BolivianExpress

Gratis

Magazine

Forever Young

#45

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EDITORIAL

Walking the streets of La Paz at one in the afternoon, it can seem the only residents of this city are teenagers. School uniforms, flirting and masses of young people blocking sidewalks and ambling along the Prado take over for a few hours, and with good reason. In 2010, 56 percent of Bolivia's population was under the age of 25, according to the World Health Organization.

This month the young and the not-so-young members of the Bolivian Express team took on the idea of youth culture in Bolivia. We thought about how young people are changing language, changing style, changing dating and sex, and spending their free time.

One of our writers ventured off to find out how skateboarding is taking off in La Paz, thanks in large part to some dedicated local and international volunteers who constructed a truly impressive boarders' paradise that is flooded every weekend with young **paceños** and **paceñas**. Another took to online dating - she was wary at first, but later found herself a bit addicted to the ease of swiping through potential matches at any time of the day or night.

Being young is often thought of as a time of freedom and lack of real responsibilities, but we also met young people in Bolivia who don't have that option. We got to know Sarita, a girl who is just 14 years old, but works a full-time job and goes to school. We also met Pedro, who at 16 is the oldest child and helps his mother care for his younger siblings. It's a reminder that the irresponsible teenage life glorified in pop culture is the result of privilege many people don't experience.

We also thought about what the word 'young' really means. Does it mean being under 25, or under 30? Is 40 really the new 30, and does that mean someone who is 35 can reflect youth culture if they live a certain lifestyle? One of our somewhat-mature correspondents set out to delve into the world of the kind-of-young, to find how youth is being stretched out or held onto.

So whether you think of yourself as young or not, come along with us as we explore a little piece of what it means to grow up in Bolivia today. ×

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

By Sara Shahriari

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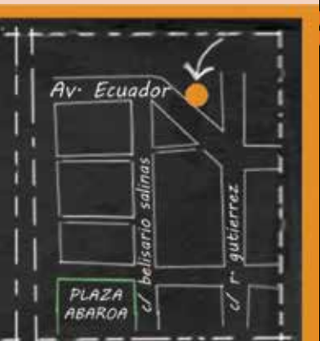

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YOUNG BUT ADULT

Between light and shadow...

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO ARGANDONA
TRANSLATION: SARA SHAHRIARI
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Sarita lives in Santa Cruz with her boyfriend. She gets up every morning to begin work at 6 am at a supermarket and works until 2 in the afternoon. She returns home to do housework and homework. Sometimes she falls asleep, but when she doesn't she goes to night school from 7 to 10 pm. She just turned 14 years old.

Work began for Sarita when she was 12 and worked as a nanny, and now she tells her story as if it all happened a long time ago. 'My father never wanted me to work. He said, "It doesn't matter that we have so little, we will be fine." But the money was not enough. My two older sisters and I left school so that my siblings could study.' And that's how this young adult made the decision to go to work.

In many parts of the world, teenagers look for part-time work to have spending money or because they want to become more independent from their families. But Sarita, whose story is like that of many other teens in Bolivia, left her home in Guarayos to work full-time.

'At first I was scared, but the family was good to me', Sarita says. 'The hardest part was being far away from my family. Sometimes I would go to my room, look at pictures of my parents, brothers and sisters and cry.'

Today Sarita wants to finish school and then study medicine. She is independent, and she visits her family every two or three months bearing gifts.

> When you start to work you really learn to value the sacrifices your parents make for you. For me it has not been easy, but I know that I am more independent now and that I can better myself'

'I think that young people should help their families more', Sarita says. 'When you start to work you really learn to value the sacrifices your parents make for you. For me it has not been easy, but

I know that I am more independent now and that I can better myself.'

'Girls are more vulnerable than boys', says Lidia Mayser, the manager of an anti-child-labour program of the government of Santa Cruz. So why are girls more vulnerable to exploitation? 'It doesn't matter that they have to work—be it selling candy, cards, flowers or anything—when they get home they are also expected to do housework', says Armando Oviedo, manager of Plan International in Santa Cruz. He explains that in rural areas, if there is a choice to make about which children will attend school, the boy is usually chosen because girls are expected to care for their younger siblings.

Bolivia's Law 548, which was passed in July of this year, allows children as young as 10 to work independently, and children as young as 12 to work for managers, as long as they have written permission from their parents and the local children's rights office. But in reality, children and teenagers have long worked, and continue to do so, without these permissions.

Across the country from Santa Cruz in the city of El Alto, Pedro, 16, works with his mother. 'My father died when I was 11 years old and my three siblings and I help my mom sell food. I help most because I am the oldest', he says. Pedro's day starts at 7 am, when he helps his siblings, who are 10, 7 and 5, get ready for school. Then he helps his mother prepare pots, plates and silverware and takes them to the center of La Paz, where they sell food near the Plaza Murillo. After the lunch rush, he eats something quickly so he can be at school by 1:30 in the afternoon. 'I have to bring all my things with me from the house', he says with a knowing smile. 'Sometimes I forget my work and the teachers reprimand me. They don't understand.'

Pedro leaves school at 6:30pm, arrives home around 7:30 or 8, does his homework or sleeps a little, and then at 10 or 11 at night he helps his mother prepare food for the following day. 'I help her peel potatoes, carrots, make rice or noodles, wash things—anything, it depends on the food. We prepare just two different dishes.'

Pedro wants to do all the things young people his age do, like study, go out with friends, and meet girls—but time for that teenage life is limited. At the same time, he carries heavy responsibilities for someone who is still a teenager. He knows his life is not easy but he doesn't complain—his mother and his siblings count on him to contribute to the family's survival.×

In many parts of the world, teenagers look for part-time work to have spending money or because they want to become more independent from their families. But Sarita, whose story is like that of many other teens in Bolivia, left her home in Guarayos to work full-time.

TECHNOLOGICALLY BRIGHT:

Computers, Coding and Education in Bolivia

TEXT: VICKY ROBERTS

Down behind the market stalls on the streets of Eloy Salmón, La Paz's most notorious electronics market, young kids work meticulously to crack cell-phones, unlocking technology that, let's face it, the majority of us wouldn't know where to begin with.

Certain that this underground work is not being taught by the current education system, I began to wonder, in countries such as Bolivia where computer access is less readily available, how is the next generation learning about the technological world we live in?

Bolivia as an emerging nation is displaying signs of rapid growth when it comes to technology. The number of smartphone users is on the rise, and according to the Pew Research Center in the United States, the pervasiveness of cell phone ownership here means that countries such as Bolivia have skipped phone landlines altogether and have moved straight on to mobile technology, giving the population access to the Internet without the need for computers at home.

It seems, however, that younger Bolivians want more education when it comes to technology. Mauri Wilde, 18, is currently studying **Ingeniería en Inteligencia Artificial**, and believes that the subject is not given the importance it deserves in schools. Since the age of 16, Mauri has taught himself how to code, learning programming languages such as Javascript, C++ and HTML from online tutorials, books and friends. 'The

CONTINUES ON PAGE 14

MINISTERIO

demand in this field is incredibly big', Mauri says, 'and is yet to be given the attention it deserves.'

Sandro Centellas, director of the **Carrera de Ingeniería Eléctrica** at the Universidad Pública de El Alto (UPEA), speaks of students' interest in learning technology in Bolivia. When asked whether his students begin university with any prior knowledge, he stated that whilst there exists some teaching in high schools, they know the basics but not the understanding behind it. "Being a good computer programmer is like being a professional footballer... you can't just become a star when you're 18 or 19, you have to begin from an early age. We can't expect to have very few resources in Bolivia and then produce a hundred Bill Gates'."

'We can't expect to have very few resources in Bolivia and then produce a hundred Bill Gates'

The current Bolivian government under Evo Morales is making inroads in this area, pledging earlier this year to provide free laptops for every final-year high-school student. By incorporating information and communication technology into the education system, the initiative aims to prepare students for the future. The Quipus computers, which are manufactured in El Alto by Bolivia's first state-owned computer production plant, are to be rolled out to every student at this level by the end of the year. At this time, however, the children are not allowed to take the computers home.

At UPEA, interest for studying technology-related subjects is on the rise. The Ingeniería Eléctrica faculty has shown significant growth in the three years since its launch in 2011, starting out with just fifty students and now at 170. Several of the students here are working with the Raspberry Pi, a computer the size of a credit card that is being used in English schools to teach school children as young as 5 how to code (a rather frightening realization for those of us that freak at the first thought of coding). Link it to a TV screen and a keyboard and—voilà!—you have a fully functioning desktop computer.

The gadget has found success with children, adults and hobbyists around the globe, due to the numerous digital projects that can be achieved with it—anything from music machines and security camera systems to weather stations and even parent detectors. The developers at Raspberry Pi launched the initiative with a target audience of around 1,000 English school children. But speaking with Eben Upton, founder of the Raspberry Pi foundation, it seems the tiny computer has surpassed expectations in enormous quantities; worldwide sales have been reported to nearer 4 million, with an estimated 200 being used here in Bolivia.

At UPEA, student Raul Quispe demonstrated his final-year project using the Raspberry Pi. He has created a system that detects the attendance of both students and teachers at the university, using heat and face-recognition technology and a webcam, which then detects a face and compares it to a database of images.

Talking on the topic of the Quipus laptops, professor Sandro Centellas suggested a future government investment into Raspberry Pis for Bolivian school children, teaching them not just to use technology in today's world, but also to understand the building blocks behind it. In Bolivia, the Raspberry Pi retails at around $65USD, twice of that in the UK. But this doesn't detract from the fact that it would be an extremely cost-effective initiative compared to the Quipus laptops.

Whilst the current Bolivian government has seen overall public spending double in the past eight years, social spending on the likes of education has increased in real terms, but fallen as a percentage, according to the Centre for Research on Globalization. However this is a nation experiencing strong economic growth, with a president who has pledged to '*pensar en lo grande y no lo pequeño*' ('dream big and not small') when it comes to technology. With initiatives such as the Quipus laptops beginning to emerge, this could be the start of a new era that places emphasis on the teaching of technology in Bolivian schools, thus preparing a young generation with the skills they desire in order to interact with the evolving technological world around them.

Raspberry Pi, known as the "Tartita de Frambuesa" in Latin America, is available at tecbolivia.com; Model B retails at $70.00 USD.

When Do You Stop Being Young?

Text: Wilmer Machaca
Translation: Sophia Vahdati

In all societies, age appears to be one of the principal defining attributes of activity and social image. Age and sex form the basis for social classification, coding and structuring in a demographic sense. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the definitions of classifying concepts, such as infancy, youth or old age, are generally vague due to the imprecise end point of one stage and the beginning of the other. These limits vary according to different schools of thought and focal points.

Who are the young people? In Bolivia, last year, under the slogan 'All Young People Matter', President Evo Morales put forward the 'Youth Law'. It established that youth lasts between 16 and 28 years of age. Nearly 24 percent of the Bolivian population qualifies as 'youth' according to this legislation.

Youth: Is It a Privilege?

When one person says to another 'You look so young!', 'You sound young', or 'You seem younger', the reply is always 'Thanks!' Is being young a privilege, an attribute or a circumstance? Certainly, this explanatory criteria is not defined through its manifestation psychologically or culturally; rather it's through the external contemplation of how someone looks on the outside: prettier, better looking, slimmer, etc. The social role of being young is confirmed by the gaze of others. You would never find a job announcement that specifies 'Looking for a well-presented young person'.

Nowadays, being young is a valuable attribute—youth is the power supply of the ego, not just in terms of vitality, but also in terms of appearance: esthetics, beauty, dynamism, etc. Through this, you can see people's growing preoccupation with increasing, or extending as much as possible, their youthfulness. People try various things to make themselves look young. For example, they resort to a variety of cosmetic products that are gaining great popularity in the media in La Paz. These include mother of pearl, snail slime, and the more exotic donkey's milk and semen (for those interested, the last two items are sold in the **Feria 16 de Julio** in El Alto).

David Llanos, a sociologist and university teacher, says that youth isn't an equal opportunity offered to everyone who finds themselves inside the governmentally defined statistical category. In Bolivia, it is more likely that the period of youth will be shorter amongst the working classes and longer amongst the middle and upper classes. The same can be seen—in terms of gender—with women: a man is more likely to be viewed as youthful than a woman, since a woman's responsibilities, the 'way they should be', means women work double-duty due their responsibilities in the home, with children, at work and more.

Generally, some upper- and middle-class young people enjoy not only the opportunity to study, but also to postpone their entrance into adult life; they marry and have children later on and enjoy a less demanding period of life with minimal family responsibility in order to capitalise upon or consolidate their role as a young person.

This means youth-evoking marketing transforms the market: We buy youth, we sell it, it intervenes in the market of desire as a vehicle of differentiation and legitimacy.

Some people think that youth is a state of mind. Helen Caro, a student at La Paz's San Andrés University and the coordinator of the city's second youth parliament, says that 'Youth is a attitude. I believe that you never stop being young.' However, as Daniel Mamani, a law student at San Andrés, mentions, it can reflect a value system in which 'the way you look is how I looked and the way I look is how you will look'. This is all relative—you are 50 years old but feel young nevertheless, although in the eyes of fellow citizens you are not eligible for a bank loan, nor are you considered for a job offer, a grant or more training.

While it is very difficult to determine when you stop being young, there are circumstances or rites of passage, such as military service or marriage, that mark the passing from youth to adulthood. Perhaps this is the reason why many people in Bolivia do not update their marriage status on their identity cards—they prefer to appear single or as students, to try and immortalise themselves as young people and mark differently the commitments of adult life.

When does someone stop being young? The search for answers and all of the doubts surrounding them inhabit an uncertain and vague territory. Let's say that the concept of youth is not static; rather that it constructs itself around a certain social, cultural and historic setting. It is better to bypass the subject (the person, youthful or not) and try to interpret a given reality from the basis of each individual's history, life and significance.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

A COOL HUNTING EXPERIENCE ON THE STREETS OF LA PAZ

PHOTOS: VALERIA WILDE

VALERIE MONIC 38

38

RAMIRO GUITRAGO 20

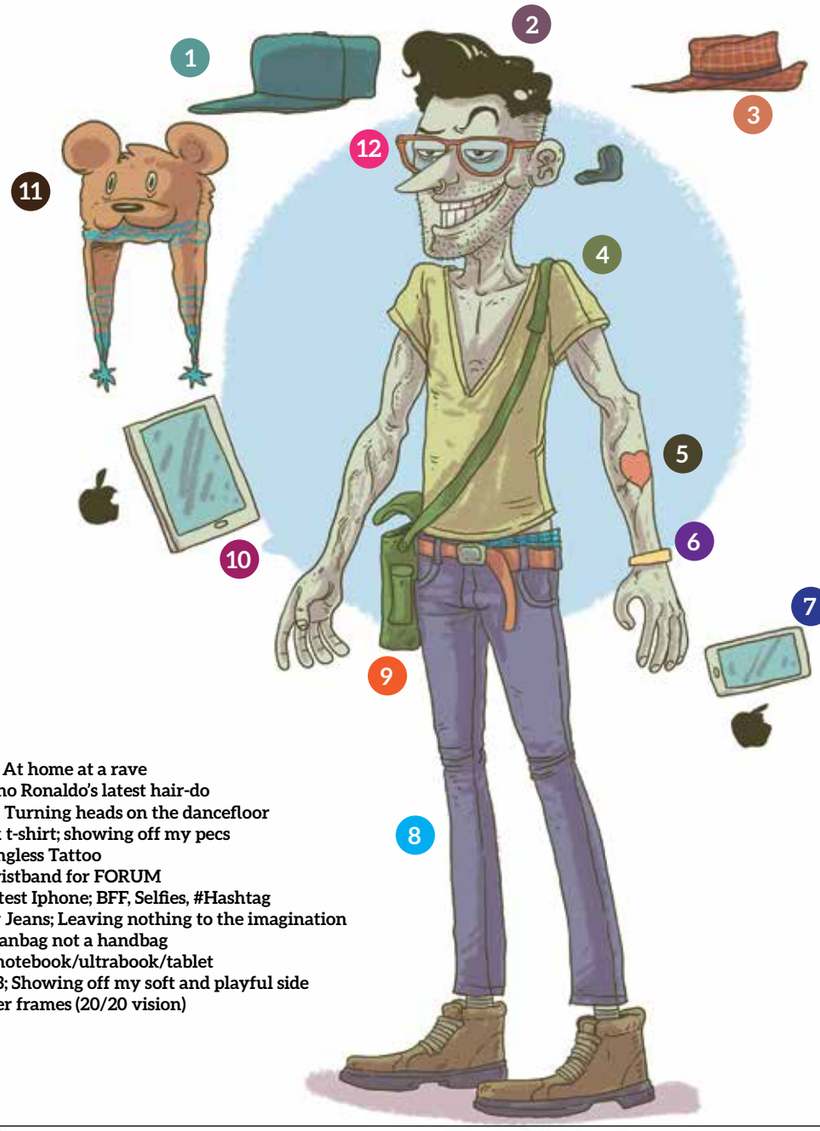
RODRIGO VILLANUEVA 17

GLORIA FLORES 25

JAILONES

'Too many bottles of this wine we can't pronounce
Too many bowls of that green, no lucky charms
The maids come around too much
Parents ain't around enough
Too many joy rides in daddy's jaguar
Too many white lies and white lines
Super rich kids with nothing but loose ends
Super rich kids with nothing but fake friends '
Frank Ocean Feat. Earl Sweatshirt

TEXT: RODRIGO BARRENECHEA
TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES



1. Hat #1; At home at a rave
2. Cristiano Ronaldo's latest hair-do
3. Hat #2; Turning heads on the dancefloor
4. V-neck t-shirt; showing off my pecs
5. Meaningless Tattoo
6. VIP wristband for FORUM
7. The Latest Iphone; BFF, Selfies, #Hashtag
8. Skinny Jeans; Leaving nothing to the imagination
9. It's a manbag not a handbag
10. Ipad/notebook/ultrabook/tablet
11. Hat #3; Showing off my soft and playful side
12. Hipster frames (20/20 vision)

I want to talk, without pretending that this an exhaustive study of the issue, about a slang word that many people use to describe a young and wealthy social group, mostly concentrated in the Zona Sur of La Paz, that is considered "elite": los Jailones.

Jailón comes from the English phrases "High life" (Jaila) or "High Society." Amongst young people in La Paz the term can be derogatory because jailones are often seen as having done nothing to earn the items they flaunt, be they cars, clothes, or mobile phones, which are gifts from their well-to-do families.

On the other hand, there are a lot of youths who want to be considered jailones because of the privilege of wealth, power and socioeconomic influence the word and lifestyle implies.

Of course you won't only find jailones, or people who aspire to be jailones, in La Paz. The word is used in countries such as Columbia, Chile and other parts of Bolivia, and the concept certainly has its equal in many places around the world.

In La Paz, a stereotypical jailon is always in fashion, trendy or chic; this means dressing in clothes by designers like Ricky *Sarkany, Kosiuko*, and *Zara* or following hipster trends with a casual three-day-old beard for guys and messed up hair for girls. It means having the newest gadgets on the technology market; like the latest iPhone, or the ability to dine at expensive restaurants like la Suisse or Jardín de Asia for even small occasions, like a one-month anniversary with your girlfriend. The lifestyle is geared around a feeling of exclusivity, which includes getting into the VIP area of nightclubs such as Forum, and is part of a search for acceptance that is as desperate as it is genuine.

My real interest in this topic lies in the fact that the most important part of jailón culture involves a certain adoption of the values and even the traditions of countries such as the United States and Europe in general (which for the record, is something even I find hard to escape). For example, jailones may celebrate Halloween more than they follow the Bolivian tradition of Todos Santos, and celebrate Saint Patrick's Day more than the festivity of Aymara New Year.

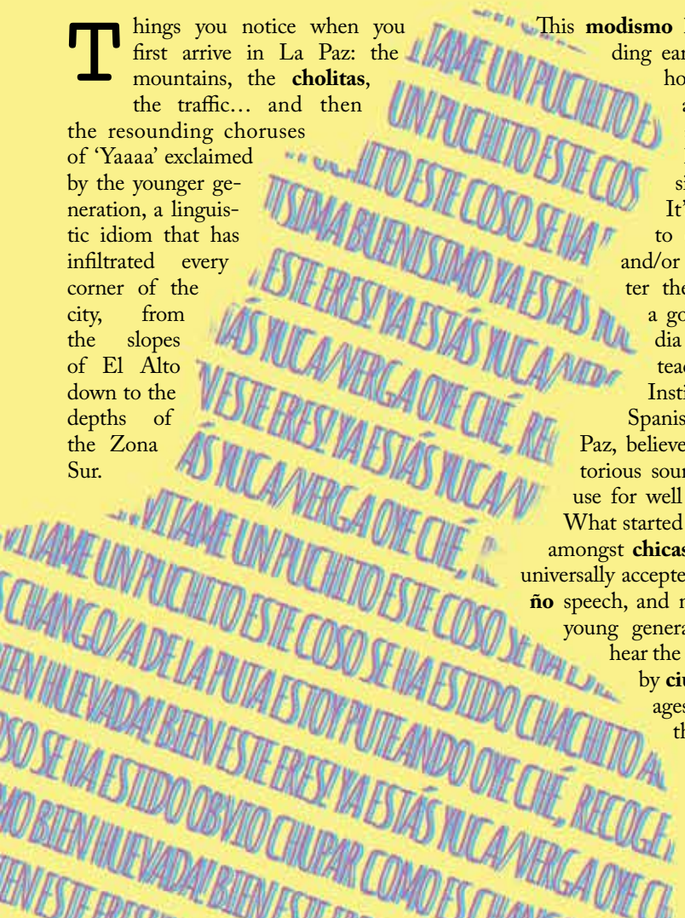
Another example is how, over the past few weeks, I´ve seen my Facebook become jampacked with friends doing #theicebucketchallenge without understanding the cause behind it - they are simply drawn to a fad from abroad.

I am not saying that being influenced by other cultures is bad, or that people should be criticised simply for being born into a privileged family. But some aspects of jailón culture make me question how having access to everything that globalisation entails is influencing Bolivian culture in a much broader way.

All this external information, and the need to obtain it in order to be part of a society that is obsessed with accumulating as many goods and services as possible (and where having money is of utmost importance), means young people find themselves inevitably alienated from their original cultural identity. It´s happening more so in this generation than ever before, and it leads me to think that this phenomenon is not exclusive to Bolivia, but forms part of worldwide trend ... don´t you think?

WANT TO SPEAK LIKE A PACEÑO? 'YAAAA!'

TEXT: VICKY ROBERTS



Things you notice when you first arrive in La Paz: the mountains, the **cholitas**, the traffic… and then the resounding choruses of 'Yaaaa' exclaimed by the younger generation, a linguistic idiom that has infiltrated every corner of the city, from the slopes of El Alto down to the depths of the Zona Sur.

This **modismo** has been invading eardrums throughout La Paz for a while now, and its popularity shows no signs of abating. It's often used to express delight and/or agreement after the punchline of a good joke. Claudia Chambi, a teacher from the Instituto Exclusivo Spanish school in La Paz, believes that the notorious sound has been in use for well over a decade. What started off as an idiom amongst **chicas** has become a universally accepted part of **paceño** speech, and not just for the young generation. You can hear the expression used by **ciudadanos** of all ages in all parts of the city.

In fact, many slang words here in La Paz have become so ingrained that they are no longer considered slang. Besides the aforementioned yaaaa, consider the terms **caserita**, **ahorita** and **digamos**. According to Georgina Herrera Moreno, a linguist at Bridge English Language Center in Denver, in order for such expressions to survive, they must be widely adopted by the group who uses it. And this is exactly what has happened: these words are now accepted markers of typical paceño speech.

Each generation brings new words to the language, allowing its members to express themselves, a communication system that acts as a powerful tool in shaping social identities.

Whilst defenders of 'standard language' regard slang as degrading, Tom Dalzell, editor of The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, argues that slang gives each generation the 'chance to shape and propagate its own lexicon…to exercise originality and imagination.'

If slang is an indicator of social identity, it is no surprise that as new words and phrases enter the lexicon, regional variations exist even within the city of La Paz, both in dialect and accent.

Down in the Zona Sur, young speakers demonstrated the adoption of American English in their speech, which could be seen by the use of **taguear**, **facebookear**, **whatsappear**… Well, you get the picture. Due to the affluent nature of this neighbourhood, the young people here are growing up with more access to computers and the Internet compared to other areas of the city such as El Alto, an economic divide that accounts for more exposure to English in this region.

David Crystal, a linguistic expert and author of The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, states that 'language itself changes slowly, but the internet has speeded up the process of those changes so you notice them more quickly.' And with the rate at which technology evolves, it's unsurprising that the next generation are adopting words into their lexicon to express concepts with no equivalent in Spanish. The addition of the suffix '-ear' quickly facilitates the borrowed foreign words into the lexicon.

Interestingly, this process of adopting foreign words into the lexicon is highly reminiscent of how Quechua changed when first borrowing words from Spanish. Consider the words **cuadernota**, **mesata**, and **vasota**, all Spanish in origin but with the added suffix '-ta' to mark them as Quechua.

The youngsters we spoke to also highlighted the difference in pronunciation of R throughout the city. As a foreigner learning Spanish in the city, it is certainly hard to grasp.

'Each generation brings new words to the language, allowing its members to express themselves, a communication system that acts as a powerful tool in shaping social identities'

They told us about its strong pronunciation down in the Zona Sur, compared to the more slurred pronunciation used in the centre and up in El Alto, where it is realised more like the pronunciation of Z. The often-quoted **perro** in Spanish has become almost a cliché for its variation in pronunciation and, if you're lucky, in La Paz you might even hear it said like pezjho.

So at what point does slang become accepted as official? The youngsters that spoke with us about their language use unanimously mentioned the Yaaaa, which highlights what a conscious and prevalent part of **paceño** speech it has become. And each year thousands of slang expressions are accepted into the official dictionaries of languages around the world.

And on those grounds, Yaaaa has a great shot at making it official. We can only hope to see it in the dictionary one day.

MEET ME AT THE MOTEL

MOTELS IN LA PAZ OFFER UP A SPACE OF SEXUAL FREEDOM AND SECRECY FOR YOUNG PACEÑOS

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: VALERIA WILDE

The door opens up into a hidden cave of treasures. I walk through a rounded tunnel; the ceiling, walls, floor--all a darkened gold of rocky texture--opening up into three small chambers. A shining sultry hot tub, with a sculpture of a buxom pirate suggestively leaning around it; a bed with the sides of a ship; a pirate's flag and a chest of false jewels and gold coins that glisten in the dim lighting. The only odd element in the picture is a well-stocked mini-bar full of alcohol, sweets and condoms. This is one of the many fantasy rooms at Stop Time, a popular motel in La Paz, available to rent by the hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the English-speaking world, the word "motel" may conjure up seedy images of dirty rooms and somewhat illegal activities. In La Paz, however, these spaces range from luxurious fantasy rooms to small uninspiring car garages. If the latter option takes your fancy, you can drive up to Motel Garage in Sopocachi and enjoy a moment of privacy inside your own vehicle; shrouded, that is, by beige moth-eaten curtains and the faded colours of the motel's pitiful bunting. However sordid this may seem to the foreign eye, these are spaces of freedom for **paceños**, young and old.

Beyond indulging far-fetched sexual fantasies, motels have become a necessary part of maintaining an active sex life in La Paz as a young adult. 'I would prefer to take a lover back to my family home, but my family is very machista,' says a paceña in her twenties, who preferred to remain anonymous. 'Some people', she adds, 'have extremely liberal parents and are able to do so,' but this is certainly not the norm. Some parents are even afraid that their child's one-night-stand might end up robbing the family home...

I set out to visit three different motels in La Paz to explore the draw of these varied establishments. All of them can be found in the vibrant and cultural district of Sopocachi, alongside a long list of other sleeping alternatives.

The motel Stop Time is perhaps one of the most famous in La Paz. Having opened over 15 years ago, it treats its clients to a choice of standard rooms for 78bs per hour, and other more elaborate rooms that enter the realm of fantasy. A pole (for dancing?), a sauna, jacuzzis and (of course) a fully-stocked minibar: yours for 158bs per hour.

Stop Time's range of differently priced rooms caters to clients of all ages and backgrounds. According to my guide, younger clients tend to frequent the more economical rooms, although gossip tells of high class young **paceños**, or members of rich mining families, who hire out two fantasy rooms for the night and bring along several partners.

But that's not to say that only young people visit these establishments. On leaving Stop Time, I caught a glimpse of a senior man drive up in his Mercedes and park his car in one of the spaces conveniently situated directly next to the rooms. He pulled the curtain half way across and let a younger woman climb out of his boot. It seems motel secrets exist for all generations.

The fantasy rooms at Stop Time are alternately bewildering, marvellous and shocking. They range from the sultry golden pirate cave to a disco-style Aladdin room. Past the mini moat, you enter the luxurious castle-themed King's room. Three doors down is the "Hitler room", featuring a portrait of Hitler covered in lipstick marks. ('This is the most feared room. Lots of people feel as if Hitler is watching them', commented our guide.) The workers at the motel do everything to ensure their clients' enjoyment, offering discounts on staying longer than 3 hours and serving food to the rooms of those who stay the day after.

BEYOND INDULGING FARFETCHED SEXUAL FANTASIES, MOTELS HAVE BECOME A NECESSARY PART OF MAINTAINING AN ACTIVE SEX LIFE IN LA PAZ AS A YOUNG ADULT

Stop Time's biggest competitor is Motel Inn, a place that looks like a holiday resort or a European Center Parcs, with three types of rooms on offer: an economical room for 64bs an hour, a normal room for 74bs, and a Suite for 120bs. Anyone curious about the quality of the rooms will have to pay the motel a casual visit. The staff refused to give me a tour of the place and wouldn't even answer my questions.

Motels in La Paz often prefer to stay out of the limelight. None of them advertise. The hushed-up part of the motel culture is part of what draws its clients. People seem to be aware that couples frequent these places, but not everyone is willing to talk freely about it.

Beyond the taboo, motels are also a place of young love and sexual exploration. Their social invisibility cloak seems to cover the diverse needs of La Paz's population. Outside of the walls, life goes on in proper public fashion. Inside of the walls, is a private world with rules left open to interpretation.

SKATING REACHES NEW HEIGHTS IN LA PAZ

Katherine Browning visits the world's highest skate park to roll around and chat to one of the guys who made it all happen.

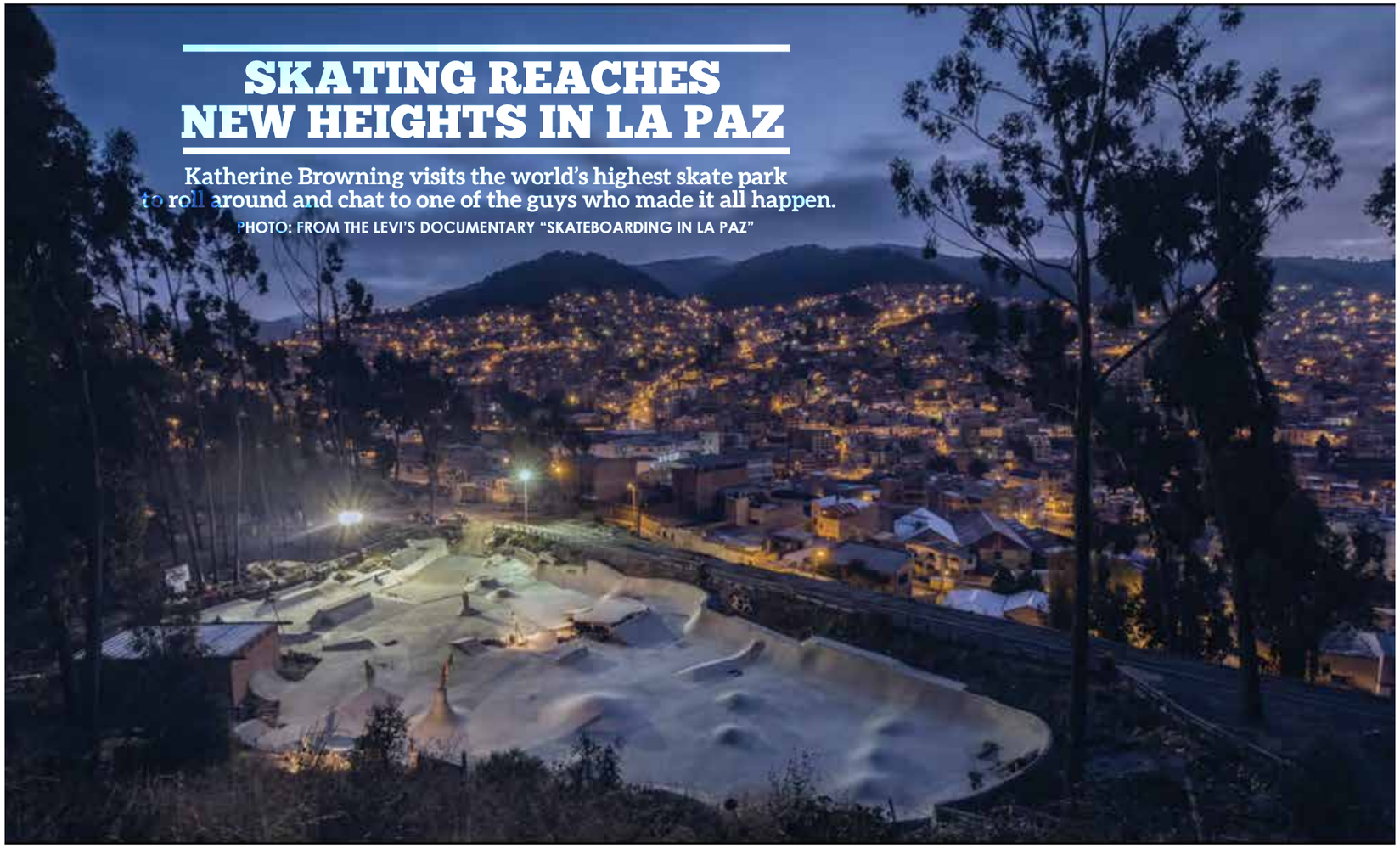


PHOTO: FROM THE LEVI'S DOCUMENTARY "SKATEBOARDING IN LA PAZ"

It's 2:30 on Wednesday afternoon and we're waiting for the vice-president of the Skate Association of La Paz to give us a ride up to the new skate park located inside the Parque Ecológico de Pura Pura in the city's north.

Inaugurated in June of this year, the entire park was constructed in just four weeks with the help of professional skaters and volunteers from 15 countries around the world. With 2,100 square metres of smooth concrete--made by skaters, for skaters--it's needless to say that I'm pretty psyched to check it out. An hour later, our guy arrives. By the time we crawl through peak-hour traffic and arrive at Pura Pura the park is about to close, storm clouds are threatening and suddenly my chances of carving up some pavement aren't looking so great.

Luckily, we catch Milton Arellano on his way out, who is the president of the Skate Association of La Paz and the guy who got the whole skate park rolling. Arellano is a US-born-and-raised Bolivian, who, sick of his New York lifestyle, decided to move to La Paz almost four years ago. Interested in developing the rather marginalised local skate scene, it wasn't long before Arellano got involved with the local government.

Change came in 2011, he says, when the Association presented a 40-page document to the local government based on the City's plan for the year 2040. The aim was to advocate the benefits of alternative sports like skating. Not only does skating offer a healthy alternative to at-risk youth with plenty of idle time on their hands, but due to the geographic features of the city, downhill skateboarding can even reduce pressure on public transport, as you only need to catch it one way.

The project initiated a dialogue about plans for a skate park in La Paz but, whilst pragmatic issues such as budgets and potential locations were more easily negotiated, one big problem remained: who would actually build it?

'Every previous civic construction for skateboarding has been a failure…' Arellano says. 'The measurements are wrong, the surfaces are messed up. Typically the best skate parks are made and designed by skaters.'

Literally a week later, Arellano got a call from Arne Hillerns, a representative of Make Life Skate Life, which is a German NGO that builds skateparks in underprivileged communities around the world. It turned out the organisation was looking to develop its next project in South America.

'I was like, holy shit, thank you skate gods for falling from the sky!' Arellano says.

The skateboarding branch of the company Levi's then came on board and agreed to pay for the flights and expenses of international volunteer skaters who would then build the park using materials provided by the City. In October 2013, representatives from Make Life Skate Life and the with the support of the German NGO Soforthilfe, based in La Paz, visited the city to finalise details concerning the project. Their visit coincided with German Reunification Day celebrations, which is why Arellano and the guys found themselves invited to 'a huge drunk meeting' in the German Ambassador's house.

'So many people kept coming up to us because we stuck out like a sore thumb... Suddenly we were these skaters in ripped-up jeans and sneakers and everyone else is wearing suits, you know? But the more we talked about it, the more people were really impressed with the project.'

The Skate Association was encouraged to apply for a microgrant and was consequently awarded 10,000 euros from the German Embassy. The money, in addition to other funds raised online, helped pay for the park's Skate Haus, which is now an integral part of the Pura Pura skate initiative.

Within the Skate Haus is a skate school, always attended in the park's opening hours by two international volunteers -skaters who have pledged to stay in La Paz for a one year period. The school is stocked with one hundred skateboards which were donated by the German organisation Skate Aid, and are loaned out at no cost. According to Arellano, weekends are crazy, apparently there are so many kids lining up to borrow skateboards that sometimes they have to use a roster system so that everyone gets a turn.

Today, though, is not one of those days and, as the hail starts to fall, I run back to the car to find it filled with adolescent skater amigos who seem to have come out of nowhere.

'The park project really captures the essence of the sport; which is unity, zero discrimination, inclusion of everyone'

And what do they think of the park?

'It is incredible. It's like nothing else. It really has helped us a lot,' says 16 year old Juan José Gutiérrez.

Juan José's older brother Raul, 23, is currently the vice-president of the Skate Association of La Paz and the owner of a small, kick-start skate shop in the Zona Sur. How does Raul describe the vibe of the La Paz skate scene?

PHOTO: JOSE LUIS SAENZ NUÑEZ
Trick: backside 180 melon grab - Dario Frias Canedo

'The park project really captures the essence of the sport,' he says, 'which is unity, zero discrimination, inclusion of everyone. When someone is trying to learn a new trick, it doesn't matter if they're from El Alto or the Zona Sur, there's always someone who is going to be there to help, to show them, because I think we all want this sport to grow collectively.'

I'm convinced. Come next weekend, this wannabe skater-girl will be lining up at the Skate Haus, patiently waiting to borrow a board, along with the other hundred-something young **paceños**.

The world's highest skatepark is open Wednesday through Sunday, 09:00 to 18:00. Use of the skatepark is free but there is a cost of 1.50 bolivianos to enter the ecological park.

THE ERA OF DIGITAL DATING

Finding Love In The Palm Of Your Hand

TEXT: VICKY ROBERTS

Swipe left, swipe right; left, right, left, left, right. Anyone who's been looking for love in the past couple of years will realise what I'm doing. Yes, it's Tinder. And it's landed here in Bolivia.

I find myself being indulgently judgemental as I flick through the profiles of potential date matches in La Paz. Swipe left, no. Swipe right, like. Sure, I'm a foreigner in this city, but whoever said you can't judge a book by its cover?

The mobile dating app Tinder is deliberately designed for that purpose. Its unique formula has catapulted the application to global success since its launch in 2012. In essence, Tinder has turned online dating into a game. It allows users to search casually for a romantic interest without the risks traditionally involved in online dating. You just never know if you've been rejected.

In the US and Europe, the long-standing social stigma of online dating is finally fading. When I arrived in Bolivia I simply assumed this would not be the case here, due to limited access to the Internet and cultural differences. More and more people across the globe are turning to the web to find love and other interests, but has this trend stretched as far as Bolivia?

In an interview with the magazine TechCrunch, Tinder co-founder Justin Mateen revealed that his company is 'really focused on international growth right now'. The numbers speak for themselves. Daily swipes on Tinder across the globe have doubled in the past six months, from 600 million to 1.2 billion. But how many of these new swipes are happening in Bolivia?

ber of smartphone users in the country has more than doubled on a yearly basis since 2011, according to the Autoridad de Regulación en Transportes y Telecomunicaciones. This kind of rapid growth seems to be fueling changes in the dating scene here, giving thousands of people access to mobile dating apps like Tinder.

At least it felt like thousands of people when I went undercover, launching a profile of my own on Tinder for the very first time.

'Relationships that start by these online means are still not well seen in Latin America'

There's reason to believe that more and more people in Bolivia are looking for love from the palm of their hand. The number of smartphone users in the country has more than doubled on a yearly basis since 2011, according to the Autoridad de Regulación en Transportes y Telecomunicaciones. This kind of rapid growth seems to be fueling changes in the dating scene here, giving thousands of people access to mobile dating apps like Tinder.

"Congratulations!" became the only thing my phone could communicate for the next few hours. "You have a new match!"

I'd obviously swiped right too many times. As my phone pinged and whirred at minute-intervals, it didn't take long for me to realise that I was in over my head. After the initial ego boost, trying to juggle conversations with thirteen different men at the same time became overwhelmingly stressful. The fact that they were all located within a 3km radius of me triggered a worry that I'd be recognised by them simultaneously the next time I walked down the street.

Whilst wading through some of the more inappropriate comments that were invading my cellphone screen ('**yo te podría calentar**', for example), it became obvious that most Tinder users are all about fast love. In fact, everything about the mobile app is fast: from launching your profile at the touch of a button, to swiftly swiping the screen to play the game. Love matches pop-up instantaneously. You could go from 'single' to 'in-a-relationship' in sixty seconds.

Behind the guise of my brand new profile, I quizzed a few of my online "dates" about why they were using Tinder. One user in La Paz, who wished to remain anonymous, confided that 'it's important for your self-confidence and ego, to know that people are interested in you.' This must be part of what makes Tinder so addictive. Unlike other platforms for online dating, Tinder is like a game, which is what hooks its growing number of users. Ironically, even though the app is designed to help people find a date quickly, it actually entraps its users into spending more hours staring into a screen.

In Bolivia, the lucky ones who manage to find love through this novel platform must go on to face the prejudice of the world beyond their cell phone screen. As one of my online courters told me, 'relationships that start by these online means are still not well seen in Latin America'. This hasn't detracted from Tinder's popularity in La Paz though. It seems the promise of finding love in a hurry, has captured the open minds of a young and curious generation.

GLOSSARY

AHORITA	Now
ALTIPLANO	The high plains plateau in bolivia
CARRERA DE INGENIERÍA ELÉCTRICA	Electrical engineering programme/degree
CASERITA	Female shopkeeper of a kiosk or market stall
CHICAS	Girls
CHICHA DE JAMÓN	Maize drink made with ham juices
CIUDADANOS	Citizens
CHOLITAS	Traditional bolivian women in indigenous dress
DIGAMOS	Let's say
FACEBOOKEAR	To use facebook
FERIA 16 DE JULIO	A huge market in the upper region of la paz, el alto. It takes place on thursdays and sundays and spans several miles selling everything from car parts to cosmetics
INGENIERÍA EN INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL	Artificial intelligence engineering
LAGARTO	Lizard or small alligator
LLANOS DE MOJOS	The mojos plains, a savannah-like region in beni department
MODISMO	Idiom
PACEÑO/A	Noun) a native inhabitant of la paz; (adjective) something of or pertaining to la paz
PERRO	Dog
PLAZA MAYOR	Main square
RUTA DEL BUFEO	The dolphin route
SUB-GOBERNADOR INDÍGENA	Indigenous vice governor
TAGUEAR	To tag (e.G. To tag a photo on facebook)
WHATSAPPEAR	To use whatsapp
YO TE PODRÍA CALENTAR	I could turn you on/warm you up

QUECHUA WORDS

CUADERNOTA	Notebook
MESATA	Table
VASOTA	Glass

JOURNALISTS GO JUNGLE

Thirty journalists, armed with tripods, microphones and stage makeup, are sent into the jungle by the Ministry of Tourism to see what Bolivia's Amazon has to offer.

TEXT: CHRISTY CALLAWAY-GALE PHOTOS: VICKY ROBERTS

T-shirts, bare legs and high humidity: We'd arrived in Rurrenabaque. 'Where?' you might say, and you wouldn't be the only one. If we were playing the word-association game for Bolivian-travel hot spots, you'd probably shout out 'Salt Flats, La Paz, Copacabana' before running out of ideas. That's why the Ministry of Tourism sent us journalists on a mission to promote Bolivia's 'Heart of the Amazon'.

Foreigners like myself are often unfamiliar with Bolivia's Beni department, just to the northeast of La Paz and where Rurrenabaque is located, but it's even less visited by Bolivians.

Flicking through the aeroplane magazine as we take off towards the unknown (on the kind of plane where you can glimpse the cockpit as you duck to enter), the statistics suggest that this story is a common one. Even though Beni is Bolivia's second-largest department, only 5 percent of its yearly visitors are Bolivians, the rest being from abroad.

So why is this the case?

'It's a question of accessibility', a journalist from the Bolivian newspaper La Razón says as he stares out the open bus window onto the dirt track we're travelling along. To cross one of Beni's numerous rivers, all of which are tributaries to the Amazon, we have to wait to board large wooden rafts that ferry us and our bus across. As the location of the river banks is variable depending on the rain, no bridges can be built and, when they have been proposed in the past, those who privately own these ferry systems opposed them.

Later at lunch, an ATB Santa Cruz journalist says that 'it's also an economic issue', since the easiest way to get to the area is not by bus but by a rather more expensive plane. He finishes his mouthful of fish and picks some more out of the patujú leaf it was cooked in. The patujú, being red, yellow, and green like the Bolivian flag, is one of the national flowers of Bolivia, native to the Amazon region.

Speaking to some representatives of tour companies that afternoon in Rurrenabaque,

I hear some ideas about why there are so few Bolivian tourists here in Beni. A representative from Madidi Travel, a local eco-tourism agency, comments, 'It's sad that foreigners enjoy the area but that many Bolivians don't know the beauty of the region. For this reason we have a special price for nationals.'

However, it's all very well going on about how no one comes to visit Beni, but there are plenty of reasons why people don't visit many locations on this earth—one being that there just isn't that much to see. But this is most definitely not the case in this region.

Against a background of ink-shadowed mountains, we are welcomed into a former Jesuit mission town, San Ignacio de Moxos, with indigenous dance, dress, music and a wooden bowl full of **chicha de jamón**, which is part of a tradition that shows the locals' hospitality.

Wearing the community's traditional male garments (long white overalls with delicate red embroidery around the edges) the **sub-gobernador indígena** introduces us to 'the living, rich culture of the Mojos'. The **Llanos de Mojos** is the savannah-like area the Sirionó, Cacyubabas, Movima, Itonama, Canichana and Baure indigenous peoples call home. This indigenous diversity is offset by mission architecture that is still preserved in the town.

Sheila Villar, the head of culture in San Ignacio, describes life here: 'We still live by our traditions today, for example, our Semana Santa and the Fiesta Patronal festivals.'

But Beni isn't just small towns in the middle of the llanos. In Trinidad, motorbikes whizz around a busy **plaza mayor**, and sloths, which inhabited the area long before humans did, hang from the surrounding trees. There, you're given a plate of **lagarto** to eat, and can listen to live music influenced by the region's close ties to Brazil.

And then picture jumping onto the Flotel Raina de Enín (a floating hotel, or 'floatel', if you will) to follow the **ruta del bufeo**, spotting pink dolphins and fishing for piranha, before heading on a jungle tour and being introduced to ants that can inflict 24 hours of pain with a single bite and to the tree from which cacao, the precursor to chocolate, is harvested.

After exploring all day and heading back to the rooftop terrace of the floatel, I talk to Jaime Ballivián, head of the Community Tourism Unit of the Vice Ministry of Tourism, about the motives behind this publicity project, as the sun sets behind the Bolivian flag flying from the floatel's stern. 'We're innovating in the form of promotion', Ballivián says. 'We want to show our diversity. Bolivia is not just the **altiplano**…. This is a determined campaign at an international level.'

Ballivián continues while keeping one eye on the waters to try and spot more of Beni's famous pink dolphins: 'The idea of tourism is really only just being born in Bolivia. Money was an issue before for Bolivians, but now the standard of living is rising, so people are starting to travel a little more.'

On the issue of accessibility, which seems to be a recurring theme amongst the issues travel agencies face, Ballivián says that 'although it does not fall under our domain, by showing these regions in the press we hope attention will be brought to the problems of accessibility. It's a process.'

On our final day being herded around Bolivia's Amazon, it hits home how foreign the presence of cameras is here. While one TV presenter applies her bright pink lipstick to match her sheer neon pink shirt and starts to walk animatedly towards the camera, a group of Trinidad locals look on bemused. Their expressions match what mine must have been when we were wandering around the preserved fish museum earlier that morning.

But tourism is new here, and that's a fact. With increasing publicity, spurred by the national and departmental governments, these collisions of different cultures will continue and, perhaps in the not too distant future, will become part of the norm.

Maybe Beni will be the new salt flats tourist destination in a decade's time. Who knows?

IT'S SAD THAT FOREIGNERS ENJOY THE AREA BUT THAT MANY BOLIVIANS DON'T KNOW THE BEAUTY OF THE REGION.'
—MADIDI TRAVEL AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE

PHOTO: VALERIA WILDE