BolivianExpress

Gratis

Magazine

Commerce

48

Directors: Amaru Villanueva Rance and Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic. **Partners:** Jack Kinsella, Xenia Elsaesser, Sharoll Fernandez. **Editorial Team:** Sara Shahriari, Matthew Grace,Juan Victor Fajardo. **Web and Legal:** Jack Kinsella. **Printing and Advertising Manager:** Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic. **Commercial Manager:** Rodrigo Barrenechea, **General Coordinator:** Wilmer Machaca. **Head of Production:** Valeria Wilde. **Production Team:** Sophia Vahdati, **Domestic Coordinator:** Virginia Tito Gutierrez. **Head of Design and Photography:** Michael Dunn Caceres. **Journalists:** Nick Somers, Laura Wotton, Ali Macleod, Matilda Curtis, Phoebe Roth, Emily Cashen, Louisa McRobb, Oliver Neal **Our Cover:** Michael Dunn Caceres **Marketing:** Xenia Elsaesser **Advertise With Us:** ivan.rp@bolivianexpress.org. **Address:** Calle Prolongación Armaza # 2957, Sopocachi, La Paz.**Phone:** 78862061- 79658778 - 70672031
Contact: info@bolivianexpress.org

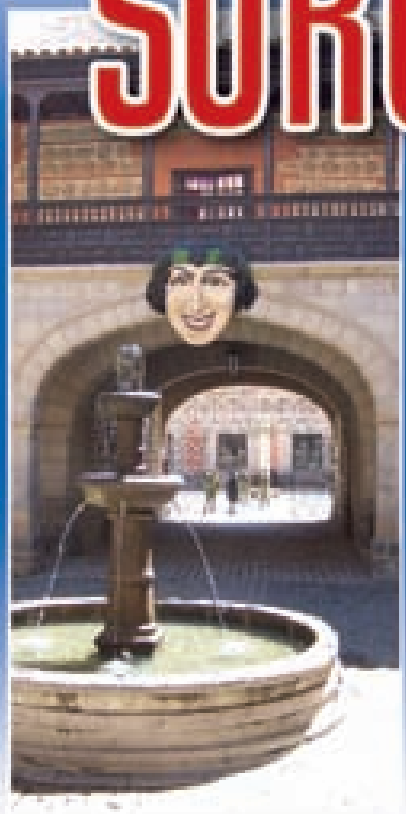
La Paz – Bolivia,
March 2015

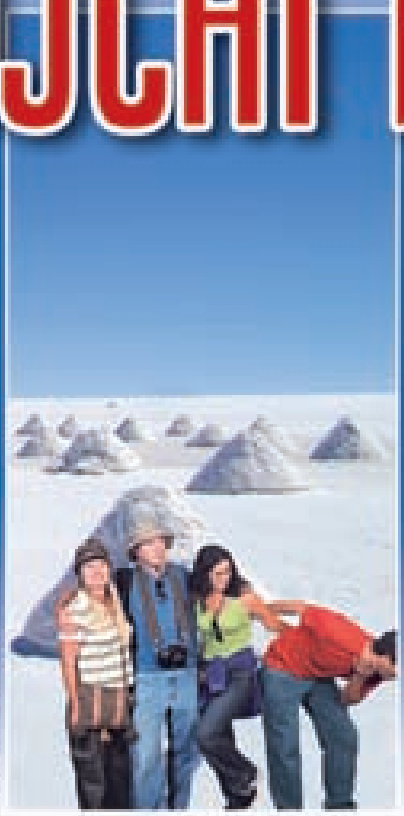
:BolivianExpress **@Bolivianexpress**
www.bolivianexpress.org

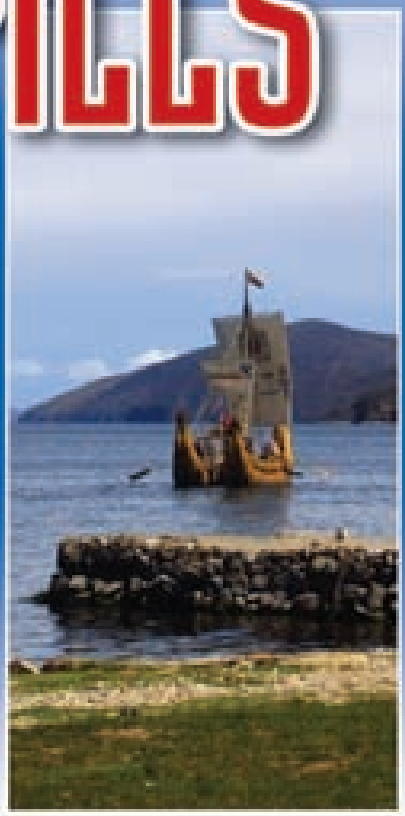
SUMARIO

La solución contra el mal de altura
The solution for high altitude sickness
La solution contre le mal d'altitude
Die Lösung gegen die Höhenkrankheit
A solução contra a doença de altura
こうざんびょう　の　たいしょほう

SOROJCHI PILLS®







Previene y alivia todos los sintomas del mal de altura
Prevent and brings relief to all high altitude sickness symptoms

Un producto de

CRESPAL

Laboratorios CRESPAL S.A.

www.sorojchipills.com

Advertencias: No es recomendable para personas con alergias o intolerancia a alguno de sus principios activos: aspirina (ácido acetilsalicílico), salófeno, cafeína. Consulte a su médico si sufre de: Desórdenes de coagulación, hemorragia gástrica, gastritis, alcoholismo, diabetes, hipertensión o reducción en la función renal, cardiaca o hepática. Mantener fuera del alcance de los niños.

EDITORIAL

Ice cream, a donkey, a sweatshirt or five kilos of bananas - wandering El Alto's twice-weekly 16 de Julio market is an extraordinary onslaught of commerce where a mind-boggling variety of items are for sale. It's the diversity and energy of these markets that attracted the BX team to this issue's theme: commerce.

For most residents of La Paz and El Alto going to market involves a long-term web of relationships between buyers and sellers. It's clear every time you hear the word *casera*, which connotes a personal, but commercial, relationship between the two. Many people don't go to a mega-store to buy food, car parts or get their shoes repaired - they go to their *casera*, who can be trusted to make sure that steady clients are getting the best quality at the best prices.

This month our team explores the world of these vendors, including the unions and organizations - some of them very powerful - that both manage and defend the world of informal commerce across the country. We also scour the markets of El Alto to find out if it would be possible to build a car from scratch using the plethora of parts for sale, take a photo journey through some of La Paz and El Alto's most fascinating commercial spaces, and explore how the cities' new cable car system affects vendors and commuters alike.

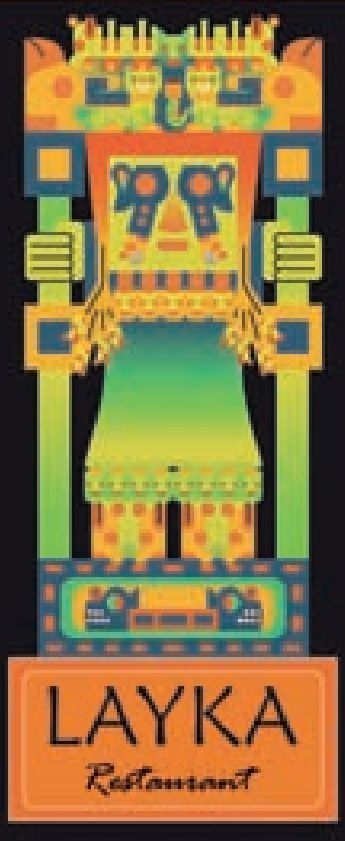
Many Bolivians are enjoying increased spending power these days, and that means luxury items like the dazzling jewels and silky soft alpaca shawls worn by some indigenous women are in high demand. To find out about these beautiful and expensive items our writer visited a **cholita** modeling school, where young women train in the art of displaying this covetable style. But prosperity of any sort is a delicate state, and in order to gain or maintain it, respect should be paid to the Pachamama, or Mother Earth. In order to honor her, people purchase elaborate mesas, which are combinations of sweets, herbs, wool and llama fetuses, and can cost hundreds of dollars.

Of course there are also many people struggling to make ends meet. This month we visit with a brand new program in one of La Paz's prisons for women, to learn how a new bakery is bringing hopes of financial security. Many women, despite being incarcerated, are still trying to support their children inside or outside of prison walls, and they need work and new job skills in order to that. Soon this bakery will open a window to the outside word that could improve their economic situation and ability to support their families and themselves.

Cash, tourism, clothes, coca, and wealth and poverty - we're thinking about it all this month, so please step with us into the dynamic world of commerce.

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



Bolivian Andean Cuisine

Llama steak

Andean stretched pig

KALA KAITO
would u dare to finish it?

Andean Buffet

15 bolivian beer choices

Exotic Bolivian Cocktail Bar

daily Live Folk Shows

Happy Hour 6:30 8:30

free shots every hour

Sagárnaga st. & Linares st. corner
2 blocks above Sn. Francisco's church

laykarestaurant@gmail.com 246 09 03 777 47 247

Quality tradition

Looking for a great meal and a fun night out in La Paz?

Look no further than the 4Corners of La Paz, 6 fantastic restaurants/cafes/bars in 1 conveniently located corner of La Paz

4 CORNERS

FOR FOOD & FUN AND LOTS MORE

Check out our website www.4cornerslapaz.com for more information about each restaurant, or grab a cab to the corner of Calle Murillo, Tarija and Cochabamba in La Paz, and wander around, you are sure to find something you love.

Sol y Luna Café - Restaurant

Siempre picante Siempre poco
La Cueva

The Steakhouse Wine & Grill

Little Italy

Tierra Sana

Oliver's English Tavern

Tell your waiter you heard about 4corners in this magazine, and get a special offer

BUYING FORTUNE

HIDDEN IN THE WITCHES' MARKET, BURNT OFFERINGS BRING FORTUNE AND WELL-BEING IN BOLIVIA'S TRADITIONAL MESAS

TEXT: ALI MACLEOD
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

Money in La Paz can buy you large houses in the Zona Sur, 8 courses of Michelin-star-quality food at 'Gustu' and luxury hummers to transport yourself around the city. But perhaps the most intangible thing that people spend money on here is good fortune. If this is what you seek, then the best place to start your search is the 'Mercado de las Brujas', where traditional mesas can be created and bought.

The mesa is a collection of objects laid out next to one another on a surface and then burnt in order to praise the Andean goddess of Mother Earth, 'Pachamama'. Usually, it includes 5 types of objects: sugary products, a mixture of herbs known as 'Koa', coloured paper and dyed wool. However, the most important component of a mesa is either a llama, alpaca or vicuña foetus, the last of which can cost up to 300 Bolivianos or $50.

"The standard price for a whole mesa is 200-400 Bolivianos or $30-60," says Simon, a man I met at the Mercado Brujas, who has been working there since he was a young boy. "But the more objects you wish to have, the more expensive the mesa will be."

Different mesas hold different significance. White mesas symbolise health and good fortune, whilst colourful mesas symbolise material assets such as houses, businesses and money. Some companies are willing to purchase the latter to bless new constructions or business deals, requesting large bespoke mesas.

'IF YOU DON'T PAY THANKS BEFORE A CONSTRUCTION...THEN THE BUILDING MAY COLLAPSE OR A WORKER MAY DIE'

-DOÑA NATALIA

'If you don't pay thanks before a construction,' says Doña Natalia, a yatiri who occupies Esquina Jimenez, "then the building may collapse or a worker may die." To avoid such risks companies purchase mesas at a high price between 800-1000 Bolivianos or $115-145, to honor 'Pachamama'.

'Pachamama' is the representation of the natural Earth and by revering her one can expect health, luck, forgiveness, blessings and release of all bad spirits. The mesa is burnt and placed in the earth so that Pachamama can receive it. According to Doña Natalia, "The intention is to pay respect to the Earth, in order to receive better crops and a larger harvest." Pachamama is the highest divinity because she influences fertility and abundance, which affect agriculture and therefore, all life.

The origin of this tradition is ancestral, starting with indigenous peoples of the Andes. Although the use of mesas has become somewhat popular among tourists, it is originally central to indigenous identity. "It is a connection between the spiritual realm and the physical world of Earth," Simon explains. 'Inspired by cosmology, the ritual calls energies from the stars to grant luck and good health.'

Paradise is Here

REACQUAINT YOURSELF
WITH NATURE

15 Pools - Kayaks - Sport areas - Butterfly Dome - Turtle Ground - Meliponines Beehive
Bird Dome - Orchids Sanctuary - Terrarium - Vegetable Garden - Monkey's Island - Swamp
Botanical Path - Evolutionary History Museum - Observatoy - Lodging and Restaurant.

Güembé
BIOCENTRO & RESORT

Contact us

info@biocentroguembe.com
www.biocentroguembe.com
Tel. / Fax: (591) 3 370 0700 / (591) 3 337 6667

Visit us

Km 5, Camino a Porongo,
desvío Las Cruces, zona Urubó
Santa Cruz - Bolivia

Follow us

PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

INDICADORES
DEL ESTADO PLURINACIONAL

En diez años el salario mínimo nacional creció en

276%

8,5%

de incremento a la masa salarial en 2015

Ministerio de COMUNICACIÓN Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia

www.comunicacion.gob.bo @comunicabolivia Bolivia Ministerio de Comunicación

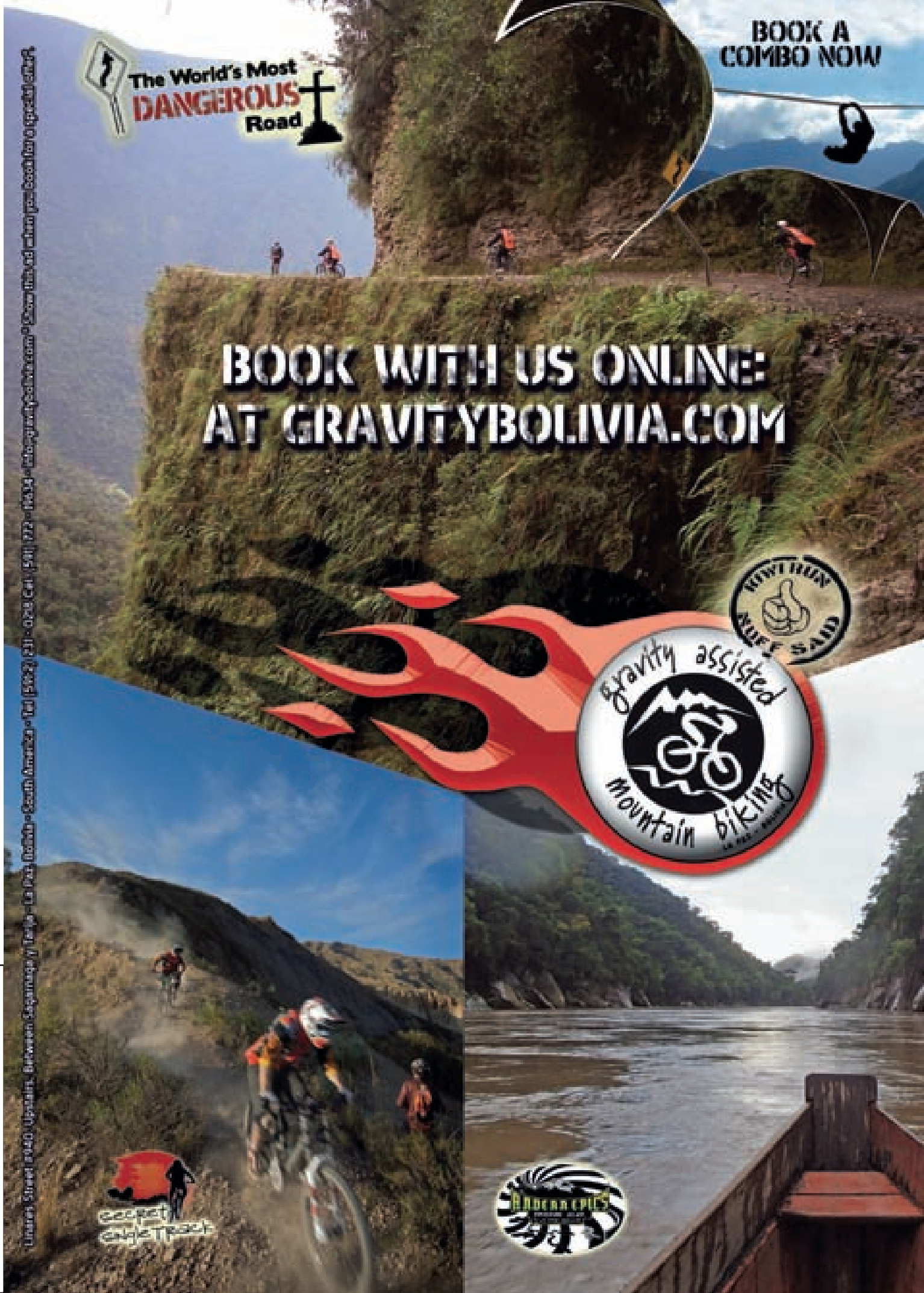
La Paz

CHOLITA MODELLING SCHOOL

A BURGEONING FASHION INDUSTRY BORN FROM TRADITION AND THE WORKING CLASS COMES INTO ITS OWN

TEXT: LAURA WOTTON
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

CONTINUES ON PAGE 16


The World's Most DANGEROUS Road
BOOK A COMBO NOW
BOOK WITH US ONLINE:
AT GRAVITYBOLIVIA.COM
gravity assisted mountain biking
Secret Single Track

Clad in dazzling embroidery, felt bowler hats, petticoats, and tight-banded corsets, twenty models line up in a long mirrored hall in the Hotel Torino. One by one they strut before each other, lightly touching their jewellery and twisting on their silk shoes. It's an afternoon class for the pupils of the first **cholita** modelling school, and the tiled mezzanine echoes with the tapping of short heels and the rise and fall of conversation. Glowing in gold and yellow, María Elena Condori Salgado leads this Saturday's session, demonstrating the basic routines to the new students: clasping one's broach, touching one's hat. This wardrobe of gold and alpaca wool, María explains, is for luxury consumers. 'To be a woman of **pollera**, you have to have money', she says. 'Besides being a very conspicuous outfit, it is also a very expensive one.'

Glitz and Glamour

You can't spend a minute in La Paz without crossing paths with a **cholita** on a street corner, or in a café or bank. A modern and uniquely Aymara Bolivian take on elegance that interprets aspects of colonial style, the daily dress of many of the women in the city has long been a recognizable thread in the city's rich fabric. Dressed in essential pieces styled to personal taste, their shawls, skirts, and stockings drench the city streets with colour and an impressive sense of cultural heritage. Now the **pollera** is not so much associated with rural women of the indigenous communities as it is with a high-end fashion phenomenon, the skirts sported by Aymara and non-Aymara women alike. 'Even women who usually wear dresses wear the *pollera* on special occasions to show off', María explains. 'Exotic colours and plenty of jewellery is what being a women of the *pollera* is all about.'

The *cholita* modelling school capitalises on this glamour. 'At the beginning, no-one wanted to be part of it and the models were shy', says Rosario Aguilar, a lawyer, former city politician and founder of the school. Up and running for ten years now, the school provides weekly workshops that challenge routine stereotypes of *cholitas* as belonging only to the urban underclass with the glitz and glamour of the twenty or so aspiring models. 'It is very important for me to empower the women in *pollera*', Rosario says before class. 'Now, culturally and politically, these women are being accepted, and more than this, looked up to.'

Economic Prosperity

It would be naïve to think that this urban update of traditional dress is not tied to the new economic and social prosperity of those who wear it. Once denied access to public and private spaces such as Plaza Murillo, restaurants, and taxis, many of these elegant women are now permanent fixtures in political and broadcast spaces, or run private and profitable businesses of their own. 'We must value Evo Morales's influence in this change', says Rosario, reminding me of his decision to promote both parliamentary power and social dignity for the women of the *pollera* across Bolivia. This contributed to the rise of the *cholitas*, by increasing disposable income and encouraging entrepreneurial spirit amongst the *cholita* bourgeoisie.

'The women in *pollera* are the protagonists of a great economical movement, paying taxes and contributing to the greater economy', says Rosario, who has seen many of her friends move down to the moneyed suburbs in Zona Sur. But, she stresses, these women have always been empowered, hardworking, and entrepreneurial; it's the changing social attitudes that have permitted their social and economic growth. No longer only recognizable amongst Bolivia's lower financial

strata, these colourful skirts and bowler hats are appreciated today as symbols of status, a chance for Bolivian women everywhere to reclaim their Aymaran heritage and exhibit their growing wealth in modern society.

With Bolivia's GDP per capita almost tripling in the past eight years, the people of La Paz are enjoying the perks of a consumer boom. Andean mansions in El Alto, Michelin-starred restaurants in the centre, and a proliferation of shopping centres across the city mark the new economic confidence you find here in La Paz. And showcasing Aymara culture at its most glamourous, ostentatious *cholita* fashion shows is a conspicuous example of this new affluence. Dressed head to toe in haute couture, Rosario radiates the economic success of changing times. 'No one really knew about how much our clothes cost because we were discriminated against', she explains. 'The catwalk reminds people of the *cholita's* new economic and social confidence in Bolivia.'

I look around the room glowing with gem-studded hair pieces and weighty gold jewellery and at once see that this is no exaggeration.

'The catwalk reminds people of the cholita's new economic and social confidence in Bolivia' —Rosario Aguilar

A New Couture

With public events like carnival, the Gran Poder and the infamous 17th of July celebrations setting a stage for wealthy Aymara paceños to showcase their prosperity, the demand for products—from US$500 Borsalino hats to US$180 petticoats—is on the rise. '*Cholitas* will use contact lenses, dye their hair, and wear makeup, and this is important for us socially', says Rosario, smiling at me with gold-plated teeth. With jewellery costing up to US$20,000, some *cholitas* might employ security guards in large events to protect against attack. 'In the *cholita* world, the most important things are the parties', explains top *cholita* fashion designer Limbert Cussi. 'It doesn't matter if a *cholita* is selling **salteñas** or fruit from Monday to Friday, they will dress in almost unrecognisable elegance for special occasions.'

With plenty of new designs emerging from recognised Bolivian designers, unique pieces can now be commissioned for exclusive events and special occasions. 'It's not like picking out a pair of jeans', Rosario explains, adjusting her *vicuña* wool manta with ring-studded fingers. *Cholita* fashion, especially at its most pricey, has found a new cachet in the last decade, and, as Limbert explains, there is no shortage of investors. 'I work for people who can pay for such exclusive designs', he says. 'I prefer this market; they don't limit themselves financially.' Specialising in items made of the luxurious *vicuña* wool, Limbert's designs might cost up to $2,000 for the manta, $700 for the hat, and a further $200 for custom *vicuña* shoes. 'The *cholitas* will pay only in cash', says Limbert, lifting a great weight of air with mock gravity and dropping it on the invisible counter between us. Petty payments aside, in the world of high fashion there is no shortage of this cash. 'A manta might cost me 5,000 bolivianos to make, but I will charge double and she will pay', he says with a smile.

Limbert holds up a card and makes invisible incisions down it with one hand, describing the pattern of his newest commission, a custom-made shawl 'half brown, half white, delicately embroidered and all crafted from vicuña, of course.' Rosario's modelling school has opened the markets for aspiring artisans, and new and exotic collections become the coquettish *cholita*. The financial prowess for these high-fashion ladies lies in exclusivity, in much the same way as Aymaran culture has forged colourful and unique trails through centuries of Bolivia's turbulent history.

The class comes to an end and the models file out, chatting amongst themselves, swapping numbers and taking posed photos with flip phones on the balustrades outside. All are hard-working women, their wealth and glamour less products of fortune than of the weekday hours spent in both formal and informal business. The excitement of what has been the first session for many of these women seems to twinkle in their rings and flutter from their skirts as they rejoin the bustle of central La Paz and their daily lives.

INFORMAL, BUT ORGA

CASH-IN-HAND WORKERS WIELD THEIR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER THROUGH ORGANISATION AND ENTREPRENEURIALISM.

TEXT: EMILY CASHEN
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

In a dusty lay-by overlooking the sprawling city of La Paz, champagne is flowing on a bright Saturday morning. Clutching a glass in one hand and my notepad in the other, I weave my way through the boisterous crowd, past the blaring speakers and carefully avoiding the uncontrollable whizzing firecrackers. Eventually I find Bendita, who with a theatrical twirl of her cape turns to greet me, her wide smile accentuated by her heavy costume make up. Diminutive in stature but abundant in energy, Bendita is undoubtedly the life of this extraordinary outdoor party. Lavishing drinks and plates of food upon her guests and leading us in a conga-line dance over a bridge, her carnival spirit is infectious and compelling.

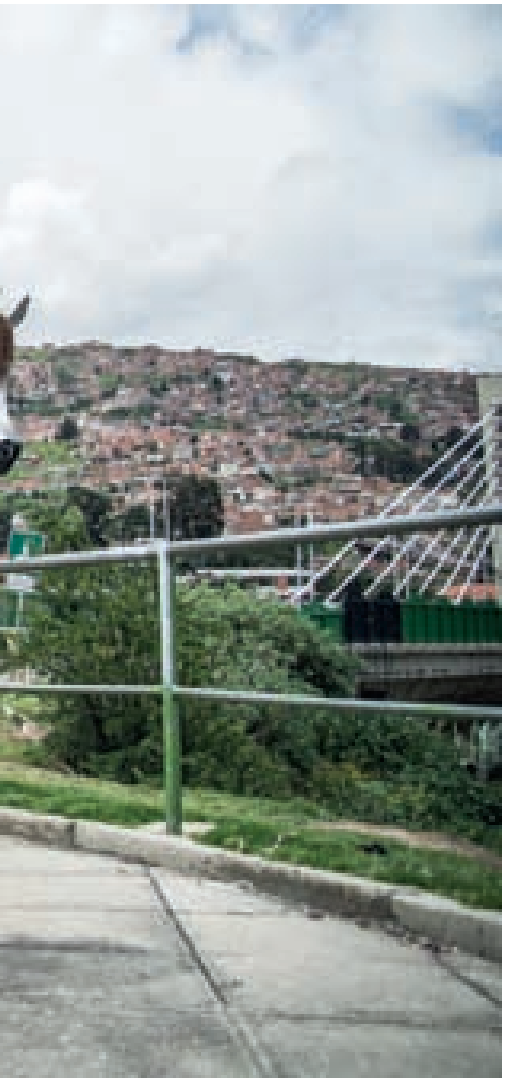
But don't let appearances deceive you. When she isn't celebrating Carnival, Bendita is an incredibly professional businesswoman, and this bridge her workplace.

Organized Chaos?

Any other Saturday morning, if you were to walk along this bridge, you would find Bendita and her sisters, Paula and Giovanna, camera in hand, diligently photographing newly married couples. For years, newlyweds on the way to their wedding receptions have been driving over the city's tres puentes for good luck, stopping in this non-descript lay-by to admire the astounding views of the city.

Four years ago, Bendita realised this wedding tradition opened up a gap in the market for an aspiring photographer. Pooling their money to buy a camera, the enterprising group of sisters set up shop on this bridge, offering newlyweds photography services and champagne, not to mention service with a smile.

While this bridge-side photography collective is a fascinating example of the country's booming entrepreneurship, it really is just the tip of the iceberg for Bolivia's informal market. According to the World Bank, a staggering 70% of the Bolivian population are employed in the informal sector, meaning that they run their own small businesses, often working erratic hours and earning



ANISED

unpredictable cash-in-hand salaries.

Initially, the tumultuous morning on the bridge served only to encourage my preconceived notions of the informal economy as erratic and precarious. But I soon came to realise that the apparent chaos and turbulence of La Paz and El Alto's innumerable street vendors in fact belies strict organisation and a fiercely entrepreneurial spirit. Scratching the surface of this flurry of activity reveals that many of these workers are also organized into unions and associations that defend their rights.

Hardships Abound

Strolling through Sopocachi market, I meet an elderly Bolivian woman sweeping the floor, towered over by an enormous pile of vegetables. Her name is Teresa Flores. Flashing a warm grin, she happily tells me "my grandmother founded the market 85 years ago. My mother worked here selling fruit and now I'm here with my vegetables". Whilst her stall here is likely lucrative , her job is not without its hardships. "The work is very demanding. We are here at the market at 7 each day and won't finish until 8 at night, and I can't take holidays because the vegetables will spoil. And the government won't give us pensions. We get nothing from them."

Her sentiments are echoed amongst street workers throughout the city. As I make my way through downtown La Paz, stopping to speak to various vendors, I accumulate a long list of grievances. On the sunlit streets of Plaza Abaroa, I meet Ruben, a softly spoken young man, and the proud owner of a bright blue cart from which he sells Brazil nuts. I learn that Ruben is not a La Paz native, and that he transports his produce to the city from his hometown of Riberalta, some 650 kilometres away. It's that 4-day journey, and his nomadic lifestyle, which Ruben finds most gruelling.

Initially, the tumultuous morning on the bridge served only to encourage my preconceived notions of the informal economy as erratic and precarious

Continuing to traverse the city on foot, I encounter Mario Aquese on a shady corner of Sopocachi - the same corner where he has worked as a plumber for 35 years. "It's not an easy job" he tells me, folding his newspaper under his arm. "There are people who treat us badly. Our work is sometimes discredited."

After listening to the many worries of these street vendors, I find myself asking why so many Bolivians enter the informal market. The answer is certainly complex. While Bolivia has experienced a period of economic growth over the last decade, the country remains one of the poorest in South America, with an approximate 59% of the population living in conditions of poverty. From this perspective, it is perhaps easy to understand the allure of cash-in-hand work, as it not only provides easy entry employment opportunities for the poor, but also enables workers to employ skills gained outside of a formal education.

Power of the People

Granted, the majority of Bolivians enter the informal market out of necessity and a lack of alternative employment opportunities. But there are also powerful organisations and large sums of money at play.

The street workers of Bolivia unionise in order to demand legal protection. The largest union in La Paz is formed of some 1800 clothes vendors, whilst hundreds of smaller unions coexist, each striving to improve the working and living conditions of its members. Some associations are even attempting to combat the lack of state benefits available to street workers by pooling money when a union member falls unwell, so as to cover their medical costs. The vacuum created by the absence of governmental protection is to some extent being filled by these ever expanding unions.

Perhaps the most striking example of union success here in La Paz is that of the child workers union, UNATSBO. Last year, after relentless campaigning, the minimum working age was reduced from 14 to just 10. While the prospect of child labour being legalised may horrify western sensibilities, for Bolivia's 850,000 child workers, this law aims to provide them with legal protection and respect.

According to Jaime Villalobos, the director of Hormigón Armado, an organisation working to improve the lives of child workers, this law "accepts the reality that children in Bolivia have to work and will continue to work. Criminalising child labour would only force kids into more clandestine activities, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation."

We are witnessing a new phase in Bolivia's history of organised labour. The unparalleled success of the UNATSBO union reminds us of the powerful potential of Bolivia's informal workers as a united social and political force.

Vulnerable, yes. Powerless? Certainly not.

From unionisation to blossoming entrepreneurship, informal labourers continue to change the face of working Bolivia.

YOLO I'm in Bolivia!

TEXT:MATILDA CURTIS
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Hola! I'm currently on my gap year, travelling through South America. I've really liked being in La Paz so far. It's actually not that different from West London, and most of the cafés have wifi. I've definitely felt a lot more spiritual and lightheaded since arriving here, especially when I walk quickly up hills. The language isn't that hard either. I never thought I was good at languages but I seem to have a natural feel for Spanish. You just have to add an 'o' to anything and shout: most people will understand. I've had a really successful trip so far. I've gotten over 94 likes on Instagram and 121 for my latest Facebook profile picture. It's me with a llama, and it only cost me 70 bolivianos. People are friendly here. They keep saying I'm a **gringo**, which must mean brave or something. I don't think I'm that brave; I'm just doing what comes naturally. I think I've found myself, but I've also lost my phone and two credit cards.

Necklace: 200 bolivianos

I bought this necklace in a stall in La Paz. It's a Peruvian blue opal, which is a stone of meditation. It was supposed to be a gift from the Inca goddess of Mother Earth or something really sacred like that. The lady who ran the stall said it matched my eyes. Hopefully I'll see her later in the club.

Alpaca jumper: 300 bolivianos

I was so excited when I saw how cheap this was, I bought three. I've seen so many people wearing them in Shoreditch and on street fashion blogs. I can't wait for someone to ask where I got it from. Urban Outfitters? Try the El Alto market, mate.

Red trousers: 40 bolivianos

These were hand-sewn by blind monks, apparently. I think they did a really good job, considering. I couldn't do it nearly as well and I can see. And I'm going to art school in Chelsea.

Tattoo: 600 bolivianos

I got this tattoo yesterday. I'm so happy with how it turned out. It's a Sanskrit phrase which, roughly translated, means 'money can't buy happiness'.

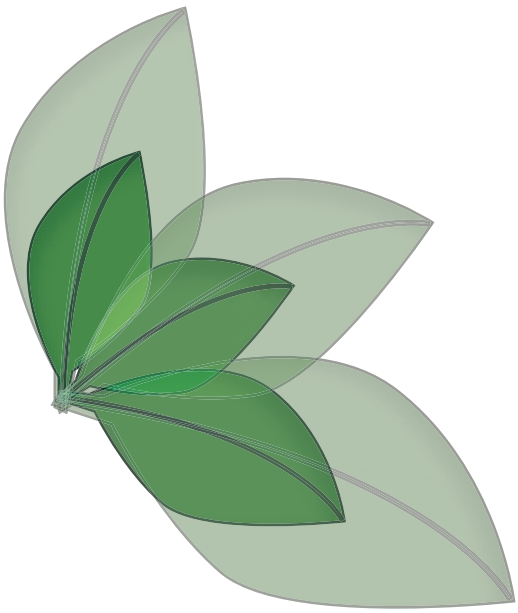
Backpack: 20 bolivianos

What's in my bag? Hand sanitiser, my passport, some bolivianos, a Lonely Planet guide, On the Road by Jack Kerouac, some cheeky coca leaves, the philosophies of Kant, and my iPad for writing my diary. Oh, and a biography of Bob Marley. I think he's been really important for music.

Bracelets: Around 50 bolivianos

My bracelets are from all the great sights of the world: India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Reading Festival. I feel as though each bracelet represents a different facet of my personality. Also, everyone knows how many places I've travelled to just by looking at them. Or I can just send them a link to my blog. I've got some insane stories on there.

COCA: IT`S NOT JUST COCAINE



A licit market is slowly expanding for the Andes' most iconic–and demonized–plant.

TEXT: OLIVER NEAL
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

The first clear liquor scorches the back of one's throat but nicely warms the stomach. It's known as Spirit of Coca—Pachamama. The second has a sweet, mellow flavour that soothes the throat and is known as Liquor of Coca Akullico. These two spirits form just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the many coca products on offer in Bolivia. They range from candies and energy drinks all the way to toothpaste.

Coca, which has played a role in Andean societies for centuries and is also the base ingredient needed to produce cocaine, is now the object of a campaign to broaden its appeal. Bolivia, the third-largest supplier of coca in the world behind Peru and Colombia, produces around 32,000 tons of coca a year. Some, of course, reaches the illegal market (around 20,000 tons a year, according to the United Nations), but the legal use and sales of the leaf have increased based on data for 2014 published by the United Nations

Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Coca accounts for around 1.5 percent of the Bolivian GDP, with a revenue of roughly US$283 million. This recent growth is due mainly to the development of a wide range of new products that local entrepreneurs have created.

One of the new breed of Bolivian entrepreneurs, Juan Salvador Hurtado, epitomises the reason the legal industry has been a growing success, drawing more farmers to provide coca leaf for this industry. His family-run business—which produces several coca-based products—includes his mother, Sdenka Silva, who runs a coca museum, and the family is deeply entwined with the traditions of coca within the Bolivian community. Juan describes it as 'kind of a legacy, and my parents have been working on it as I have for a while already. So I think it's in my blood in some way. I myself consume coca leaves and enjoy all the benefits of it . . . . I bond with it.'

Hurtado's thirst for success is clear when I ask him about where he will look to sell his products next: 'Peru will be our first big aim. I think next year we will look to do that.' He offers a range of new products including coca candies, which are the strongest I've tasted. They start off with an intense bitter wave that washes over you. (I'd recommend not biting into it unless you want your entire mouth turning black!) 'It's strong compared to other sweets', Hurtado says, 'because they are just that—sweets with a little bit of flavour. What we are trying to have is the quantity as if you were using leaves in the traditional way. One lozenge has almost one handful of leaves.'

WITH AROUND 300,000 FAMILIES INVOLVED IN COCA CULTIVATION, MANY BOLIVIAN COMMUNITIES RELY ON IT.

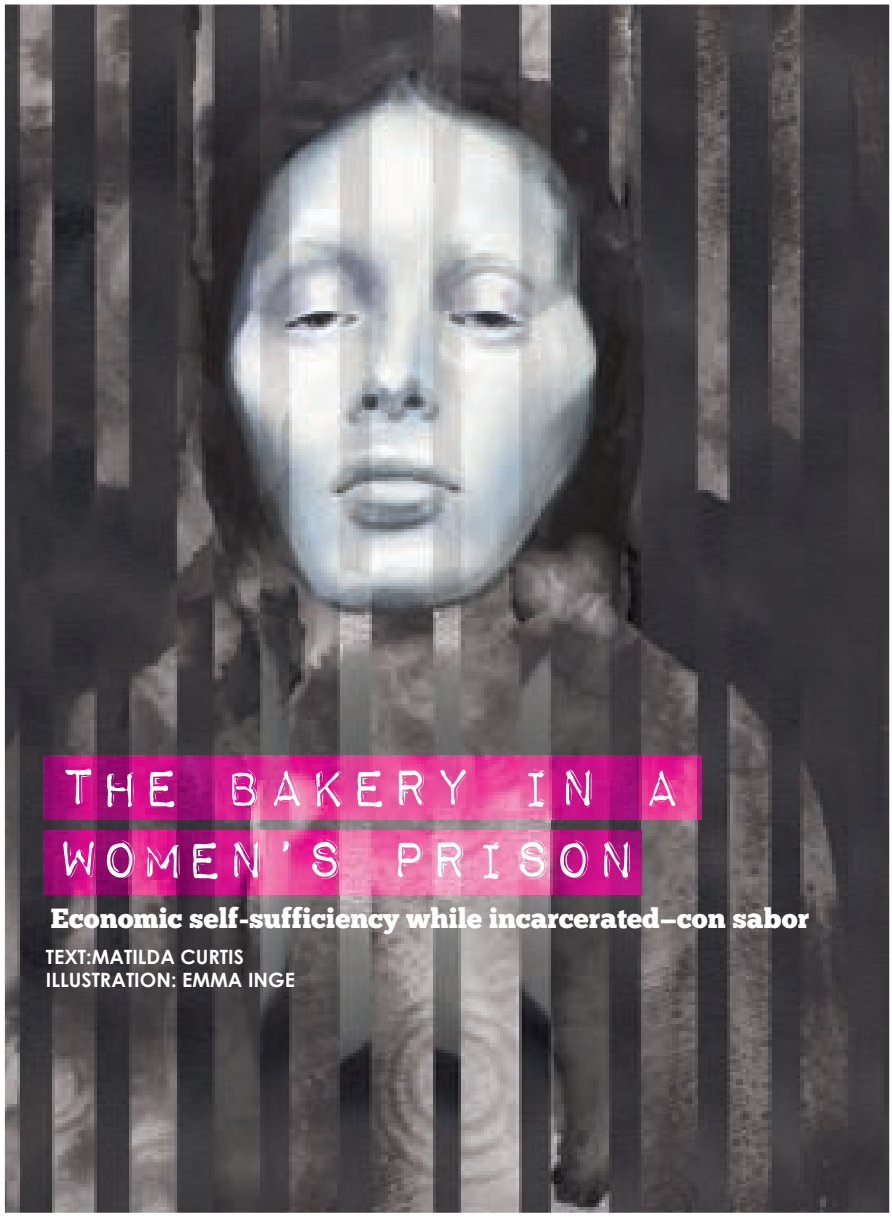
The family have been working in the coca sector since the industrialisation of the market, seeing many changes as different Bolivian governments come and go. Sdenka was in the heart of the industry during the peak of the war on drugs in the region, and she now uses the museum to tackle the debate from an academic viewpoint, documenting its history. Of the strong stance against coca, particularly from the United States, she uses the museum 'to give a small contribution to solve this problem

that is not very fair, not very clear, and not very truthful.' The family sees coca as an important issue for the country's traditions and economy, but because 'it is mainly illegal, the doors to commerce will remain closed' outside of Bolivia and Peru. But the family, ever hopeful, look forward to opening other markets in the future.

The scale of coca production in Bolivia is clear just from walking into the Villa Fatima coca market, one of only two of its size and scale in Bolivia (the other being in Sacaba, outside of the city of Cochabamba). The smell of the market is potent and lingering, and impossible to ignore. It looks like a military operation, as trucks line up out back piled high with coca and a continuous line of men carrying two bags at a time run inside delivering them to any one of the countless numbers of rooms stacked with coca. Money changes hands regularly, men and women buying and selling coca by the ton or in smaller quantities. As the drawers at the front desk pile up with bolivianos, it's obvious that coca is big business here.

With around 300,000 families involved in coca cultivation, many Bolivian communities rely on it. However, current production levels are far too high for the legal demand. President Evo Morales, an ex-coca farmer, has been supportive of the industry, fighting for Bolivia to have special recognition of the historic and legal uses of coca. He has also curbed some over-production of coca with an anticipated third consecutive year of a drop in coca acreage of over 10,000 hectares in Bolivia. Sdenka sees this as 'a step—and let's hope that the symbolic step goes further.' However, there is still strong opposition to the coca industry, particularly from the United States, after that country's Drug Enforcement Agency was expelled from Bolivia in 2008. Morales has been attempting to increase the licit yield of coca leaf to 20,000 hectares for traditional uses from the current 12,000, although some studies have shown that only 14,705 hectares are needed for licit consumption. This highlights the ongoing battle that remains for the status of the coca leaf, in Bolivia and globally.

The difficulties for coca remain, but those within the industry itself are optimistic; they see a potential for future steps with greater recognition of Bolivian traditions and coca's benefits. What does the future hold for coca—who knows? ×



THE BAKERY IN A WOMEN'S PRISON

Economic self-sufficiency while incarcerated–con sabor

TEXT:MATILDA CURTIS
ILLUSTRATION: EMMA INGE

It's not easy to make a **salteña**.

The filling must be prepared the night before and refrigerated overnight. Construction is a delicate task: each ball of dough is rolled into an eighth-inch-thick circle, folded over the filling, and the edges sealed and scalloped together.

Twelve women stand together in a large kitchen, learning exactly this process. Their uniforms are brand new, simple and professional: black chef hats, black chef jackets with red linings, and red aprons. One woman—dressed the same but in white—watches over their work. She advises them on their method and arranges the **salteñas** neatly on a large tray.

René, a bespectacled man in his early thirties, hovers over them. His candor betrays the enthusiasm of a proud parent at a football match: he is keen to show them off. The women are working hard, but every so often, they share a joke.

'When the bakery opens, you're going to get fat!' Isabella, the loudest and most dominant of the group, shouts at René. The women all laugh affectionately. He protests, but laughs along.

René Estenssoro Torricos is the general director of the Seed of Life Association, or SEVIDA. This is an organisation that has been working in the Obrajes prison for women since 2000, attempting to improve the economic, legal, and psychological situation of inmates.

The twelve bakers around him are female prisoners in the midst of training. This prison bakery–large, flooded with light, technologically advanced—will soon open to the public. It will allow the women to learn employable skills and earn a personal income. Customers from outside the prison will be able to order through a door to the outside.

The economic situation in prison is difficult. Women receive a small breakfast and lunch every day, but beyond that they must largely provide for themselves. They need twenty to thirty bolivianos a day for basic necessities: toilet paper, shampoo, food, anything at all they might need for day-to-day living. If a prisoner has children, either inside or outside the prison, school supplies and other necessities are added expenses.

According to Bolivian law, the only thing a prisoner should be deprived of is her freedom. But in Obrajes, there is scant opportunity to work. The prison economy is in a state of flux because jobs are on a constant rotation, and a prisoner needs to be inside for some time before she can start or join a business.

An inmate and baker-in-training, Isabella, seeks advice from the head chef as she attempts to form the edges of the dough. The economy of the prison, she says, can be frustrating and insecure. Although it is possible to start a small business, this requires an initial investment, and many prisoners must rely on loans. But the interest rates, set by fellow prisoners, can fluctuate wildly. This is why the bakery is so important: it will give the women a fixed income with which to rebuild. Isabella has a husband and son in La Paz's San Pedro prison and a daughter in Obrajes. She cannot rely on familial support or outside income.

The need for money is often the reason behind the women's misdemeanors, René says. 'For example, a woman has five children. She has an opportunity to send a package full of drugs for 1,500 dollars. There are lots of conditions that make her fall into crime.'

Their crimes can also be the culmination of years of domestic mistreatment. 'In Bolivia, there are lots of cultural conditions that mean being a woman in prison is very different to being a man', René says. Astoundingly, he reckons that 95 percent of the women in Obrajes—and, accordingly, the bakery—

have been victims of physical, sexual, or psychological violence.

The importance of the bakery is more than financial. It means the workers are accorded respect, and rewarded for hard work. It's a chance for women to gain back some control and plan for the future. SEVIDA's new program is called the Plan for Freedom, and the idea is that, eventually, the women will form their own businesses and create an association. Every *salteña* sold in the bakery will contribute towards a common pot, from which every

RENÉ SAYS HE WANTS THE BAKERY TO 'LET THE WOMEN KNOW THAT THE LIVES THEY HAVE HAD ARE NOT THE ONLY REALITY. I WANT THEM TO GENERATE AND CONSTRUCT A DIFFERENT TYPE OF REALITY.'

baker will receive income. The rest of the money will go toward programs to benefit prisoners such as contracting a doctor to provide gynecological and psychological care.

René is also trying to create a network of family members to sell bread so they can benefit too. The program is still in its early days, but its aims are clear: to empower the women and their family members, and to support the prison.

Signing up to the bakery is a gamble. There is no guarantee that jailhouse *salteñas* will sell. There are already weaving and laundering businesses within the prison that have enjoyed some success, but a **panadería** requires a very quick turnaround and a set of regular customers. The women will need a loyal network outside on which to build and extend their reach.

But whether or not the bakery proves lucrative, its significance—purely as a training ground—is clear. There are two handwritten posters tacked up outside the kitchen. One advertises the lessons for making *salteñas*. The other reads, simply: 'Porque aprender algo más siempre es bueno' (Because learning something new is always good).

René says he wants the bakery to 'let the women know that the lives they have had are not the only reality. I want them to generate and construct a different type of reality.'

The bakery provides a reality of high expectation. The brand-new uniforms and equipment encourage a certain level of behaviour. Professionalism is expected, so the women rise to the challenge. But their individual personalities haven't been hidden entirely. Just visible underneath their highly professional chef's coats are long, coloured skirts, flip-flops and socks, heeled boots and Crocs.

And, as the women place their *salteñas* on a tray in the large oven in the corner, they discuss the party they're going to have when the bakery finally opens its doors.

'Can we have stripper clowns?' roars Isabella. They all laugh as René shakes his head disapprovingly. But he looks away. He can't help but laugh too. ×

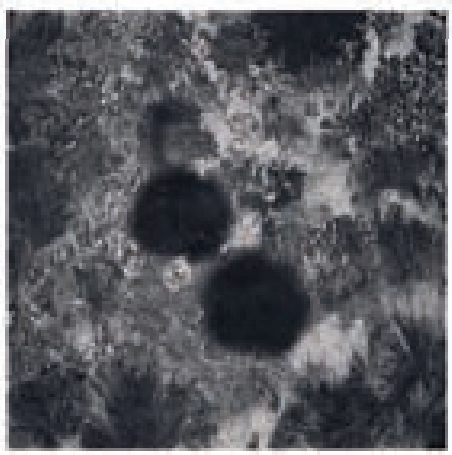
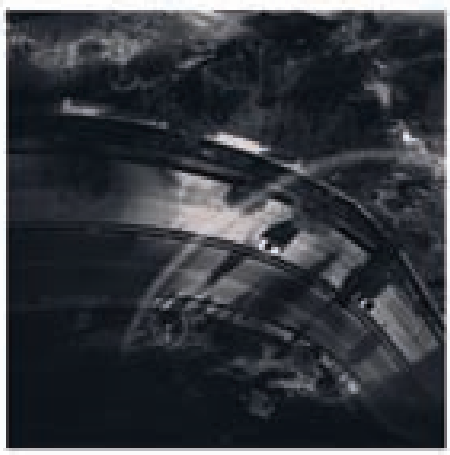





TRANSPORTING A CITY

La Paz's new cable-car transit system is changing the commute of both paceños and alteños–and transforming the city.

TEXT:PHOEBE ROTH
PHOTOS: MICHAEL DUNN - (IG: @MICHAELDUNCA)

Arriving in La Paz, one of the first things I noticed was the *teleférico*, the cable car system that is the city's newest, and most modern, mode of mass transit. It was unexpected, towering over the streets and houses below. These travelling cabins are the city's most efficient method of transport, carrying thousands of people every hour during peak periods, be it commuting to work, going about their daily routine, or simply riding on it for the spectacular views. From the congested and bustling city of El Alto to the wealthy and modernised Zona Sur, before the *teleférico* was built, such panoramic views of the city were near unseen. Now the government plans to build six more lines, dramatically expanding what is already the world's longest urban cable car system. Because it seemed so incongruous, I set out to learn more.

The three current *teleférico* lines stretch almost eleven kilometers, connecting El Alto with central La Paz, and continuing south to the polished neighborhood of Zona Sur. So far it's cost US$235 million, for everything from mechanical parts imported from Austria to surveyors and employees tending the stations. Six additional lines are scheduled for completion by 2019, which will extend the system by another twenty kilometers, costing a further US$450 million.

Torsten Bäuerlen, the La Paz head of communications at Doppelmayr, the Austrian firm that constructed the *teleférico*, described the technicalities of building an urban cable car system. There are safety aspects to consider; for example, the system must be accessible to elderly people, young children, and mothers carrying babies. To achieve this, the system is designed to slow the cars down as they are loading passengers. Communication devices are installed in each car in case of emergencies, and grated windows protect people on the ground from objects that otherwise could be dropped or thrown from the cars. The system also runs partially off hydroelectrical power, making it environmentally friendly (a particular benefit for La Paz's smog-choked urban geography).

The *teleférico* stations were, for the most part, built on public spaces; for example, the central station on the red line, was built on a disused train station, and the southernmost station on the green line was formerly part of a military school. Where private land was used, a surveying company was employed to study the terrain and decide its market value, and the government then offered to buy out the landowners. Eighty percent agreed to sell, according to Bäuerlen. The government negotiated with the holdouts, and eventually gained access to their land. However, the planning for construction was easier than expected at first, Bäuerlen said, as the majority of the city was in support of the project.

Of course the *teleférico* has had a huge impact on the people who live and work near the stations, in particular on local commerce—both good and bad. María Castilla, who runs a small kiosk at the top of the yellow line in El Alto, says that since the teleferico was built her sales have decreased. María says this is due to the food and drink stalls set up in the Qhana Pata station in El Alto, which poach her customers.

However, across the road from María, Álvaro, who owns a similar small shop, says that sales have increased since the *teleférico*'s construction. 'Before the *teleférico*, it was very difficult to get good sales. But now sales have increased significantly with more customers passing.' He also says that the teleferico is a positive addition to the city in terms of travel: 'I can get to the centre faster. Before, I used to have to take a bus, which would take lots of different turns to get to the centre and take me hours.'

But underneath the Qhuta Uma station in La Paz, a small market has been built over and covered by the station. I wandered in and chatted to one of the vendors selling api con pastel. She explained that her sales have decreased since the *teleférico* was built because people don't pass through the market as much, which is now cold and dark from lack of light.

'BEFORE THE TELEFÉRICO STATION WAS BUILT, IT WAS DESERTED—NO LIFE, NO PEOPLE, NO COMMERCE. NOW, THERE'S EVERYTHING.'

—ROXANA, TELEFÉRICO COMMUTER

Commuters, of course, have a completely different perspective. Roxana, who works at the Spanish Institute on 20 de Octubre and commutes from El Alto via the yellow line during the week, speaks only positively of the *teleférico*. 'Before the *teleférico*, I had lots of problems, in particular during rush hour—for example, at 6 pm when everyone is trying to get home to El Alto. Now, from Plaza España, I can get home in a relaxed manner. No one pushes me around and I don't have to wait long for a bus.' She also notes that the *teleférico* has brought new life to some areas: 'Before the *teleférico* station at the top of the yellow line was built, it was deserted—no life, no people, no commerce. Now, there's everything—it has had a great effect on informal labour.'

And the future of the *teleférico*? The next six lines are due to be given the all clear by the government in the next couple of weeks, and will take four years to build. How will it continue to change the lives of commuters, and what will it mean for the future of commerce in El Alto and La Paz? Only time will tell.

MARKET

A PHOTO ESSAY BY NICK SOMERS

What is it that you need? Ingredients for your favourite meal, new furniture to match freshly painted walls, a new shirt for a night out at the bars? Perhaps that one specific and tiny part of an equally particular device that you have been searching for but just cannot find in any store in the city – and is completely driving you crazy. Don't worry, you will find all your heart desires in one of the many markets that line the streets of La Paz and El Alto. No item is too big, small or rare that you won't find it waiting in one of the many makeshift kiosks scattered across town. From coca to a donkey to a car, the markets have us covered.


B.

10
BOLIV
THE JOURNEY THROUGH

Guards with guns, blood-dripping cow carcasses, and unwashed tourists—all witnessed through the journey of a hundred bolivianos, from the cashpoint as a crisp note to a roadside kiosk as a handful of coins. A presentation of the city's commercial life.

They are both dressed immaculately, their peaked and polished caps casting shade over their wrinkled eyes. These are my protectors as I am shuttled off the armoured truck, bundled with hundreds of others like me in the confines of a black briefcase.The two guards that escort me bear semi-automatic shotguns, deterrents to anyone considering an unwise attempt on the Banco Union. Shortly I will be in a cashpoint and, soon after, injected into the lively and variable economy of the city. I am a 100-boliviano note, red and white, emblazoned on one side with the image of Gabriel René Moreno, a prestigious Bolivian historian, writer, and biographer. I am ready to be cast around and broken down throughout the numerous exchanges and transactions that occur within the city of La Paz.

I am gripped tightly and hastily put into the wallet of a smartly dressed gentlemen. He appreciates the importance of punctuality but still craves his morning **salteña** in Plaza España, which has forever been a part of his daily routine. He will have to be late because smaller change is necessary to purchase one of these warm delights. In the Ketal supermarket, he buys a bottle of **vino tarijeño** for his evening agenda. I am broken down into a fifty, a ten, and a handful of silver coins. Outside, people cluster together under the multicoloured tarpaulin of the **salteña** stand, protected from the light drizzle. The gentleman leans in favour of **carne** over **pollo** and, in the form of a fifty-boliviano note showing the face of painter Melchor Pérez, I am handed over and quickly placed in the pouch of a **cholita** street vendor. Many *salteñas*, several empanadas, and the occasional dribble of **llajua** later, I am given as change to a new host. She buys several **tucumanas** for her office and, in return, receives me in the form of a twenty-boliviano note, displaying the lawyer Pataleón Dalence and, on the reverse, the Golden Colonial House of Tarija. She heads down Calle Ecuador and is soon in the Sopocachi market that is located below Calle Guachalla.

The entrance is lined by a flamboyant display of flowers that send an attack of colour and fragrance on the senses. Once

00

VIANOS

EY OF A NOTE
GH LA PAZ

TEXT AND PHOTOS:ALI MACLEOD

her eyes have adjusted to the low light, she can see the diverse proceedings of this informal market. Women are perched high upon mountains of cleaning products, whilst cow carcasses hang from silver hooks, the blood still dripping, and giant sacks of pasta are stacked towards the ceiling. As tempting as all this is, my proprietor is here for a papaya juice. I am exchanged between hands and coated in the remnants of fresh fruit. It is not until later that I emerge once again. As a ten-boliviano note, printed with an illustration of the city of Cochabamba on one side, I am flung into a back pocket of a young man, my new possessor, a lost tourist on the wrong side of town.

He steps from this subterranean market outside and, following his map, begins to walk towards Plaza Murillo, the epicentre of the city's political life and the location of his hostel. On every corner, under every roof ledge and in every concealed alley way, informal street commerce and exchanges are evident. Coins and notes are interchanged amongst hands everywhere. On Avenida 6 de Agosto, passers-by are tempted into reading daily newspapers by women crying out 'La Razon'. Along El Prado, young boys and older men known as **lustrabotas**, wearing thick balaclavas, sell their shoe-shining services for a pittance. CD kiosks line the sidewalks of Avenido Ayacucho towards Plaza Murillo, each selling a range of music for a small price, from Beatles tribute bands to local reggaeton.

The mid-afternoon sun warms the cobbled stones of Plaza Murillo and the usual kit of pigeons clamber on one another, fighting for the handfuls of food that tourists throw. A local man wanders around taking photos of these events unfolding. I am plucked from the tourist's pocket and given to this spirited entrepreneur. I now reside in his pocket reduced to a five-boliviano coin. For this price, the backpacker receives a picture of the pigeons scrambling amongst his dreadlocks.

Later, once the light has begun to fade and the pigeons have mellowed, the gentleman decides his day´s work is done and walks in the direction of Avenido Illimani. Here he hails down an old American school bus, known as a **micro** in Bolivia. For the price of one boliviano, this cramped but ever efficient method of transport can take him to any of the destinations displayed on the placard in the front window, and now he heads for home. *

El Alto, a place of wonder and endless opportunities to buy an array of products at cheap prices. I've seen nothing of the sort before. As I wander past the range of car parts on sale I ask myself: could I find everything I need here to make my own car? Am I up for the challenge? Let's call it El Coche Alteño.

Almost everything you'd need is on the greasy streets of the spare parts market in El Alto. You can find four doors for $100 altogether; seats at $20 each; shock absorbers at $45; wheels at $140 for four; and even an engine bed for only $30. The only thing you'd have trouble spotting is the chassis, as it turns out I may be the only person considering building a car from scratch here.

"You will struggle," one mechanic told me.

"We don't have many chassis here. People mainly use this market to replace broken parts."

The challenge appeared beyond me until I stumbled across a small garage called Osaka Motors. The chief mechanic, Victor Alanoca, told me; "We sell parts for Japanese cars – you can find almost everything in here, somewhere. It would take a long time. It would be difficult. But it would be possible."

Victor showed me into his garage and escorted me into a dimly lit space stuffed full of car parts. A sole pathway helped us move around, engulfed by hanging taillights and the smell of oil. I suspect there was some kind of order to it, secret to anyone but Victor. To me, the garage looked like piles of metal parts that were overflowing, but Victor says he can find almost anything in the heaps that were in front of me.

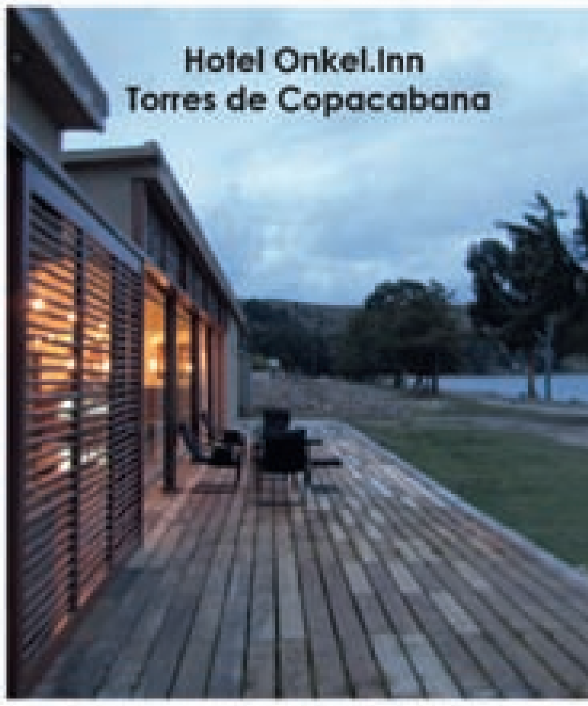
Parts for Hyundais, Nissans and Toyotas mix together. No-one is working inside. It's more of a store for car parts than a garage per say - just what you would need to build El Coche Alteño.

As Victor explains, "The difficult task would be making the pieces you find actually fit together. But many places don't even know what parts they have." This seems pretty clear from the way his garage is laid out.

Even if you succeed in the hunt, there is no guarantee that constructing your own car in El Alto would be cheaper than simply buying one. It would certainly be more time consuming and, if done wrong, potentially far less reliable than purchasing a complete car on the market.

El Coche Alteño [Italics], from the bodywork of the car to the engine, all the way to the smallest screws and washers, would cost between $7000 and $8000--depending on what sort of car you wanted. But the amazing thing is that by walking along one street in this city you have everything you'd need to make your Andean car vision a reality.

Or, alternatively, you can buy Victor's tractor for $3000.



GLOSSARY

CARNE	Meat
CHOLITA	Traditional indigenous Bolivian woman
EMPANADAS TUCUMANAS	A fried empanada
GRINGO	Disparaging term for a tourist
LLAJUA	The typical hot sauce served in Bolivia
LUSTRABOTAS	Shoe-shine boys or men
MICRO	Bus
PANADERÍA	Bakery
POLLERA	A wide pleated skirt traditionally worn by cholitas
POLLO	Chicken
SALTEÑA	Traditional Bolivian breakfast pastry filled with meat, vegetables and gravy
TARIJEÑO	A person or thing from Tarija state
VINO	Wine

FROM PARAGLIDING TO BICYCLING THE DEATH ROAD, THE CITY HAS MUCH TO OFFER THE THRILL-SEEKING ADVENTURER

TEXT AND PHOTOS: LOUISA MCROBB

On a recent morning, I found myself at the top of a cliff strapped on to a reassuring tour guide, about to run off the edge. Once we got up in the air, the wind caught the parachute and carried us along indescribable rock formations unlike anything I had ever seen before. I was soaring above the mesmerising and striking Andes, here in the southern part of La Paz, close to the Moon Valley. The experience was all-consuming. It was impossible not to be caught up in the moment.

According to Miguel Alem, one of the partners of the Andes Xtremo tour agency, the most popular months for paragliding in La Paz are between May and September. On average, Andes Xtremo organizes about thirty-five tandem flights a month, but during the high season this number nearly doubles.

Activities such as paragliding the skies, mountain-biking the infamous Death Road, or rappelling down the side of a building attract a growing number of thrill-seeking tourists every year to Bolivia. These

adrenaline junkies generate money for the tourism industry. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism accounted for 6.3 percent of Bolivia's GDP in 2013—with a projected 4 percent growth rate per annum. At present the industry supports almost 100,000 jobs in the country.

To be honest, I didn't think of myself as an adrenaline junkie before I came to La Paz. But ever since I arrived in the city, I have grown interested in these adventure sports mainly because they are so readily available. I tried to avoid them, but that was nearly impossible. Three weeks into my trip to Bolivia, I was riding down the Death Road.

According to Derren Patterson, general manager of Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking, 'Ninety percent of the people who ride the Death Road are tourists.' The day I went on the road, it was more like 100 percent. The riders came from the United States, Canada, Germany, and the UK. Why they want to do it varies from seeking an extreme mountain biking experience to being able to say that they have survived Death Road.

Gravity's bikes are very robust, and the riders were keen to express that they were 'the best bikes they had ever ridden'. Moving along the road, it is clear that some sections are riskier than others. In my group, only one rider bore the brunt of the road, falling at speed and grazing his arm. This was quickly taped up and sterilised by our guide, Marcus, who was at the ready with a toolbox full of medical equipment. However, I think the rider secretly enjoyed the war wounds. He later said that 'It was genuinely the most amazing thing I've done—the journey back up as well, seeing things I missed, just the whole thing.'

Patterson says that it's 'hard to think about anything else when you are riding. It's a quick connection to "now", and you don't have to think about anything else.' After going down it myself, the attraction is obvious. Starting at the top of a glacier and slowly edging down towards a rainforest, the views are remarkable.

Another extreme sport available, the Urban Rush consists of rocketing down a fifty-metre-tall building in central La Paz. The inspiration was in 'helping people confront their fears and push themselves beyond what they thought was possible', according to Patterson.

The demand for the Urban Rush experience has increased since its inception. Priced at 150 bolivianos per jump, it remains fairly busy during its five-hour window of daily operation, with approximately twenty people a day taking the plunge. The suggested dress code is a superhero outfit or, if one desires, a bacon costume provided by the company. It must be a thrill to descend a skyscraper in a Spidermanesque way, particularly dressed as a slice of fried meat. As to why one would do it? Just for the kicks! Definitely my next adventure.

WWW.BOLIVIANEXPRESS.ORG

FOLLOW US

f: BOLIVIAN EXPRESS @BOLIVIANEXPRESS

PHOTO: PATRICIA VARGAS


PHOTO: NICK SOMERS - WWW.NICKSOMERSPHOTO.COM