



BolivianExpress
Grupo Express Press

AUGUST RITES

Free Distribution — Issue 2

Directors: Amaru Villanueva Rance, Jack Kinsella, Xenia Elsaesser, Ivan Rodríguez Petkovic

Editors: Amaru Villanueva Rance, Xenia Elsaesser, Andrew Cummings

Web and Legal: Jack Kinsella

Printing and Advertising Manager: Ivan Rodríguez Petkovic

Social and Cultural Coordinator: Sharoll Fernandez

Design: Michael Dunn Caceres

Journalists: Andrew Cummings, Tanja Roembke, Lorange Dao, Alistair Smout, Christina Hookham, Rishum Butt, Olivia Alter, Anna Hunter, Katie Lark, Niall MacCrann, Emma Hall

Cover Photograph: Michael Dunn Caceres

Marketing: Jack Kinsella, Andrew Cummings, Lorange Dao, Olivia Alter

The Bolivian Express would like to thank: Alix Shand, Esteban Medrano, Claudia Aparicio, Adrian Villanueva, Christian Vera

Advertise with us: sales@bolivianexpress.org

Address: Express Press, Edificio Quipus, 5to piso, Pasaje Jauregui

Website: www.bolivianexpress.org

La Paz – Bolivia, August 2010



Editorial by Xenia Elsaesser and Andrew Cummings

“You know how you Europeans save money to go on holiday? Here we save money for our festivals.” Festivals are expensive business, from the booze, food and décor to the elaborate costumes, but for Bolivians it’s all worth it. To the outsider it is the most colourful showcase of Bolivian culture, but as we learnt this month there is far more to it than party, party, party. These articles chart our interaction with festival-goers, do-ers and more, refusing to be distracted by short skirts, waltzing past the zestful spirit of that fiesta on the Prado and into its tenebrous back alleys. From unearthing dubiously obtained skulls to encountering transvestite intellectuals, we have journeyed in and beyond the party atmosphere that so characterises August. A significant stop-off includes our collaboration with the Hormigón Armado this month, as well as holding up a barometer to the country’s political trends. Written accounts pale beside the vibrancy of what we experienced this month, but we hope that despite the lack of **cerveza** and **zampañas**, through reading these articles you will be able to enjoy the festivals as much as we have. And if this isn’t enough, next time join us!

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

CONTENIDO

p.4	Hanging Out with the Lusrabotas	
	Customary Moralety	p.6
p.7	Festivities Galore	
	My Super Sweet Fifteen	p.8
p.9	Viñetas con Altura	
	My Big Fat Bolivian Wedding	p.10
p.12	Bolivia's Real death Road	
	Entrada Universitaria	p.14
p.16	Quien Va a Sembrar a la Tierra? <small>Universitaria</small>	
	6 de Agosto	p.17
p.18	Gay Old Time	
	Paceño Style	p.20



Look for the shamrock

Av. 20 de Octubre, frente a la Plaza Avaro, busca el trebol
Telf: 591-2 2432296 - Cels: 70693076
irishpublapazbolivia@gmail.com

Irish pub

GUINNESS
DRAUGHT

Hanging Out With The Lustrabotas

Text: Deborah Bender — Photos: Michael Dunn and Deborah Bender



The lustrabotas are the young boys who offer to shine your shoes on the streets of La Paz. You will also find them running to your side with their shoeshine kit if you chance to sit on a bench in one of the city's many open, airy plazas.

Some of the lustrabotas wear balaclavas; others don't. Some say that these masks serve as protection against the winter's chill, an understandable reaction to the bitter La Paz winter.

More often, however, the youth themselves will tell you that they wear a mask so as to hide their identity from family or friends. One lustrabota, in his early twenties, told us that he was still going to school and he didn't want his classmates to know that he worked at shining shoes. Another said that he has told his family that he works as an assistant in a hardware shop. Whatever else it may be, it is clear that shining shoes on the streets is looked down upon as an occupation.

Bolivian Express has a collaborative relationship with Hormigón Armado, a non-governmental organization whose members work with the Lustrabotas. Each Saturday, one or more Bolivian Express members meet with

the lustrabotas at the "Fundación Arte y Cultura Boliviana" on Calle Ecuador. During this past month, we held writing and photography workshops with the boys. Each youth wrote a story about a favorite memory and a brief autobiography. During one workshop, local photographers demonstrated how to take photographs using a digital camera. They also discussed photo-portraits with the boys. In the accompanying photographs you can see the lustrabotas' photographic work, creating portraits of each other.

There are many warnings and cautions about the lustrabotas. Many will tell you that the boys are "cleferos" – that is, glue sniffers. Others will tell you to watch out, as they will be the first to pick your pockets.

Certainly, the boys know how to negotiate to get their needs met. But usually a firm "No" or "No, thank you" will suffice. The cautions are however, not entirely unwarranted – some shoeshine boys undoubtedly sniff glue, to alleviate symptoms of hunger or because they are encouraged to commit **trampas** by other boys.

For the most part, however, the boys that I met with each Saturday at the

Bolivian Express –Hormigón Armado workshops had more to teach me than I could have taught them.

From them I learned that while mathematics and languages may be preferred by one or another, **recreo** is every boy's favorite subject. I learned, too, that the laughter of the boys is universal and infectious. In short, I discovered that the lustrabotas are quite like other boys of their age; conditions of poverty may change outward appearances, but they each have hopes and dreams, just like boys and youth in every corner of the world.

During the upcoming months, Bolivian Express members will continue to meet with the lustrabotas. At their request, the focus will be on learning English.

Those who work near the entrances to the fancy hotels already know quite a few phrases, as they ask their English-speaking clients to help them with the language. Beyond their threateningly masked exterior, the boys I worked with revealed themselves to be fun-loving young people with admirable ambitions and a zest for learning that is veritably entrepreneurial, the third and most important lesson I learned during my too short stay in La Paz.





"I was born in La Paz and I grew up here. I'm 11 and I study at '20 de Octubre 1'. I live in El Alto with my mother and my three sisters. At school, my favourite day is Thursday and my favourite subjects are languages and playtime. If I had 100 pesos, I would buy clothes and trainers."

Juan Ignacio



"I was born in La paz, but I grew up in Caranví. I am ten. I live with my mum and my dad and my brother and I live in up in the deep inside in El Alto. I am at school and I like to study. The subject I like best is maths and playtime. If someone gave me a 100bolivianos as a present, I would do lots of things with them, especially get food and clothes."

Miguel



"I was born in Caranavi but I grew up in La Paz. I am twelve years old. I am in 6th grade. I live with my cousins and my uncles. In school my favourite subject is maths and I don't like languages. I like play-time."

Ruben



CUSTOMARY MORALETY



Text: Alistair Smout
Photo: Lorange Dao

It's not often that a president who returns with 64% of the popular vote (nearly 40% more than their nearest rival) faces stern political opposition eight months into their presidency, but then, Evo Morales is not your typical president. Always a controversial figure, the country's first Aymara President is once again causing a stir among his people, but, worryingly for his government, the traditional lines of division are shifting.

As a champion for an oppressed majority, it hardly needs saying that not all sections of Bolivian society have been fans of Evo. Business leaders and the middle classes have been suspicious (or outright hostile) towards his socialist motivations, and the financial centre of Santa Cruz has been demanding greater autonomy. However, increasingly his regime is subject to protests closer to home, as recent protests over the new customs law attest. On these marches, which are happening two or three times a week, protestations come from both Aymara and Quechua communities, and from regions as diverse as La Paz, Potosi and Morales' home region of Oruro. During Independence Day celebrations in the traditionally supportive urban expanse of El Alto, a man drunkenly heckles the town's president, proclaiming Morales a "bastardo" before he is dealt with, subtly yet ef-

fectively, when his seating is removed. Why has this change come about? One complaint we hear during a relatively peaceful march is that the enforcement of taxes on cheap imports is tantamount to communism. One wonders what else to expect from a *movimiento al socialismo*. Of course, not everyone on the march voted for Morales, or at least is ready to admit that they did. But those who do are noticeably embarrassed by their admission. He is branded a "traidor", and it is ostensibly easy to see why. The enforcement of taxes on cheap imports will raise the cost of living disproportionately for the poor who buy the goods, and also the lower-middle class vendors who sell them. However, there is a definite sense of paradox surrounding the protests, and one gets the sense that, predictably, the people are willing to support socialism only so long as they can benefit from it. As soon it becomes clear that in practice, socialism means higher taxes for all, suddenly it is not so appealing. Viewed as a champion of the lower classes, Morales' actions can seem treacherous, but as a champion of socialism, his treachery is far less obvious – indeed, to embrace free trade would be far more ideologically inconsistent.

Regardless of such technicalities, if the working classes feel that Morales

has abandoned them, opposition will mount and his government could be in trouble. However, it is time to challenge the lazy assumption that the middle classes are necessarily against Morales. His dominant victory in the presidential election reflects a growing support for his leadership in more bourgeois circles. The Bolivian economy fared relatively well during the global financial crisis, growth has been steady, and one section of society that should benefit from enforced trade tariffs are the Bolivian producers and owners of industry. While such tariffs do distort the market, their global presence, from the Common Agricultural Policy in Europe to protectionism of sugar in the USA, reflects the political bonus that governments can gain from interest groups in their electorate.

However, at the moment this political bonus seems dwarfed by the alert consumers of Bolivia, who are most concerned about the costs to their own pockets. What it may boil down to is necessity: whether Morales needs the support of the protesters more than they need the country's first indigenous president. For the paradox of the crowds suggests that, while they may protest against Evo's current actions, you wouldn't bet against them abashedly voting for his party again.

Festivities Galore

Text: Niall Macrann

Photo: Michael Dunn

As a European new to La Paz, my first experience of a Bolivian festival was a breathtaking one; as I watched the volume and vibrancy of the Entrada pass, I wondered what could inspire fifteen thousand people in such a collective effort. Moreover, I was astonished to learn that this monumental event was not a one off occasion, but one in a long string of festivals and celebrations threading throughout the Bolivian calendar and bunching up into a prolific August bundle. Whilst my colleagues dashed around surveying the various explosions of colour, light and sound popping off this month, I stepped back for an overview of the Bolivian passion for festivals throughout the year.

Preste

One of the most popular feasts in La Paz, it takes place on a saint's day and is generally celebrated with a community or family. Starting with a church service, a procession will then leave from the church to one of the families' houses, with an elder carrying an icon of the saint at the front. It features Folkloric dancing and drinking, need we mention, plus sacrifices to the Pachamama. Once back at the house, a lively party ensues, with each family providing a different commodity, like music, food, or drink. There is also a tradition the parties increase in size each year, so if five cases of beer are drunk one year, six must be provided for the next!

Alasitas

24TH January

6 Day festival dedicated to Ekeko, the god of plenty. Father Christmas, but without the beard, clothes or reindeer. (The likeness is astounding, trust us). Don't expect your presents wrapped, they come a-dangling off him like little round baubles. If it wasn't for his pot belly and twirly moustache, you might mistake him for the said father's tree.

Fiesta de la Virgen de Candelaria

2nd February

Copacabana. The Bolivian patron saint, she's so special she gets two birthdays, one in February and another in August. (see p23)

Carnaval

February/March

celebrated across the country in the week before lent. The most famous is in Oruro where around 38,000 dancers and musicians participate. The streets fill with furry bears, horny girls (referring obviously to their devil costumes). Careful you don't get chucked in the fountain, because it's a tradition for everyone to get soaked.

Semana Santa (Easter)

Every year Jesus returns to battle the legions of bunnies advancing towards Semana Santa. In La Paz, he always wins. In the UK he's less fortunate.

Independence Day

6th August

See article on p.16

Fiesta de Jesus del Gran Poder

May/Early June

Part III of the Jesus trilogy, it's a bit like having a posthumous birthday party, which also happens to be La Paz's hugest Preste. It has always been controlled by the indigenous communities of La Paz, with their different cultures and religions represented in the dances and costumes of the procession, which traditionally goes through the richer, whiter areas of La Paz.

Fiesta de Virgen de Urkupina

15th August

thousands make a pilgrimage to Quillacollo near Cochabamba.

All Saints Day / All Souls Day

2nd November

Persistent with the living, Bolivians can't stop themselves offering drinks to the dead too. Today's party is shared with you on p12.

Spring Equinox

21st September

celebrated at Tiwanaco, near La Paz. Get up ridiculously early to freeze yourself to death watching the sunrise over some sacred ruins. It's definitely worth it.

Navidad/Christmas

25th December

You Know it already



My Super Sweet fifteen

Text: Anna Hunter

The church blessing, the Cinderella gown, the bouquet, the tiered cream cake, the first dance...all little girls dream of this day. The average schoolgirl has to make do with playing Polly Pocket weddings until her big day twenty years later; however, girls from Latino communities receive more instant gratification in the form of their quinceañera at age fifteen.

Strictly speaking, this isn't a wedding: there's no groom, no honeymoon and certainly no alcohol involved in the proceedings. This is a rite of passage that grants a young girl a "princess for a day" pass, ensuring that she, like a bride, is the focus of her family and community's adoration. She has achieved the ultimate female accolade: womanhood.

A multitude of cultures and communities celebrate a teenager's coming of age in a similarly ceremonious manner, the most widely known being the Jewish Bar Mitzvah to signify a boy's entry into manhood at thirteen. Female rites of passage have often centred on long, regimented practices and prayer once a girl receives her first period, such as the 'Navajo Kinaalda', or strict, social introductions into polite society, as demonstrated by the waning French Débutante ritual. Although similarly rooted in tradition, the modern quinceañera blows these rigid rites out of the water.

A perusal of quinceañera boutiques in La Paz proves that it is the Quinceañera herself who is firmly in charge of proceedings. Whilst in the past the quinceañera was a more family-orientated occasion, modern day festivities seem to be modelled on the American Prom and Super Sweet 16 culture, a fairytale indulgence of teenage fantasies encapsulated by Mattel's new

"Quinceañera Barbie" and Disneyland's quinceañera packages and competitions. This Never Neverland element has certainly permeated La Paz, with fairies perching atop garish pink cakes and Disney princesses adorning the quinceañera **velas**. For the more fashion-conscious, trend-obsessed fifteen year old, Emo-style gowns have been rushed in from Argentina, ensuring that a Quinceañera needn't abandon her usual urban outfit of biker boots and black capes. In brief, every shopkeeper that I interviewed emphasised that it is the Quinceañera who personalises the party; the parents merely pick up the bill.

Nevertheless, despite this apparent wave of diva-esque daughters and opulent, superficial banquets, it is perhaps encouraging that young women are encouraged to take responsibility for their own event, as it can only further their sense of independence and self-esteem, essential traits for the modern woman. A 21st century quinceañera does not aim to launch girls into a life of domesticity or marriage, as was the original purpose of the celebration; instead it reinforces a teenage girl's confidence, inspiring her to chase her own dreams instead of simply living up to family or social expectations.

Over the course of this month, I have definitely watched too many home videos of quinceañera celebrations on YouTube. Some are highly impressive and entertaining in their display of pomp and ostentation; however, it soon emerges that even the most MTV-style fiesta has not lost the gravity or meaning of a coming-of-age rite. It is not the expansive guest-lists or generous gifts that bring a tear to the Quinceañera's eye; it is the pride of her parents and her first dance as a woman with her father.

Festival Name: La Quinceañera

Meaning: "The Fifteenth Year"- a girl's entry into womanhood

Origin: The Aztecs...dubious theories

Crazy Customs: Teenage girl presented with high heels of her choice by father. Lucky lady. The Quinceañera in question is flanked by up to fourteen of her favourite girlfriends (damas), along with up to as many gentleman admirers (chambelanes). She receives roses from the boys, a crown from her mother and her damas light candles in her honour. Beats a slumber party celebration, that's for sure.

Viñetas con Altura

Text: Lorange Dao
Tarja Roembke



	Festival name: Viñetas con altura
	Meaning: Comics with altitude
Origin of the festival: Firstly celebrated in 2003, since then, on an annual basis	

Although we arrived more than 30 minutes late to the MUSEF (Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore), where Viñetas con Altura was being held, the conference had not yet begun. An eclectic selection of people mingled amongst the stands: **aficionados** who'd already come in previous years, amateurs who'd read about the events in the newspapers and showed up out of curiosity, and authors who wanted to attend conferences and workshops to perfect their art.

South American and European authors gave a range of workshops over the course of the week; the time when Bolivian comics were almost exclusively dedicated to political humour is far away. These days they produce a huge variety of comics and the festival exists to demonstrate this diversity: from au-

tobiographic comics and Manga, to fantastical and horror genres. 'Viñetas con Altura' wants to bring it all to the public and help authors gain recognition. For the past eight years the association has been collaborating with foreign artists in order to help Bolivian authors export their work. Indeed, "before the festival, few people knew about Bolivian **historietas** outside our frontiers. Now they know Bolivian comic authors in Argentina, Peru and Chile. Few books are exported but there is an exchange. For instance, we publish authors in Bolivian magazines, not only Bolivian authors but also Argentine, Peruvian... and in Peru, the same author invites a Bolivian to take part in their magazine. So there is an exchange of talent," explains Joaquin Cuevas, one of the main organisers. However, although the festival has

helped authors and their historietas achieve some visibility and fame through Latin America, only few Latin American authors manage to live from their art: most are forced to take another job. Surprisingly enough, Diego Jourdan, one of the few artists who lives from his creative output, does not consider himself an artist, as he works **por encargo** i.e. most of his work consists in putting someone else's stories/ ideas into images, which also means adopting a style that is not his own.

Although Joaquin confirms this rather pessimistic account of the comic artist's situation, he is satisfied with the success of 'Viñetas con altura'. His awareness of the difficulties that these artists face make him believe even more firmly in the importance of promoting their works.



TOWARDS A BOLIVIAN NATIONAL POLICY TO PROMOTE TOURISM

Tourism is the best alternative for Bolivia's economic development due to its impact in employment, the effect in the economy of the regions, the promotion of the private investment that is required and the projection of Bolivia's as a touristic country, said Reynaldo Cardozo, President of Cámara Hotelera de La Paz. Its importance as the main generator of non traditional income for the economy, following the mining and oil industry, can be appreciated in the 2009 statistics. Close to 651.262 tourists visited the country, leaving an income of \$us 343 million.

The main growth has been registered in the regions that promoted the touristic sites and circuits. La Paz, that traditionally has been in the first place in the preference of the visitors, due to its natural and cultural beauty, didn't reflect major changes. Apparently that is due to the social conflicts that usually take place in the city, the lack of promotion, opportunities for investment and facilities for the touristic companies, the high costs of the services and the lack of interest of the airline companies in direct flights. All these problems had been aggravated by the costs of the operations, which are the highest of the region.

According to the president of the Cámara Hotelera de La Paz, this situation enables the companies from La Paz to perform in the market in a competitive way, offering quality services that are demanded in the global market. With the premise of improving the results, the touristic sector conformed by organizations as the Cámara Hotelera de La Paz has presented its proposal to the government and the Bolivian National Assembly. The proposal is based in the necessity of promoting tourism in La Paz and Bolivia, focusing these activities as the central core of the regional and national development.

"The investments and jobs could be multiplied if the government confirms its determination to approve a national policy, that includes the assignment of budget to advertise Bolivia's attractions, sites and circuits, generates a system to assure services of quality and creates conviction that tourism could be the main source of Bolivia's economy, that has to be reflected in the activities of different sectors of the country", said Cardozo.

The potentiality of La Paz, as the most important destiny of Bolivia's tourism, is shown in the investment of over 300 hotels in the region: 145 of which are in La Paz and El Alto. They are associated to the Cámara Hotelera de La Paz that started its activities in 1978. This organization is working actively in different sort of projects in coordination with the Tourism Vice Ministry, the Departmental and Local government, and other non governmental organizations.

UNIQUE LA PAZ

Its breathtaking attractions that fascinate for its spectacular assure that La Paz is unique, from its high mountains of the Andean range, the Titikaka Lake, the mysterious park of Madidi, the original cultures and the beauty of its colorful folklore.

All these inspire and compromise the future plans and activities of the sector that is determined to attract investments in all areas, including the new projects in the rural communities, that have unique characteristics for the wonderful surroundings where they take place, as well as creating a welcoming spirit which is a must for the success of the plan.

The proposal is based in the application of a strategy that focuses its importance in the world advertising of Bolivia's image as a touristic country, with all its appeal.

In the other hand the hotel owners ratify its commitment to improve the quality of the services, contributing in a decisive way to the national policy of tourism and its objectives. The consolidation of La Paz as touristic destiny in its own is a legitimate aspiration that responds to the goals of the region, which sums and reflects the variety of attractions of the country. The hotel owners of the Cámara are conscious of that and sure that this vision will allow La Paz to reach its goal.

My Big **Fat** Bolivian Wedding

“And so the prince in shining armour rides gallantly upon his white stallion across strange and foreign lands, high and low, all in search of his beloved, so that he may take her and wed her in holy matrimony...”



As beautifully romantic a story as this may seem, such stories tend to remain in the realm of fiction, and thus I have dubbed it ‘the fairytale curse’. The unfortunate truth for young girls in the UK is that we are more likely to find our Prince Charmings mounted on a J-reg Ford KA than mounted on his noble steed. But despite this gas-guzzling reality, the fairytale dream lives on, and all little girls are taught to dream of a prince charming and white wedding. On my arrival here, I asked myself whether Bolivian princesses are slaves to the same ideals.

Certainly the time, care, and effort that is expended in planning and hosting a Bolivian wedding may rival what we are used to in the UK, but a Bolivian matrimonial ceremony is certainly not the average ‘White

Wedding’ that British kids remember from their Disney-days. Bolivians remain attached to the practices and traditions of their ancestors, which like religion, are a syncretic blend of pre- and post-Hispanic influences.

However, the ingenuity with which traditions is intermixed with the ‘new’ practices that we are more accustomed to in the West may give some surprising and altogether amusing results. Marriage is universally considered a fundamental rite of passage, but in the Aymara and Quechua traditions it is the most significant social event in an individual’s life: a step down the aisle into adulthood, taken with huge symbolic gravitas and enriching the community life culturally, spiritually, and alcoholically. Following the religious and state

formalities, the real wedding festivities begin late in the evening. This is when aunts, uncles, and relatives you probably didn’t even realise you were related to hit the dance floor, sometimes too literally for comfort, as the customary alcoholic offerings to **Pachamama** pouring over the ground transform the environs into a beery, treacherous ice-rink. Although the first dance for many couples in the UK may mark the beginning of a wonderful and fruitful marriage, the obligatory opening waltz by the bride and groom in Bolivia is less emotion-stirring than comical. Let’s not forget that heels and slippery floors do not go well together.

The **Paceña** and **Chufay** is a-flowing, and if you don’t have an alcoholic beverage in hand already, you’ll be

sure to have one very soon. Refusing a drink might well cause offense, as a result of which many guests pass the night pouring it down raucously in reciprocal demonstrations of respect and appreciation for their neighbours. The rate of alcohol consumption is similar to that in the Indian Sikh tradition where a lot of drinking and a lot of dancing makes for quite a spectacular and enjoyable wedding.

Some Bolivian customs do bear

resemblance to those that are somewhat mechanically carried out in the 'White Wedding' tradition, for example, the throwing of the bride's bouquet to all the 'single and ready to mingle' ladies in the room. However, how often do you see this happening to the dulcet tones of Shania Twain's 'Man, I Feel Like A Woman'? No, you can never criticise the Bolivians for choosing context-inappropriate music.

This chaotic jubilation may disappoint the dreamy young girl's ideals of elegance and sophistication, but the genuine celebratory behaviour is what sets Bolivian custom apart. Refusing to be dominated by Western trends, it neatly integrates elements of the white pomp with its own practices and eccentricities. And rightly so: in a nation as colourful and diverse as this, to restrict oneself to 'white' only would be despicably reductive. Incorporating both gleeful capering and precarious drunkenness with figurative weight, what in the UK is a stilted performance, an unattainable fairytale curse, here becomes reality in all its accident, beauty and bedlam.

Unconventional? Perhaps. But fundamentally, Bolivians know how to throw a great party.

Text: Rishum Butt,
Deborah Bender

Photos: Deborah Bender



Bolivia and the UK share many matrimonial customs. It seems that the mandatory "sleeping uncle" is one of them.



In a blending of new and old, many brides today have exchanged the pollera and ruana for a more contemporary white wedding dress. Still, in a delightful blending of cultures, the gift-giving tradition of pinning money on the bride and groom persists.



Even the wedding cake has been influenced by western trends. If you look closely, you will see that a single ribbon dangles from each cake. Inside the cake attached to each ribbon is a small trinket. One of the trinkets is a small gold ring. Similarly to bridal bouquet tradition, the girl who pulls the ring from the cake is applauded as the one who will be the next to marry.

Text: Emma Hall

Photos: Emma Hall



BOLIVIA'S REAL DEATH ROAD

Exploring the Bolivian approach to what lies beyond the grave

On entering the Cementerio General of La Paz, the presence of Catholic and generally European traditions related to death struck me straight away. Cholitas had unearthed black variants of their traditional attire for a funeral, and as we entered a sign commanded us to be respectfully silent. Yet as we ventured past the whitewashed church into the cemetery proper and listened more closely to our two shoe shiner guides, the individuality of the Bolivian approach to death became ever more apparent. Memorials resemble school lockers— 4 up, many across – with each of the deceased having their own display window, containing photos, flowers and dedications. A common practice is to place within these windows the material goods which the person enjoyed most during their lifetime; behind one pane of glass stood two bottles,

of coca-cola and Pilsener beer. Our guide tells us that the coca-cola and beer drinker will be smiling in heaven as he gazes fondly down at his memorial. 'I'm going to have my shoe platform and polish', he adds, grinning. Such a practice could be seen as simply taking the Christian belief in heaven more literally than is customary across the Atlantic. Yet the most distinctive features of the Bolivian relationship with death come from ideas rooted in Andean societies long before the arrival of colonial forces. 'El día de los muertos', most famously associated with Mexico, is also acknowledged in Bolivia on the 2nd November each year. One week later a celebration of the dead particular to Bolivia takes place: 'el Día de las Ñatitas'. It is estimated that around 20% of Bolivians own a ñatita – a human skull which, for Bolivians adhering to Aymaran

beliefs, plays an integral part not just during the festival but also throughout the year: keep your ñatita appeased with tobacco and coca, and you can expect good fortune. But neglect to pay due respect, and you will only have yourself to blame as your hopes and dreams unravel to nothing. Obtaining a ñatita is controversial business. Occasionally they can be legitimately inherited from a relative (more directly than you might think), but more often than not they are bought anonymously on the black market, or scavenged from clearances of overflowing graveyards. At this point Catholic authorities tend to frown upon Aymaran traditions; on bringing up the ñatita topic with the usually jolly priest of San Francisco church, he took on a grave tone, explaining that separating a skull from its body prevents the dead from resting in peace. Indeed,

FESTIVALS OF THE DEAD

Sorting your Catrinas from your Ñatitas

Name: Día de los Muertos

Meaning: Day of the dead

Date: 1st-2nd November

Origins: Celebrated by the Aztecs and Mayas for around 3000 years. The rituals symbolize death and rebirth, represented by the skulls.

Crazy Customs: The Catrina has become a popular symbol of the festival – a Tim Burton-esque model of an elegantly dressed woman with a skeleton body.

Fun Fact: In Pre-colonial traditions, when someone dies, their souls goes to the underworld– where souls live an inverted life cycle- they are born old and die young. Think Benjamin Button.

the festival found itself in the midst of religious controversy in 2008, when the Bolivian Church refused to bless the skulls on the grounds that they were profane objects.

Even more acceptable symbols and realisations of Don Death and his friends are inescapable within La Paz. Taking an evening stroll down El Prado on a Thursday, the eccentric 'T'ili Rock' show can be found on the central boulevard, watched by a captivated audience of all ages. Two ten-inch high skeletons, one on guitar and the other an accomplished drummer, dance jerkily, and admittedly in a rather mesmerising manner, to a variety of rock classics – amongst which I witnessed some spooky Rolling Stones. The combination of macabre, twitching bones and Mick Jagger's cheeky vocals is more post-humorous than posthumous, summing up the ease with which Bolivians approach morbid subject matter.

T'ili Rock, along with other the many other traditions in and around La Paz, points towards a more open, communicative and arguably healthier relationship with death than the hushed stance adopted by many European cultures. Whilst the phrase 'Death is just the next stage of life' is all too often regurgitated as a clichéd comfort phrase back home, here I am told so in earnest, vibrant tones by every Bolivian I meet. And it's by no means a one-way street, either. This very personal, real relationship with lost ones is one common to everyone here, Aymaran or Catholic in creed: San Francisco's priest smiles, 'I speak with my mother all the time'. The Bolivian approach to death is certainly one I would like to transport back to Europe with me – though I'm not sure how well the ñatitas would fare through customs.



Name: Día de las Ñatitas

Meaning: Day of the Ñatitas (skulls) – when they are taken to the cemetery to be blessed.

Date: 8th November

Origins: In Prehispanic beliefs, the bones of the dead were unearthed so that the living could communicate with them.

Crazy Customs: The skulls are adorned with flower crowns, hats and even glasses and golden teeth.

Fun Fact: The police station of El Alto has a skull, 'Juancho', which, they believe, helps them in their investigations.

ENTRADA UNIVERSITARIA:

Students Come Out To Play

Text: Christina Hookham, Rishum Butt and Anna Hunter

Festival Name: Entrada Universitaria

Meaning: The grand entrance and procession of the UMSA students

Origins: A festival supported by the University Mayor de San Andres (UMSA) and designed to preserve and enhance Bolivian culture through the medium of indigenous song and dance

Crazy Customs: Mucha cerveza

Random: Scheduled to last for 8 hours, actually lasts for well over 12

It's Saturday morning, and the sun lifts its golden face to welcome a flood of activity bursting down along the Prado. Locals are filling up the streets at a rapid rate, the tourists are out in their forces armed with cameras and copious amounts of sun protection whilst long-limbed women parade up and down the street in outfits worthy of a parental guidance warning. The ignoramuses amongst us may be led to believe that we are bearing witness to the alleged greatest fiesta on earth, the Rio Carnavale. But this is not Brazil, this is Bolivia. The hop, skip and a jump of the dances is more folk than Salsa and more likely to get you bopping along than hot under the collar.

In England, as in Bolivia, bells attached to a man's leg is a clear sign of a folk dancer. But, unlike in England, folk dancing is cool here. 72 faculties, with over 200 people involved in each, massively outshines folk activity in Britain. Sidmouth Folk Festival, the largest of its kind in the UK boasts a mere 1000 participants, whilst here there are well over 14 000.

As each 30-man-strong-band nears the crowds, we are assaulted by the lead melody from the big brass section. Although the music contains melodic, embellished tunes from the pan pipes and wooden flutes, these are drowned out by the shrieking trumpets and their brothers. The lack

of accordion or fiddle clearly highlights the difference between the folk music of Bolivia and the Celtic influenced folk music of Britain.

Although the costume designs, like the music, have been around for many years, no group looks the same. Faculties performing the same dances distinguish themselves with their differing takes on the traditional dress. The general ethos: the more glitter and sparkle, the better the costume, especially for the Morenada and the Caporales. The dresses worn by young women, although very very short, hold certain similarities with the current trends within the competitive Irish Dancing community. Some dances, such as the Jalqa, stay very true to traditional dress, with women carrying flowers in baskets and on their backs, while wearing long black dresses with bright, ornately stitched aprons, strikingly similar to traditional Dutch dress. The accompanying men, meanwhile, wear white trousers and shirts with decorated belts, a reminder to us English gringos of Cotswald Morris dancing.

From dance to dance, the type of costumes varies from cholita-esque skirts to sequined loin-clothed hunters, and from incredibly decorated warriors to the cowboy boots and harem trousers of the men in the Chacarera. Each and every costume is breathtaking to look at and collectively the big, bright colours make the procession a visual

treat. The Tinku warriors jump from side to side, touching the floor, then the sky, in a dance inspired by battle. Between routines, the dancers gather together in large circles chanting to each other, keeping group morale high. The Chacarera proves to be one of the more complex dances, with the women dancing around the men, swinging their skirts in a style reminiscent of flamenco, while the men clap, tap and stamp their feet while jumping around, with a never ending abundance of energy, similar to the ceilidh dancing of the Celts. Although the Morenada and Caporales are the more sedate of the dances, with the dancers only seeming to swish their hips while moving backwards and forwards, frequent echoes of "BESOS, BESOS" ("kisses, kisses") everytime the girls walk past demonstrate that these were the most popular dances amongst both the performers and the crowd. (I wonder why.) As the day progresses, the readily available **Paceña** further enhances the happiness of all involved, though causing the parade to descend into chaos! By evening people have left their seats and are dancing amongst the procession, slowing an already protracted parade to an almost standstill. Although the dancers have lost their coordination and the music is out of tune, the sheer enthusiasm of both the performers and crowd keep the euphoric spirit of the Entrada alive and beating long after the sun decides to turn in for a well-deserved descanso.

Dances



Morenada

a vibrant dance from the Bolivian Andes, appropriately performed by the Facultad de Agronomía. Feathers, googly eyes and very short skirts.



Diablada

a highly energetic dance with an enormous dance troupe from the Facultad de Medicina. Stethoscopes included. A dance of combat that originates from Oruro and climaxes in a duel between St Michael and the Devil. The seven deadly sins and ornately dressed angels with very high hemlines also feature



Caporal

KNICKERS KNICKERS KNICKERS. Colour co-ordinated underwear are a major feature of this dance. Despite the focus on female lingerie, Caporales has it's roots in religion- the dance is intended to honour the Virgin of Socavón.



Tinku

Very physical war dance from Potosí. Male and female dancers are separated whilst Chinese dragon-esque characters thrust between them.



Chacarera

A partner dance from the Bolivian Highlands that is reminiscent of Flamenco. Lots of dress swishing. One unlucky lady got her skirts stuck to her head which seems to be an occupational hazard of this flamboyant dance style.

Quién va a sembrar la tierra?

Text: Xenia Elsaesser
Photo: Jack Kinsella

Who will sow the land? The Jalqas sow the land. When I decided to join the Jalqas I did not realise the gravity of what I was undertaking. Enticed by merrily leaping couples, it seemed like a fun dance to take part in. Certainly it is a community dance, and the compact sense of unity that drew me in, the vision of 40 people swaying as one block, proved most satisfying and real. But what had seemed so joyous in rehearsals, on the day of performance became something far darker and far more profound.

The preparatory atmosphere up at the top end of the **Prado** was not unusual. The men arrived in their home clothes, and slouched around with their costumes tucked sheepishly into their bags. The women arrived dressed, and began the community ritual long before dancing. We eyed the Morenadas, and complimented them. We eyed the other Jalqas group, and said, "They have a nice pattern on their **aguayo**. Our dress is prettier though." As we waited we helped each other arrange the flowers and pin them to our backs. Before dancing, we left our bags in the ornately adorned car that would drive before us. We pressed up to the door, whilst within our leader, Yana, sat like some aged Queen in a litter, and leant heavily out to receive our offerings.

The struggle began when we tried to secure our place in the procession. We were one of the last to enter, our fraternity having not yet gained the age and status to begin earlier in the day. But we were late. The band was not to be found; we rushed around anxiously, locating first a lone trumpeter, who finally made out his friends, engrossed in the latest Caporales entry. By this time the Miners, who came after us, had already begun to advance. We dashed in front of them and asserted our position in spite of their threateningly advancing truck. They were displeased, but we stood strong, still untangling the chaotic mix of dancers, band-members and dislocated couples, but refusing to budge from our proud place at **ante-penúltimos**. Last

year we had been **penúltimos**.

By this time, darkness had fallen and the cold was beginning to bite at my sandaled feet. Our slow start did little to relieve the chill; the bands were too close together and my **bloque** could not coordinate: those at the front of the group were dancing to a different, faster band than those at the back. What had become so slick in rehearsals here broke down into laboured fragments; at first overpowered by the un-



equal brass bands, we soon found that they had left us behind, and scurried and stumbled along in an attempt to keep up with the rapidly fading music. Our movements were less dance than swaying run, and the road panned out before us like a desolate highway. I despaired.

But in this very wretchedness lay the heart of the dance. Beating unevenly, by the time we passed San Francisco it had gained in constancy and power. Our movements began to come together, steadily and tragically. The women, in our great black dresses, chimed like dark bells. No one was smiling. The men bent low, swinging their pick axes at the tarmac. The leaders of the group marched down along

the files, barking, "**Agachense! Que bailen, bailen!**", and the women bent low too, still swaying, sowing seeds into the street. We rose, wheeled and spun, subservient to the cry of the leaders and the demands of the ground. The flowers on our backs drooped and sweated, but remained pinned tight. Sometimes despondently, I noticed that hardly anyone was watching us. Men in orange jackets swept the streets, the stands were being dismantled and red **Paceña** banners fell graciously over our heads. Families walked home, carefully avoiding the leery drunks, and in dark corners, some couples kissed and huddled. No one seemed to care for us, dancing there in the centre under higher orders. But this bleak and tired atmosphere was borne out by the Jalqas. Toiling increasingly painfully down the road, I felt gradually lifted by the grave dignity of it all: a melancholy procession, blared at from behind by the brass, pursued by miners and devils, and tethered along by a weary yet irrefutable instinct to cling to the road.

As we neared the Palco, our leaders' severity mounted, their voices cracked above our heads like whips, and we gathered ourselves together to prepare our entry to this ultimate, brightly lit arena. We lived these final steps wholly: the **bloque** strode forward as a unit, the men swung the women round them in a solid formation, us women heaved and chimed our knells, our lips drew into small smiles. We had had our swan song.

Was there anyone left in the **Palco** to see us? It didn't really matter, our symphony had not been danced for onlookers. It was a declaration, here at the eve of a long and revelrous day, that we remembered the cold dread of the Altiplano, the labour of the countryside, ploughing forward through the seasons, sowing and harvesting the potato crop. We remembered that triumph was our life, and reward was our death, death that kindly awaited us at the end of a long and agonizing journey.

Ploughing In The Sea: The Legacy of Bolivar

6 de Agosto

Text: Alistair Smout
Photo: Michael Dunn

television reporter and accompanying cameraman coming down the street pick out the only other person who is (nominally) working. They ask me if I'm having fun, where I've been, and I respond as best I can, in broken Spanish. It becomes quickly clear that maybe, just maybe, I am not the most authoritative person to articulate the nation's patriotic sentiment on what is perhaps the most important holiday in the Bolivian calendar. I try to explain that my Spanish isn't very good, but she presses on. The questions get more complicated, and the conversation

governments, usually led by military leaders. Independence certainly did not mark the liberation of the majority of native Bolivians. Universal suffrage was not realised until the MNR revolution of 1952, and, symbolic of their exclusion from the political process, only from this date onwards were indigenous Bolivians allowed to enter the Plaza Murillo. The struggle did not end here, the MNR was soon replaced by a military junta. Looking at Bolivian history, it is easy to get pessimistic about the development of the state in a post-colonial setting. Even Bolívar himself was



“All we have gained is independence, and we have gained it at the cost of everything else... Those who have toiled for liberty in South America have ploughed in the sea. Our America will fall into the hands of vulgar tyrants.”

In the Zona Sopocachi of La Paz, things are peculiarly quiet. The normally chaotic traffic is calm, and pedestrians cross the road with relative ease. Shops are shuttered up, cafes are draped in red, yellow and green, and the rusty smell of a barbecue drifts over a garden wall. The famously hectic city is having a break. It is 6th August, and a national holiday, for, one hundred and eighty-five years ago today, and after a sixteen year war, Simón Bolívar declared Bolivia's independence. As I stroll up towards the Prado, kids are having ice-creams, their parents sitting relaxedly in the sun, and a couple walks hand in hand, in matching Bolivian national football shirts. It may be of some surprise, therefore, that of all the people enjoying a day off work, the attractive

stalls further. Eventually, my questioner despairingly implores, “Repeat after me: Viva Bolivia!” I oblige, but it starts me wondering. Was it really necessary for those words to come out the mouth of an ignorant, illiterate gringo? The predominance of white skin tones in media and advertising was covered in an article last issue, but if the very day of a country's liberation from colonialist oppressors isn't a day to actually ask Bolivians their own opinion, then I'm not sure what is. Bolívar is often described as “South America's George Washington” for his role in bringing democracy and self-determination to the continent, but progress on this front has in fact been painfully slow. After independence, Bolivia frequently suffered under corrupt

far from optimistic. “All we have gained is independence, and we have gained it at the cost of everything else... Those who have toiled for liberty in South America have ploughed in the sea. Our America will fall into the hands of vulgar tyrants.” His words have, unfortunately, proved largely prophetic. Whatever the political problems Evo Morales faces, the significance of his election (if it needed proving) is only highlighted by this context. To his worst critics, he may be a vulgar tyrant, but, to paraphrase Woody Allen, at least he's for the left, which is good news for native Bolivians. And in time, attractive television reporters may ask them about their country's independence. For they're bound to have a damn sight more to say about it than I do.

WE'LL HAVE A GAY OLD TIME

Text: Andrew Cummings

Images: Andrew Cummings & Olivia Alter

'Chicken', noun:

as well as referring to the animal, the word can colloquially mean 'cowardly', alluding to a certain deficiency in one's virility. But Evo Morales seems to believe that the link between poultry and ponciness is stronger than that, as he made evident at a climate change conference in April of this year. Watch out, Evo warned chicken-eaters everywhere: thanks to 'feminine' hormones in everyone's favourite fowl, you're soon to turn gay and bald ('in the shit' in more ways than one. Ahem). In catchier terms, chow down on chicken and you'll soon be eating more than just the feathered variety of cock. The idea that homosexuality, effeminacy and deviancy are linked (according to Evo, gay, bald chicken-eaters 'experience deviances in being men') got me wondering about the status of homosexual men in La Paz: in a country that's progressing in so many fields, how goes it in the world of gay?

At first, gay La Paz cowers from me: it doesn't just seem to be underground, but locked firmly away in some heavily-guarded closet. Scouring the internet I can't find anything other than a few out-of-date websites telling me that Catholic Bolivia is a raging homophobe. With some patience, though, I finally find the right places to look. I find LGBT welfare sites, groups of Bolivian Facebook users rallying together in the fight against discrimination, and even more groups looking for casual sex, particularly in Santa Cruz. Browsing Bolivian classifieds sites such as mundoanuncio.bo I find more adverts from guys looking for intimate encounters (one particularly romantic one stands out: 'semi-semi-transvestite' – that's two 'semis' – 'seeks the best sex available for thirty-five bolivianos'), but several from men just looking for more



Chickens: they know you know

than just your average gang-bang ('This is a serious advert,' one man professes, 'I'm looking for a chubby man over forty to begin a serious relationship'). It's perhaps telling that sites such as these are so popular in Bolivia – with neither a significant openly-gay population nor a prominent gay scene, where else can Guido meet his soulmate Luis?

Another reason for all this hush-hush might be the prevalence of **machismo**, at least according to a recent study of **masculinidades** (published online at cistac.org). One report by social anthropologist Pilar Arispe mentions the frequent use of expressions such as 'no seas

maricón' ('don't be a faggot') in schools, while another by Claudia Vincenty lists various understandings of *maricón*, including 'cowardly', 'someone who always complains', and 'someone who doesn't know how to confront their problems.' Not a world away from the English 'faggot', then: to be gay is to be effeminate, which is seen as undesirable.

"Machismo is everywhere, though," David Aruquipa, a chief member of the transvestite troupe La Familia Galán, reminds me, "not just amongst gay people." There's actually a lot of openness in La Paz, David tells me; given the city's cosmopolitan nature, there's plenty of



Any self-respecting attendee of a 'Marcha de Orgullo Gay' knows that subtlety is key



The Familia Galán Museum in the Zona Cristo Rey offers a unique insight into the trans scene of La Paz

room for sexual diversity. Bolivia's capital also allows for different ways to live as a gay man: there are those that prefer going to gay clubs (of which I can find no trace in the city or online), having their own 'intimate' space as David calls it, and there are those who will go to any old place to express their sexuality however seems appropriate. (Depending on how the mood takes you, this may involve dressing up as the opposite sex or, as a few of the more attractive members of the Bolivian Express team have fallen victim to, going to a club like Namas Té and trying to suss out the sexuality of one's prey of choice by asking them: "So, have you seen any girls you like here?" Each to their own.) "In La Paz," David finishes, "the gay scene is very political. We discuss sexuality through art, through culture; it's about promoting



Ricky Martin: Gay

diversity, it's about human rights." Talking to the Familia Galán, I start to feel as though things are looking up for the gay population of Bolivia, or at least in the bigger cities of La Paz and Santa Cruz. Not only has Evo since admitted that there are 'gays in the **Palacio**' but in the last few months citizens of La Paz have witnessed a successful Gay Pride March, an LGBT film festival screening **pelis** from countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Germany and the USA, gay art exhibitions, and the painting of a sexual diversity-themed mural near the Puentes Trillizos (and who can forget what Ricky Martin did for the Spanish-speaking world when he chasséed out of the closet in March?). In any case, I can't shake the feeling that the link between birds, baldness and buggery just won't stick. Dunno why.

HOY en la Cinemateca Boliviana

PAOLO AGAZZI PRESENTA

ESCRÍBEME
POSTALES A COPACABANA



Paceño style

Text: Olivia Alter, Katie Lark
Photos: Olivia Alter, Katie Lark

Names

Isabel and Lley Flores
(Aunt and niece)

Profession

Both these ladies are lawyers from La Paz, but Lley lives and works in Santa Cruz.

Do you think living in Santa Cruz has changed the way you dress?

The climate is much warmer there so people aren't so covered up. Women also wear more clingy clothes which show off their figure.

And Isabel, do you have any particular influences?

No I don't think so. I like to be unique and I don't copy anyone else's style.



Names

Ronan y Rolando

Ages

28 y 21

What do you do?

Ronan is a doctor and lives up by the cemetery while I study anthropology and business and I live in San Antonio.

How would you define your style?

We try and dress as modern as possible, very casual. Our group of friends tend to dress in a similar way. We generally shop in the galerías around here.

What do you think most influences how younger people dress?

Music is very important to us. We love Lady Gaga! Ricky Martin and Justin Timberlake are our fashion inspiration (see the gay article for more on Ricky Martin).



Names

Adiel and Lucas

Ages

28 and 29

Where are you from?

We're Argentinian, we're currently working on a documentary here in La Paz.

Is there a big difference between Argentinian and Bolivian style?

Style is determined by social status. Back home the middle classes get their inspiration from America and Europe, from music and TV, whereas here there is more of a colonial, hispanic feel which you can clearly see in the cholitas' 'uniform'.

So what would you say influences your style?

Mainly MTV, reggaeton and cumbia. It's more chilled out...wanna try some Argentinian tobacco?!

As Ronan (left) was getting his shoes shined in San Francisco Square, Rolando gave us the low down on their styles.

Forget bowler hats, long skirts, shawls and plaits - there's more to Bolivian fashion than the cholita uniform. We headed to the city centre, around San Francisco, to see what other styles we could find. From schoolgirls to professionals, **Cruceños** and **extranjeros**, La Paz is buzzing with diversity. Here's a small sample of what we found...



Names

Isela Lloscoso and Nicola Palenque

Age

16

What do you do?

Schoolgirls at San Francisco

Tell us about what you're wearing...

This is our school uniform, everyone wears it in La Paz Tuesdays to Fridays, we're just wearing it today (it's a Monday) because there is a competition happening at school.

What do you wear outside school?

We normally just wear jeans or a skirt and top.

Where do you get your clothes from?

We don't have a favourite brand or place to shop, we just go to the shopping malls in the centre of town.

Do you have a particular influence or role model?

Definitely Shakira!

Name

Cynthia Rojas

Profession

Tourist management

Tell us about what you're wearing...

I like to dress smartly. My favourite designer is Lilliana Castellanos. She makes suits for younger professionals out of alpaca wool or the more expensive vicuña.

Where do you tend to get your clothes?

Zona Sur definitely has the best shops; this is where Lilliana Castellanos has hers.



Names

Mark Trevail (middle back) and Charlotte Abrahams (front left)

Ages

22 and 20

What are you doing in La Paz?

Travelling, mate. Already been Rio and Buenos Aires, staying at Loki innit.

Where did you get your clothes from and what do you think influences you?

Mark: Everything I'm wearing is from back home; Abercrombie t-shirt and Jack Wills trackies. Don't have no influences, I'm my own person.

Charlotte: I normally wear stuff from Topshop and H&M, but while I'm out here I try and fit in, like this llama fleece that I just got up the road. No one'll have it back home, they'll

Not-so-local treats

Reviews

CAFÉS:

Café Beirut | Tanja Roembke
Café Arábica | Emma Hall

The Middle Eastern restaurant **Café Beirut** has a nice Arabic flair, with one wall completely covered with pipes of varying sizes; it also boasts a lot of sitting space and a separate lounge area to smoke, whether it's cigarettes or shisha you want. The food, both Lebanese and more international, is of a good standard, with falafel, hummus, and even hamburgers, all very tasty and of a mid-range price. One of Café Beirut's most unique features is that the service is not only friendly but, in contrast with most other Bolivian restaurants I've been to, quite fast: with one press of a button, a waiter or waitress will magically appear at your table. All in all, a good restaurant for a nice, relaxing evening!

Location: Av. Montengro, (591-2) 2774496

Along the extensive 20 de Octubre strip of eateries comes **Café Arábica** (as long as you can manage to resist the temptation of Chocolate Caliente one door down). Entering the cafe, you could be anywhere in the world, though Arabia wouldn't be my first guess: spotless coffee table tops reflect the MTV shows playing on the flatscreens, and the calm atmosphere goes against the rowdy Bolivian norm. The food selection is very agreeable, with plenty of pitas and wraps – despite being a resolute carnivore, I found myself picking a vegetarian option with ease – and the drinks selection defies the number of 'mocha', 'cappu', 'frappe' and 'cino' combinations you thought possible. By Bolivian standards the service is average to rather quick, though if you're doing Arábica for speed, you're doing it wrong: here is the place to escape the hustle and bustle of Bolivia and embrace the chilled-out, cosmopolitan side of La Paz.

Location: Av. 20 de Octubre n. 2355, (591-2) 211-3293



Apparently, **Forum** is the place to be on a Saturday night in La Paz, but on two conditions: you look good enough (or often even white enough...), and you can make it through the hour or so of Latino-music-that-everyone-knows-except-you before the real party gets going. Our friends from 'mad gringo hostel' Loki couldn't hack it, but spurred on by the remaining alcohol in our bloodstream, the thought of free drinks (40bs entry was considered especially steep, until presented with 35bs worth of drinks money), and with the delights our VIP wristbands might bring us in mind, we shook our booties with the best of them. The VIP area is a spacious balcony with tabled sections where only the richest of **paceño** rich kids come to play (as we were told on various occasions). Cue much dancing on sofas precariously close to a low rail overlooking the dancefloor (until we realised there probably are better places to go, and decided it was time to leave).

Location: Calle Víctor Sanjinés n. 2908, (591-2) 2413669

CLUBS:

Forum & Blue | Olivia Alter

Now **Blue** really is the place to be on a Saturday night. Or any night for that matter. Whether you want to or not, you will end up at Blue on a night out. Blue is a bit like Marmite: you may find a gringo couple shagging in the toilets the perfect excuse to go home, or forget the mess in the back, stare up at the lasers and rave about how good a venue this grimy little cellar-esque room down a back alley is. If by now you've come to expect some of the usual Latino sounds thrown in to the mix, the music suddenly ain't so bad either.

Location: Somewhere along the Calle México... but shhh

One Last August Rite

I couldn't help myself. Bolivia's festive fever swept me up and carried me off to where I wasn't supposed to be, to Copacabana's celebrations. As I was assigned to report on everything that wasn't August, this festival was left without coverage. So I went undercover to share one last rite of August with you.

Copacabana's independence day festivities display the Bolivian standard: syncretism. Celebrated in the first week of August it is not just about liberty, it is also a religious festival dedicated to the Virgen de la Candelaria. I arrived on the last day, and like thousands of faithful already had that week, I climbed the steep path up the Cerro Calvito, the 3966m peak that overlooks the town. Numerous stalls occupied both sides of the path, many selling miniature items like model cars or houses for people to offer to the statue of the Virgen at the

top. Candles burnt around the many stone crosses that guided your way to the top, and Yatiri shouted prayers, sprayed beer, and let off fire crackers along the sides of the path, adding to a chaos in which I saw a small boy accidentally set alight a large wooden figure of Jesus.

I had come here without aspirations to mysticism, greedy for a chance to partake in this month's festival analysis, searching for moments to make droll commentary. But, as I reached the summit and the spectacular view of Lake Titicaca spread out beneath me, my senses reeled. Dizzy from the climb, and with the Yatiri's rough cries resounding through the crowds and encircling my head, the candles took on a misty, reverberating sheen. Even I, a disbelieving observer, found myself prey to a most unsettling and powerful sense of spirituality.

Text: Niall Macrann - Photo: Alistair Smout

GLOSSARY

SPANISH TERM

Aficionado
 Boliviano
 Cruceño
 Descanso
 Extranjeros
 Historieta
 Lustrabotas
 Machismo
 Masculinidades
 Paceña
 Paceña/o
 Pachamama
 Palacio
 Peli
 Pollera
 Por Encargo
 Prado
 Recreo playtime
 Ruana
 Trampas
 Vela
 Palco
 Aguayo
 Agachense, que bailen!
 Ante-penultimos
 Penultimos
 Bloque
 Altiplano
 Quien va a sembrar la tierra?
 Zampoña
 Chuflay

MEANING IN ENGLISH

A fan
 Currency used in Bolivia
 Person from Santa Cruz
 Rest
 Foreigner
 Comics
 Shoeshine boys
 'Chauvinism' almost hits the nail on the head
 Masculinity, Virility
 Brand of beer from La Paz
 Person from La Paz
 "Earth Mother" revered by indigenous people of the Andes
 Something political - Law courts
 Sort of 'película' which means 'film'
 Traditional skirt
 To order
 Main street in La Paz
 playtime/ recreation
 Traditional shawl
 Mischief or wrongdoing
 Candle
 Closed arena where the authorities sit to watch the highlights of the Entrada
 The coloured cloth that cholita women carry things in on their back.
 Bend low, dance!
 The ones before the
 The second last
 The block of dancers
 High plain above La Paz
 Who will sow the soil?
 Panpipes
 A kind of alcohol

ARTICLE IN WHICH IT WAS

Viñetas con Altura
 We'll have gay old time
 Paceño style
 Entrada Universitaria
 Paceño Style
 Viñetas con Altura
 Lustrabotas
 We'll have gay old time
 We'll have gay old time
 Entrada Universitaria
 Paceño Style
 My Big Fat Bolivian Wedding
 We'll have gay old time
 We'll have gay old time
 My Big Fat Bolivian Wedding
 Viñetas con Altura
 Entrada Universitaria
 Lustrabotas
 My Big Fat Bolivian Wedding
 Lustrabotas
 Super Sweet 15
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Bailando Jalqas
 Editorial
 My Big Fat Bolivian Wedding

GET INVOLVED WITH THE BOLIVIAN EXPRESS

BOLIVIANOS Y CH'UKUTAS

Estamos buscando Bolivianos y pseudo-Bolivianos interesados en participar en este proyecto. Trabajarás al lado de nuestros periodistas realizando investigaciones periodísticas y estando involucrado en un constante intercambio lingüísticos y cultural. El voluntario ideal es aquel entusiasta paseante con buen ojo estético, interesado en conocer gente de todos los rincones del planeta, y a quien le interesen la aventura, la cultura, el periodismo y la fotografía. Responsabilidad y relativa familiaridad con el idioma inglés es esencial. Para más informaciones envía un email a sharoll.f@bolivianexpress.org, o llama al 72503533

GRINGUITOS

We are looking for journalists and aspiring journalists from around the world to help produce our magazine in La Paz. Join our programme and we'll provide you with tuition in Spanish, journalism, photography and magazine design. You'll also get a personalized press pass and accommodation in the Bolivian Express residence located in the heart of La Paz. While working for us you will explore Bolivia, researching stories, taking photos, and writing articles in collaboration with locals from Bolivia. You will be involved in all aspects of production. Our programmes range in length from one month to a full year. For more information visit www.bolivianexpress.org or contact info@bolivianexpress.org

