all around but no ski resort.

Although difficult, it is possible to ski in Bolivia: not only at Chacaltaya, but also on Mururata about 35 kilometres east of La Paz. It's glacier is reasonably healthy and skiable. There's an obstacle, though: The road ends five kilometres from the slope .

'Tourist agencies do take people skiing in Huayna Potosí, and people go snowboarding in Charquini,' José Manuel says. 'So there is an interest from young people and tourists.'

The dearth of skiing culture in Bolivia, an inconsistent climate, and an absence of funds make it difficult for the Club Andino to enjoy the slopes of Chacaltaya. But the dream isn't that far-fetched. Perhaps with the help of tourism and ski enthusiasts from around the world, it's possible to revive Chacaltaya – and even expand into other locales. And, should the snow hold – always a dicey proposition in today's warming world – see people start skiing again.

Contact details:
Facebook Page: Club Andino Boliviano

PERFORMING LIFE **BOLIVIA**

BREATHING LIFE INTO YOUNG PERFORMERS

TEXT & PHOTO: HANNAH CHUKWU

The streets of the residential neighborhood Montenegro in Cochabamba are dusty, sparse and sprawling. At sunrise, the vast expanse of land is punctuated only by the silhouettes of children heading to school, to work, or to the streets. And a few of them are heading to the Performing Life centre.

Performing Life is an NGO based in Bolivia that teaches performing arts to children living in poverty in Cochabamba, combining professional circus and music training with social education programmes. The social circus programme began in 2005 when the founder, John Connell, was left to fend for himself as a foreigner in Bolivia and noticed someone special: Tania. In the brief stop of traffic at a red light, he watched Tania wander into the road, diablos in hand, juggle astonishingly, hoping for a tip from one of the drivers. He realised that children like Tania made far more money performing than begging on the streets, and thus the social circus aspect of Performing Life was born.

As I walk into the Performing Life centre, I am joined by one of the youngest participants, Matthias, whose mum spends the morning cooking a free meal for all of the children at the centre. Matthias joins a group warm-up before the social education programme, which is his first class of the day. Rosa, a volunteer from the United States working with the children, tells me how the class fills in the gaps left by the state education system. Children are taught about gender equality, alternatives to aggression and are encouraged to grow in ambition.

'Damaging **machismo** is socially ingrained into these children from a young age,' Rosa says, 'and we try to help them unlearn it.' She tells me that volunteering in Cochabamba 'is the hardest thing she's ever done', as access to higher education for children from low income backgrounds is incredibly difficult. Teaching the children to be ambitious only helps to overcome one of the hurdles in between them and higher opportunities.

After the social education class, the core event of the morning begins as the children move on to another class with circus director Amy Booth. With her are two circus skills practitioners, who started out as students at the centre: Tania and Carlos. Amy scales a 6-metre-high structure to tie up silks for the practice, as unicycles, diablos and juggling balls are dragged out of the main room and into the sun. Laughter echoes through the courtyard, as Matthias giggles hanging upside down from one of the silk ropes. Diablos flash against the light as they fly from person to person. 'Circus lies at the intersection between sport and performance,' Amy tells me, as we watch Tania demonstrate a complicated juggling move for one of the children. 'Whilst it helps the children to be physically healthy, it also aids in self-expression, and provides a practical skill for the children to earn money for their families,' she explains.

The children perform astonishing solo routines, but teamwork is an essential part of their education. One of the most noticeable changes Amy has seen in children who have been attending the programme for a long time is an enormous growth in their interpersonal relations, maximising their ability to be selfless, thoughtful and confident in engaging with others.

Tania and Carlos have both been coming to the Performing Life centre for 11 years. 'The discipline I learned through circus helped me realise I wanted to go to university and eventually join the elite police training academy,' Tania tells me. Carlos, on the other hand, has travelled all across South America juggling on the streets, before coming home to help teach at the centre. 'There are not a lot of options for poor children in Cochabamba,' he says. 'They often end up in gangs as young as 13, and many of them don't have parents to look after them.' Performing Life has managed to carve out a tiny haven in Cochabamba, where new doors are opened and new opportunities can be reached.

Lunch follows soon after circus skills class, and during the meal Tania asks all the students for improvements and criticisms of the day's activities, reinforcing their sense of community. This community is wider than just one neighbourhood of Cochabamba, however, as Performing Life also conducts a music programme on the other side of town, teaching music performance to some of the city's most vulnerable children. The reach of the organisation is always extending. Amy and Irene Soria Lopez, the national director of Performing Life, have even larger dreams for both programmes.

Amy dreams of turning the circus skills programme into a professional school, and Irene dreams of uniting the different groups in the music programme to create a 200-strong orchestra that plays with recycled instruments. Inspiration for these ideas has come from similar projects across South America. A music school in Argentina has managed to create the orchestra Irene pines for, and social circus programmes are becoming popular across Bolivia, with one having recently started in El Alto.

Performing Life is breathing new life into performing arts by combining it with a heart for community development. The results are breathtaking.

Contact details:
https://performinglifebolivia.org/

CHUÑOS AND TUNTAS

UNEARTHING BOLIVIA'S POTATO TRADITIONS

TEXT: FELIX MEDLOCK **PHOTO:** IVAN RODRIGUEZ

The chuño and tunta are traditional ingredients in Bolivian cuisine used in a wide range of dishes, notably **chairo**, a soup consisting of vegetables, meat and chuño. The use of these special potatoes has increased greatly in recent years with upscale restaurants utilising them in new and exciting ways. In order to learn about chuños and tuntas, I set out to **La Cumbre**, a mountain pass and the highest point on the road to the **Yungas**, where chuños and tuntas are often transformed.

The word for chuño comes from the Quechua language, meaning 'frozen potato', which provides a basic understanding of how chuños are made. On arrival to the *Cumbre*, I was taken aback by the traditional methods still employed today. Paulina, a woman who had been camping at the *Cumbre* with her daughter for three weeks to cultivate chuños and tuntas to sell in La Paz, explained the process that she implements. The process for the tunta is more complex and time consuming than that of the chuño, which is reflected in their differing appearance and taste. The chuño is small and black, compared to the tunta, which is white and slightly larger. The chuño itself tastes nothing like a Western potato, with the texture of a much denser food. This is part of the brilliance of the chuño; it is so vitamin-rich it is now considered a superfood, and due to its long shelf life, is a staple food in the Andean diet.

The first step of the process for making chuño and tunta is the same. Potatoes are scattered on the ground and water is sprinkled over them. They are left for three to four days during which they freeze through by night and thaw in the day. Due to the specific temperature requirement, Paulina explains that the process is only done during the winter, in July and August, to supply for the whole year. Paulina then walks barefoot over the chuños and tuntas. By doing so, she separates the skin from the potatoes. This is where the process then differs. The chuño is left out in the sun to dry, whilst the tunta is submerged in water for a month in large sacks. The tunta is then spread out to dry in the sun, just as the chuño was.

Leaving Paulina, I want to know: why has there been such a resurgence in popularity for these small, shrivelled and ultimately unappealing looking foods? At the gastronomic restaurant Gustu in La Paz, we ask head chef Mauricio López. He tells me he has been experimenting with different ways to eat and enjoy the chuño; from modern spins on *chairo*, to blueberry soaked chuño accompanying lamb. Mauricio was full of praise for this ingredient and its uses in his food enjoying its versatility as an accompaniment. As Gustu champions Bolivian cuisine and ingredients, the chuño is commonly featured in its menus. But Mauricio also loves the tunta and tries to incorporate it into his dishes whenever possible. Its plainer taste makes the tunta a somewhat blank canvass for a chef.

Chuños and tuntas have recently made a resurgence due to their adoption at upscale restaurants. However, they have always been very prominent in traditional Bolivian cooking. Their characteristics, such as their incredibly long life and vitamin and mineral-rich make up has led them to be cultivated and eaten for many years. Perhaps in the future, they will receive international recognition as the superfoods they are, just as quinoa has in recent years.

MAURICIO LÓPEZ

THE YOUNG FACE OF A NEW BOLIVIAN CUISINE

TEXT: NICK FERRIS **PHOTO:** IVAN RODRIGUEZ

From the most succulent pork terrine and delectably crispy lamb mains, to a starter of alligator escabeche or pudding of milk whey sorbet, the food at Gustu is a world away from the city's traditional **choripanes** or **salteñas**. I am in the **Zona Sur**, at restaurant Gustu, to meet head chef Mauricio López. Notably youthful for a chef de cuisine, he seemed remarkably calm and composed for a chef - though a tattoo of two crossed knives on his forearm perhaps discloses a more ruthless streak that would prove handy in the kitchen.

Mauricio tells me he did not always want to be a chef, but that he knew he loved cooking from a young age. 'I was always cooking in my parents' kitchen and making a mess,' he says. But it wasn't until he was studying administration in La Paz, still cooking whenever he had the chance, that he decided to pursue a career in his favourite hobby.

He spent a year knocking on doors at restaurants across the city. Finally, he came across a cookery programme offered by the Melting Pot Foundation, a charity established by Dane Claus Meyer. Meyer co-founded the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, which was voted four times World's Best Restaurant. A lofty door to knock on indeed.'I sent my CV, went to a couple of meetings, was given a visa and was told I would be in Copenhagen in 10 days,' Mauricio remembers.

Over the next three months, he interned in a number of European restaurants, including Noma, before returning to Bolivia and working for Gustu. He has been head chef since 2015, when he was only 25. He sees his position not just as a job, but as a true vocation. A real opportunity for him and his compatriots, using lessons in discipline, efficiency and artistry learned in Europe to reimagine Bolivian cuisine.

'We don't do traditional Bolivian food, that's true, but we use the ingredients and we are all Bolivian, 99% of the kitchen is Bolivian.' It is something of a unique ideology that Mauricio and his team follow. With stunning effect, they merge global styles and sensibilities with an incredible array of traditional Bolivian ingredients and techniques. 'For example,' he says, 'right now we are working a lot with fermentation, we have made a miso soup with quinoa and it is amazing, super different to the traditional miso. Quinoa is a Bolivian ingredient, but you take it to another level.'

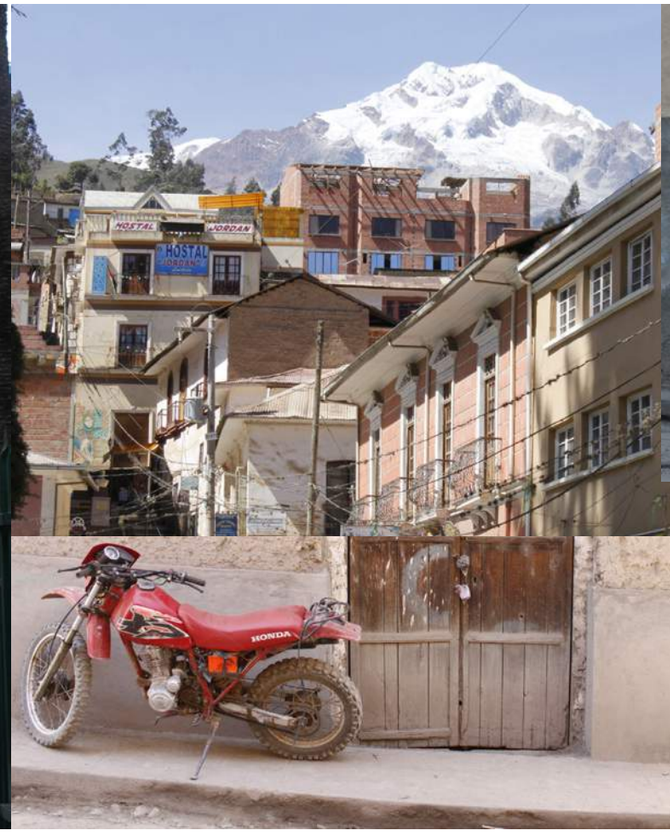
After more than four years of operation, the restaurant is an established player in La Paz's culinary scene. Gustu's craft is well renowned; it was listed No. 14 in Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants in 2016. Yet its history has not always been a smooth one. Last year, the New Yorker reported that Gustu was not making a profit. When I ask Mauricio about the sustainability of the business, he admitted that, 'it was hard at the beginning. We had to take care of our numbers and try to balance our social impact.'

The social impact Mauricio refers to is the Manq'a project, an initiative funded by The Melting Pot Foundation. So far, they've trained 3,000 students in cookery schools in El Alto and La Paz. 'We are now in the fifth year, and we are sure the restaurant is sustainable,' Mauricio beams. 'To ensure that, we also have side businesses like our deli and our bakery, from which we sell bread to different restaurants, and catering services.' Such services have included weddings, corporate events and Evo Morales' 2014 presidential inauguration ceremony.

When I suggest that some critics argue that Gustu is too elitist to have any relevance to none but the wealthiest of La Paz's *Zona Sur*, he defends the restaurant: 'I am pretty sure that if someone actually ate at the restaurant they would change their opinion. We have the same prices as other restaurants in La Paz. The idea is to not be exclusive. We hate that word. We want to show what we are doing to most Bolivians.' This does not quite ring true, as prices remain far beyond the reach of ordinary people, although Mauricio claims that 60% of Gustu's customers are now locals, up from 20% at the time of opening. After looking around at other tables on a busy Thursday evening, I think he might be right.

60% OF GUSTU'S CUSTOMERS ARE NOW LOCALS, UP FROM 20% AT THE TIME OF OPENING.

Certainly, Mauricio's belief in the value of what he does is captivating. I ask what he hopes for the future, and he does not answer for himself, but for the restaurant and Bolivian cuisine generally. 'I want to see Bolivians go out to eat more. I want there to be a scene. It is happening in Santa Cruz, and growing slowly, but I want there to be a big market. Once the market is there, big changes will come, and Bolivian cuisine will really take off,' he hopes. When I push him to say what he really wants for himself, he is similarly open-minded and generous to his colleagues. 'As we become more of a machine that works by itself, and more chefs de partie and sous-chefs come through, I will need to look beyond Gustu and start my own venture.' Genuinely passionate, trained across the world but proudly Bolivian, I cannot wait to see what he does next.



SEEKING THE PAST **IN MODERN BOLIVIA**

A JOURNEY TO SORATA, TO EXPERIENCE LIFE IN COLONIAL TIMES

TEXT & PHOTOS: NICK FERRIS

Walking around central La Paz, amidst the exhaust fumes and market stalls, it's hard to know what things were like at the time of Tupac Katari or Simón Bolívar. The city's colonial buildings, the only obvious remnants from that age, are often a sorry sight. Hidden behind masses of tangled black wires, colourful old town-houses lie forgotten. Squeezed between messy red-brick new-builds and towering skyscrapers, the ornamentations and patterning is gradually eroded by the dust and fumes of passing cars.

Seeking a sense of what towns and villages were like 200 years ago, I decided to travel to the small town of Sorata, in the Yungas region on the eastern edge of the Andes. I took a three-and-a-half-hour minibus journey across the altiplano from La Paz to find a town that permeates old-world charm and a powerful sense of history.

Sorata was used by the Spaniards as a link to the gold mines and rubber plantations of Alto Beni, and a gateway to the Amazon basin. It is famed for holding a sensational 1781 siege, when indigenous leader Andrés Tupac Amaru and his 16,000 soldiers constructed dykes above the town to collect snowmelt from Mount Illampu. These were then opened, promptly washing the entire town away. More recent conflict was experienced during the 2003 Bolivian **Guerra del Gas**, when a hotel was burnt to the ground and a number of tourists were trapped in town amidst clashes between soldiers and villagers – all to the detriment of the town's tourism industry.

The peaceful town I discover is a world away from all this. A series of winding cobbled streets lead onto a broad, verdant main square with a distinctly colonial feel, lined with restaurants and complete with a bandstand and towering, white-barked palm trees that offer shade to children playing and elderly **sorateños** alike. Yet the star attraction of the town is its architecture. Like the colonial architecture still evident in La Paz, these buildings are beautifully coloured and rich in intricate ornamentation. Unlike La Paz, though, the buildings still exist in considerable numbers and in close concentration. Built by the Spaniards using riches procured from the gold in the area, many houses still possess original balconies and doorways, and courtyards centred around fountains that run using their original pump and water source.

However, there is a problem. Just as in La Paz, where citizens are currently witnessing the questionable construction of the towering Casa del Pueblo by the historic Plaza Murillo, there are little to no regulations or protective measures governing these buildings. This means that, for the most part, buildings are at best dilapidated, at worst falling down. 'There is no cultural conscience,' says Goyo Charly Lazo Colque, in charge of culture and tourism in the Sorata municipality. 'Nobody is interested in conservation in Sorata, they just want to organise parties and make the people happy.' Lazo wants to introduce building regulations, but a lack of cultural education means there is little appetite for that in the government bureaucracy. 'There is an official working at city hall,' Lazo says, 'who has built a house of bricks, five stories tall, and you can see it right next to all this beautiful architecture.'

Lazo cites the division of wealth following family deaths, causing houses to be literally split between heirs, as a major factor contributing to the decline and varying standards of disrepair evident among the buildings. He also blames outsiders, often wealthy miners who are simply 'not interested in the heritage of the town', who build new red-brick property over the colonial houses.

According to Lazo, 'the government would rather spend their annual budget of 100,000 bolivianos on parties and celebrations' rather than on efforts to protect local heritage. In fact, the opposite is occurring: the **plazuela**, which had until recently been a colonial square complete with original European railings, is being converted into a modern children's playground. A vital civic amenity, yes, but one that is contributing to chip away at the town's cultural heritage.

I ask Lazo if perhaps, given how they represent an exploitative and racist past, the decline and destruction of colonial buildings might not be such a terrible thing. He is quick to rebut me: 'The majority of sorateños are direct descendents of Spaniards mixed with the Tiwanaku heritage; they are proud to be who they are and of their culture, both indigenous and Spanish.' He says that many older **sorateños** who left the town in their youth come back in their retirement, such is their love for the town's atmosphere. 'You can always find them in the main square wearing their traditional outfits, with their old hats. They will always be there. They love it here; they call the town their **paraiso terrenal** [earthly heaven].'

Lazo sees tourism and foreign investment as possible ways of answering Sorata's problems. The grandest house in all Sorata, Casa Günther, was restored in 2009 to feature in the German film *Write Me – Postcards to Copacabana*. Now tourists are returning to Sorata in large numbers following the *Guerra del Gas*, for the most part to take part in trekking or other adventure tourism, but bringing in money all the same. The momentum generated by increased foreign interest and officials like Lazo, who are eager to capitalise upon it, could prove a winning combination for the revival of cultural heritage not just in Sorata but, by its example, in La Paz and the rest of the country. There is hope, then, for crumbling cultural heritage, that both government officials and locals can learn to see the worth of the historic cultural beauty around them, and that it can be protected and restored for the future.

SEBASTIANA RETURNS

A CLASSIC OF BOLIVIAN CINEMA RECEIVES NEW LIFE AS A GRAPHIC NOVEL

TEXT: RAQUEL DIAZ **PHOTO:** IVAN RODRIGUEZ

Flipping through the pages of one of the two copies in existence of *¡Vuelve Sebastiana! Los Chipayas*, a graphic novel based on Bolivia's first internationally acclaimed film of the same name, one sees Bolivia's simultaneous gravitation toward celebrating tradition and looking beyond its borders toward a globalised world. The tale of the fading Chipaya indigenous population is rendered through anime-like art, meant to appeal to younger, contemporary audiences.

The late Bolivian director Jorge Ruiz filmed *Vuelve Sebastiana* in 1953. Despite being filmed over 60 years ago, the issues shown in the film are still relevant today.

'We are in an age in which cultures are almost disappearing,' says Guillermo Ruiz, the director's son. 'Documents like [the graphic novel] are all we have left. They revalue and rescue culture.' Like his father, Ruiz is also a filmmaker and makes documentaries. 'The book and film go hand in hand,' he continues, adding that the screenplay has been adapted for the graphic novel, word for word. 'Children can view them for assignments and learn about other lifestyles,' he says.

The graphic novel's artist, Juan Ariel Camino Aparicio, adds, 'We want to use the book as a method of teaching kids, as a larger part of modern Bolivian education...By rescuing these ancient cultures, we learn about our identity. We are forgetting who we are as Bolivians.'

Vuelve Sebastiana is the story of a Chipaya girl, Sebastiana, who ventures away from her impoverished tribe and runs into an Aymara boy who is brandishing lots of food. Her grandfather sets out to find her. Once he does, he recounts the glory days of their tribe, days of celebration and fertility, to persuade her to come back. This story resonates with contemporary audiences as it calls for a return to one's roots. For most Bolivians, that means returning to these ancient cultures.

Vuelve Sebastiana is more than a love story between the indigenous youths. It is an important anthropological work that echoes traditions of oral and visual storytelling. It won the James Smithson Bicentennial Medal in 2006, due to its 'contributions to visual anthropology' and earned Jorge Ruiz the title of 'father of indigenous cinema'. Apart from the medal bestowed by the Smithsonian Institution, the film has obtained many other awards and was one of the first Bolivian films to rise to international fame.

Since the Chipayas were not familiar with cameras at the time of filming, the filmmakers first spent time with the tribe and involved themselves with their quotidian life. Slowly, they started taking out their cameras without filming, and eventually they started recording. According to Ruiz, the Chipayas were unaware that they were being filmed, resulting in a heightened authenticity that is uncommon in the field of anthropology.

> 'WE WANT TO USE THE BOOK AS A METHOD OF TEACHING KIDS, AS A LARGER PART OF MODERN BOLIVIAN EDUCATION... BY RESCUING THESE ANCIENT CULTURES, WE LEARN ABOUT OUR IDENTITY.'
>
> —JUAN ARIEL CAMINO APARICIO

According to Ruiz, it is crucial to preserve Chipaya culture due to its rich history. The Chipayas are the oldest peoples of the Andes, descendents of the ancient Chullpa tribe. When Jorge Ruiz filmed *Vuelve Sebastiana*, there were only about 1,000 Chipaya people alive in the region. To this day, the population is still low, at about 2,000 people. Ruiz attributes the decline of this culture migration and poverty.

The poverty and struggles conveyed in the film are still relevant to Bolivian politics regarding indigenous people. The issues it presents ring truer than ever. 'Under the government of Evo Morales, there is more healthcare and education for indigenous people, but not enough,' Ruiz says. Years after the film came out, 'Sebastiana's husband died from a lack of medical attention in his community,' Ruiz says. 'He died from appendicitis, a disease that is very easy to cure.' According to the Bolivian newspaper La Razón, Sebastiana herself has not been able to escape poverty, despite her starring role in the film.

Aparicio, the graphic novel artist, plans to visit La Paz this October to promote the work, hoping to find a publisher. He also has ambitions for future projects adapting Jorge Ruiz's cult films into more graphic novels. *Mina Alaska* (1968) is part of the series of pending projects aiming to rescue and preserve Bolivian culture and history.

Like Sebastiana, it seems many Bolivians have powerful reasons to return to their cultural roots. 'The film still has an impact, even on children,' Ruiz says. 'We screened it at some schools and the children were touched. The teachers were also happy to see it because it shows culture reflected through the eyes of a little girl.'

BOHEMIA **PAPEL**

PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE FOR BOLIVIA'S SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

TEXT & PHOTO: HANNAH CHUKWU

Walking into the Bohemia Papel workshop feels a little like walking into Wonderland. Every surface is covered in a miscellany of objects – dried orange peels lie amongst coca leaves and cards imprinted with the words PLANT ME! are scattered around the room.

CECILIA TAPIA IS SOWING SEEDS – FIGURATIVELY AND LITERALLY – FOR FUTURE PROJECTS TO SPROUT UP ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

The quirky feel of the workshop carries into the unique products Cecilia Tapia creates: handcrafted recycled paper infused with raw renewable materials. Some of the paper is infused with seeds, which creates a perfect metaphor for the renewable ethos behind Bohemia. After Bohemia Papel's seeded paper outlives its usefulness, the sheet can be planted into the earth and the cycle of life begins anew, as the seeds germinate and sprout.

Founded in 2011, Bohemia Papel is a manifestation of Tapia's passion for handicrafts and her desire to reduce waste. This passion is the manifest driving force behind Bohemia Papel's success. 'My dream for the project is that the success of Bohemia Papel will work as a reference for the topic of recycling paper across Bolivia,' Tapia says.

Bohemia Papel is not just sheets of paper though. Tapia's products include cards, bookmarks and handcrafted journals, including a calendar for 'Environment Lovers' – marking out days such as International Women's Day and World Environment Day. The journals also include instructions for how to replant the paper from which they are made.

Whilst the handmade aspect of Bohemia Papel products give them a characteristically rustic charm, Tapia's dream for her company is to be able to upgrade to industrial-sized blenders and pressers, so that the products can be produced on a larger scale. Tapia competed in the Latin American Green Awards in Ecuador this year, highlighting Tapia as an innovative creator – and her ethos behind the project deserves recognition. When Tapia founded Bohemia Papel, she ran workshops for local women to teach them how to make renewable paper.

Tapia is also reaching beyond the corporate production bubble to spread her message. She's looking to work with universities, collecting used paper for reuse. 'This collaboration is incredibly important to me,' Tapia says, 'but I also love that the project helps to generate sources of employment in my neighbourhood. For example, when I have had large jobs I have sought the help of young people in my community.'

But the toughest part about running a sustainability-driven small business in Bolivia, Tapia says, is the lack of help from the government. She laments the fact that Bolivia's commitment to reducing waste is rather minuscule. 'My environmentally oriented peers in Chile and Peru are receiving support from the authorities,' Tapia says, 'but here in Bolivia there is very little support. When you want to promote something like environmental sustainability, you have to do it alone. There are not many allies.'

Bohemia Papel is leading the charge for recycling and environmental sustainability in Bolivia, and Cecilia Tapia is sowing seeds – figuratively and literally – for future projects to sprout up across the country.

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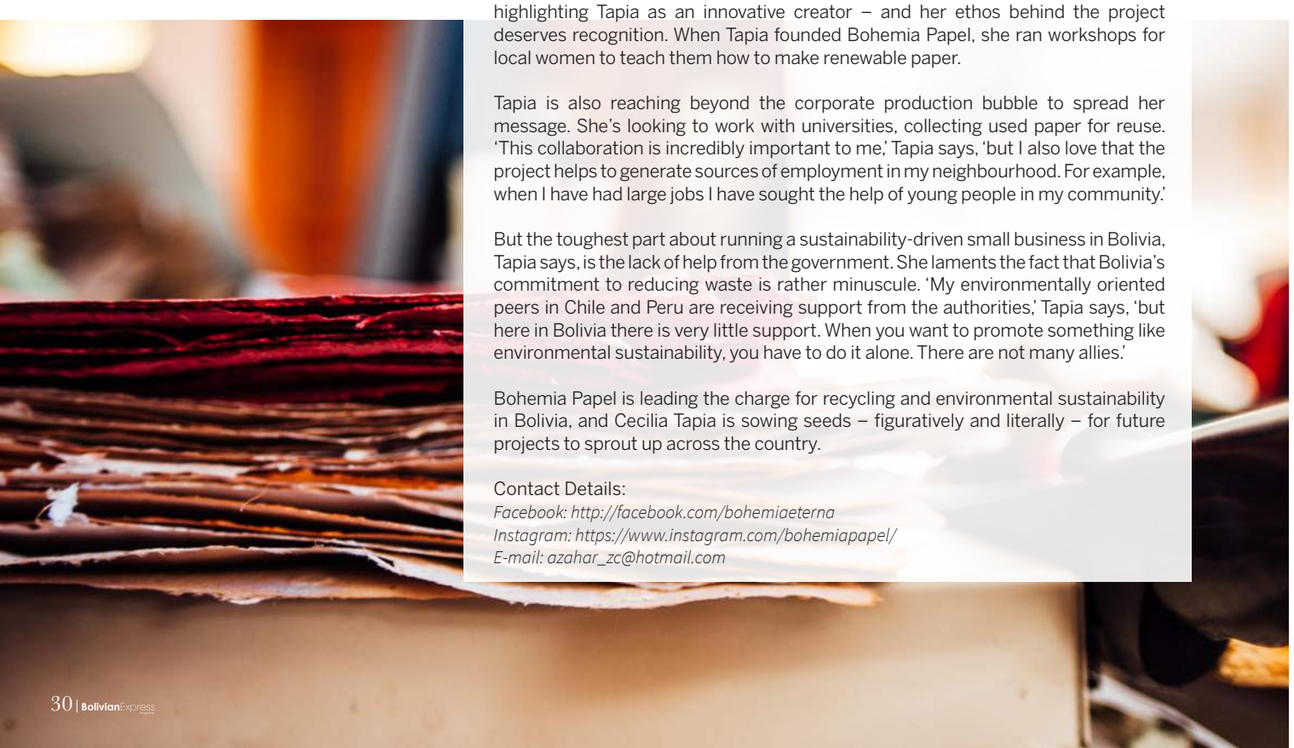

A **GREENER** LA PAZ

EMAVERDE'S MISSION TO PROTECT AND CREATE PARKS IN THE CITY

TEXT: DANIEL JOHNSON **PHOTOS:** COURTESY OF EMAVERDE

La Paz, which spreads across 472 km², is fairly big by Bolivian standards. While its little sister, El Alto, gives the impression of being even larger, the valley in which La Paz is situated affords striking panoramas of the city that reveal its true size. However, one of the things you notice when gazing at both cities is the lack of parks and green spaces. There are many reasons for this, political, social and cultural. But this is starting to change. Green spaces are being preserved and created throughout the city, despite the many challenges.

The slopes of La Paz can be deceptive. Many of these green spaces are tucked away from prying eyes. But the city still lags far behind World Health Organisation guidelines, which state that urban environments should have at least 9m² of green space per person. La Paz currently has 2.5m²; El Alto is worse. This has cultural roots, according to Yorema Gutierrez, a biologist and local advocate for public spaces. 'People don't grow up seeing green spaces, so when building and creating new neighborhoods, the space for greenery isn't allocated,' she says.

Gutierrez suggests some tentative solutions for this, pointing out how much more effective grassroots action can be, compared to that of the municipalities. 'Neighbours can create their own communal projects and spaces. It's about education,' she explains. 'There are plants and trees that don't need much maintenance, you need to teach people how to create spaces cheaply.'

Emaverde, a local company that stems from the municipal government of La Paz, has a different stance. Under its managing director, Julio H. Linares, the organisation has been working hard for the past 14 years to revive the dearth of La Paz's greenery. Despite the damning statistics, Linares is optimistic. 'We have been given a mission by the government of La Paz: to maintain the 500 green areas in the municipality, to create green spaces and to manage the recreative spaces of the city,' he says. This is an enormous task, with those 500 green areas amounting to about one million square metres of land. In 2005, Emaverde only administered 200,000m².

CONTINUES ON PAGE 34

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The fight to make La Paz greener has not been an easy one. Linares cites the numerous struggles they have faced, from the topography of the city to fighting with landlords. 'It becomes difficult to find terrain to build more parks,' he explains. 'We work with what we have. Improve them, re-purpose them, modernise them.'

The recent water crisis in La Paz has been yet another challenge. Shrinking glaciers have dramatically reduced the city's, and Emaverde's, water supply. Luis Revilla, the mayor of La Paz, instructed the company to refrain from watering plants with drinkable water. This prompted Emaverde to radically rethink how to manage its parks and adapt their methods. 'We had to use fewer plants and use more inert materials, like rocks and wood,' Linares says. 'It was difficult. Using rocks was new for us and more complicated than what we were doing before.' Emaverde also began using wastewater and planting species with less water absorption.

'IT BECOMES DIFFICULT TO FIND TERRAIN TO BUILD MORE PARKS. WE WORK WITH WHAT WE HAVE. IMPROVE THEM, RE-PURPOSE THEM, MODERNISE THEM.'
—JULIO H. LINARES

The main challenge for Emaverde, however, remains financial. Only 35% of the company's income comes from private sources, including Doppelmayr, the Austrian-Swiss company behind Mi Teléferico. The rest of its resources comes from the municipal government. Unfortunately, with the decline in the price of oil, local government funding has dropped between 30-40%, impacting Emaverde's finances. 'We haven't been able to increase the number of green areas this year,' Linares says. 'We are mainly maintaining what we have.'

This does not necessarily spell the end for the expansion of green spaces. Apart from maintaining parks, Emaverde also works in reforestation. 'Every year we plant between 5,000 and 10,000 plants,' Linares points out. 'Only 70% turn into trees, but we take care of them. They are the lungs of the city,' he says.

For this endeavour, Emaverde partnered with Banco Bisa and the social responsibility departments of several other companies. While the central government has also tried its hand at reforestation, it has only achieved limited success. Linares recounts the government initiative, Mi Árbol, which planted hundreds of trees in rural areas. According to Linares, in communities around Oruro almost no plants survived a few months after planting, due to a lack of supervision. Emaverde's method prevents this problem, 'We plan, we oversee closely the plants for at least 4 months, to make sure the trees don't die,' Linares explains.

By regional standards, La Paz has a lot of work to do. Asunción in Paraguay has 10m² of green space per person. Cities in Brazil have 20m² on average. These neighbouring countries do benefit from more favourable weather conditions, but La Paz has made admirable progress, both statistically and in the hearts and minds of its citizens. 'Our work has captivated the people,' Linares says proudly. 'Emaverde has been transforming abandoned areas into gardens.' Trees are becoming a more frequent sight in the city, and *paceños* are starting to see the value and benefits of having them around.

LA PAZ AIMS TO BE A **SUPER HOST**

THE CHANGING FACE OF TOURISM IN LA PAZ

TEXT: MICHAEL PROTHEROE **PHOTO:** IVAN RODRIGUEZ

'SUPER HOST IS AN INSTRUMENT, A MECHANISM TO BE ABLE TO OFFER PERSONALISED INFORMATION TO WHOEVER VISITS THE CITY, AND OFFER THEM A QUANTITY OF SERVICES WHICH MIGHT NOT EVEN BE FOUND ON THE WEB.'

—MAYOR LUIS REVILLA

In 2014, after a successful Internet campaign, La Paz was included on the New7Wonders Cities list. As a result of this, the municipal agency La Paz Maravillosa was founded, and was tasked with developing tourism in La Paz. They are now launching a new initiative: Super Host. The Super Host programme aims to tackle the issue of providing a safer, more authentic and more accessible experience of La Paz and Bolivia to tourists.

Raúl Pérez, the adviser for La Paz Maravillosa, says that Bolivia has quite a contradictory relationship with tourists. Even as its popularity increases with tourists, there is still a perception of the foreigner as the enemy, the coloniser. 'In 2014, New7Wonders declared us a "wonder city". But, paradoxically, in 2015 the World Tourism Organisation carried out a survey, and the least hospitable country to foreigners was Bolivia. So it's like two sides of the same coin,' Pérez says. He continues, 'Why? Because in terms of touristic competitiveness we are always behind. One of the most obvious reasons for this is the problem of hospitality. So we developed the concept of Super Host.'

Patricia Grossman, Director of La Paz Maravillosa explains: 'We are not from the Caribbean, or Central America – we are Andeans, and Andean people are like this: they are serious, dry, they don't try to make you smile. And I respect the culture, I don't want to change it. I want **paceños** to realise the touristic potential of La Paz. It's about recognising the city's potential.' According to Grossman, the Super Host programme is about intercultural exchange, sharing knowledge and potentially creating business opportunities. To achieve this, the initiative focuses on three axes: safety, access to information and promoting a change.

Improving the image of the city and the country is a daunting challenge, but the benefits of succeeding in this area are worth the effort. Luis Revilla, the mayor of La Paz, highlights the various long-term benefits of such a programme, saying, 'We are fully aware that the execution of our touristic promotion means an important economic opportunity for the city, but also for the visibility of the city in the world. Of course, it means a lot of challenges, but we think they are achievable in the long term.' Both Mayor Revilla and Grossman see opportunities for La Paz and Bolivia for positive change and want *paceños* to see the potential that the city and the country has to offer as a tourist destination.

The Super Host programme aims to train people both from within and outside of the tourism industry. Additionally, the programme will provide a network of information accessible by anyone, combined with a contact centre reachable over the popular WhatsApp smartphone application so that any tourist can request and receive information.

As Mayor Revilla explains: 'Super Host is an instrument, a mechanism able to offer personalised information to whoever visits the city, and which can offer them services that might not even be found on the Web, allowing specific needs of people to be addressed and provide not just general information that exists in any institution, in any city.'

The contact centre will be available at the end of August, with services provided 24/7 in Spanish, English and French. Users will be able to ask questions and receive personalised information almost immediately. Additionally, a dedicated Super Host office will open, and 31 associated WiFi points will be installed throughout the city later on.

Pérez continues, 'What can La Paz offer beyond what's always normally offered? It's not just the Valle de la Luna, the **teleférico**, the city centre and so on. We have a gastronomy programme, a programme with [the mass-transit system] PumaKatari, which opens new spaces for you. There's the discovery of new places like [the popular trekking location] Siete Lagunas.' There is a clear focus on developing tourism as a means to show a more genuine side to Bolivia and effectively rebrand the country.

As Grossman puts it, to be able to sustain La Paz Maravillosa, the city needs '**gente maravillosa'** to support the transformation of La Paz into a world tourist destination instead of just a gateway into Bolivia. 'I want to reach all services in the city and not just the touristic ones. This programme involves us all as hosts,' Grossman says. 'We need people to change their logic, to work on the notion that foreigners are not the enemy, the colonisers, and for *paceños* to recognise their potential.'

Mayor Revilla notes how developing infrastructure and tourism benefit each other in the long term. 'We're going to have the best health system in the country, the best transport system – through our municipal buses and the *teleférico* – the best waste collection system,' he says. 'We're going to have better connections for vehicles, viaducts and bridges that are needed in a city with such a difficult topography, all this converges in the benefits that the implementation of our municipal programmes have for the whole city which also supports touristic development.' This is no small task, to be sure, but Mayor Revilla realises it, summing up, 'There's a lot to be done in La Paz.' However, with a new hospital recently finished, several additional *teleférico* lines being built and two more bridges being added, the city is well on its way to achieving its goals.

Super Host will be launched soon.

GLOSSARY

BX75

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Magazine

CHAIRO	Meat and vegetable soup
CHOLITA	Bolivian women in traditional dress
CHORIPÁN	Sausage sandwich
GENTE MARAVILLOSA	'Wonderful people'
GUERRA DEL GAS	The Gas War of 2003
LA CUMBRE	Mountain pass at 4,600 metres, it is the highest point between La Paz and the Yungas
MACHISMO	An attitude, quality, or way of behaving that agrees with traditional ideas about men being very strong and aggressive
MONTÍCULO	Park in La Paz
PACEÑO(A)	From La Paz
PARAÍSO TERRENAL	'Heavenly earth'
PLAZUELA	'Small plaza'
SALTEÑA	Bolivian type of empanada
SORATEÑO(A)	From Sorata
TELEFÉRICO	The gondola based mass-transit system of La Paz
YUNGAS	A tropical and subtropical ecoregion in central Bolivia
ZONA SUR	Neighbourhood in the south of La Paz

CHA
PLAZUELA
SALTE
SUR

Menos POBREZA Más DIGNIDAD

Gracias a las políticas económicas aplicadas en los últimos 11 años, Bolivia logró cerrar las brechas de desigualdad y al menos 1,6 millones de bolivianos salieron de la condición de extrema pobreza entre 2005 y 2016.

REDUCCIÓN DE LA POBREZA 2005 -2016

1,6 millones de personas
salieron de la
Pobreza Extrema en Bolivia

De estos 1,6 millones, 640 mil personas pertenecen al área urbana y 940 mil al campo; y 830 mil son hombres y 770 mil, mujeres.

640 mil personas en el área urbana

940 mil personas en el área rural

830 mil hombres

770 mil mujeres

MENOR DESIGUALDAD

En los últimos 11 años, a nivel nacional se ha reducido la diferencia de ingresos entre ricos y pobres de 128 veces a 46 veces.

2005

El 10% más rico tenía 128 veces más ingresos que el 10% más pobre

2016

El 10% más rico tenía sólo 46 veces más ingresos que el 10% más pobre

• *En el área rural, la diferencia de ingresos entre ricos y pobres se redujo de 157 veces a 77 veces.*

• *En el área urbana, la diferencia de ingresos entre ricos y pobres se redujo de 35 veces a 19 veces.*

#SueñosCumplidos

BOLIVIA, 192 AÑOS LIBRE Y SOBERANA

Ministerio de COMUNICACIÓN
Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia

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