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For most travellers who visit, Bolivia is not a place to sit still. The country offers a variety of must-see and must-do attractions that are spread out across far-reaching distances. Many backpackers here grow accustomed to the 12-hour overnight bus ride. The Salar de Uyuni, the jungle rivers outside of Rurrenabaque, the shores of Lake Titicaca, the colonial architecture of Sucre – any of the most visited destinations in Bolivia are found in all corners of its tremendous geography.

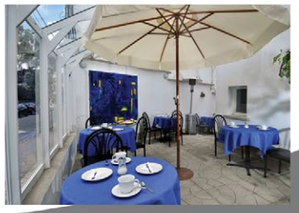
One cannot stay put in one city or location and come close to understanding what Bolivia is. To truly learn about Bolivia is to travel across it, to experience the variety of wonders it has to offer the adventurous visitor. It is in this process of travelling to other destinations that, along the way, you see the true Bolivia – the sleep-deprived bus driver; the friendly kiosk owner at the crossroads; the passenger next to you finally making the trip home after a semester at school. Sometimes the seemingly endless bus rides here feel like a blessing, given the opportunities to meet new people and to take in a variety of landscapes. For certain, these travels are central to the Bolivian experience.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, we looked at various journeys, both physical and metaphorical, to understand the variety of paths people in Bolivia have taken. We travelled by train across the **altiplano**, from the mining city of Oruro to the salt flats at Uyuni. We heard legends of great explorers who came to Bolivia in search of riches, and sent our writers out to find their own treasures along the Choro Trial and among La Paz's culinary hotspots. We danced with our neighbours through the **barrios** of La Paz to celebrate the cultural history and tradition of Gran Poder. We explored the everyday-life journeys unique to Bolivia, from the process of becoming an adult to the taking of the streets by underrepresented corners of society desperate to have their voices heard. We even travelled outside this country to experience the culinary and cultural hotspots of other places to better understand the wonders found here.

In all our journeys taken to create this issue, we returned home with a better understanding of Bolivia, and hope to share our findings with you here. Most importantly, we understood that this is a large country, and it is important that those who come here give themselves the opportunity to see wide swaths of it, to not just stay in one place and call that Bolivia. Hopefully, this issue of Bolivian Express will be a reminder that the joy is in the traversing. The journey isn't just arriving from Point A to Point B; it is everything in between.

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

By William Wroblewski



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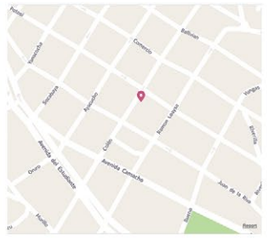

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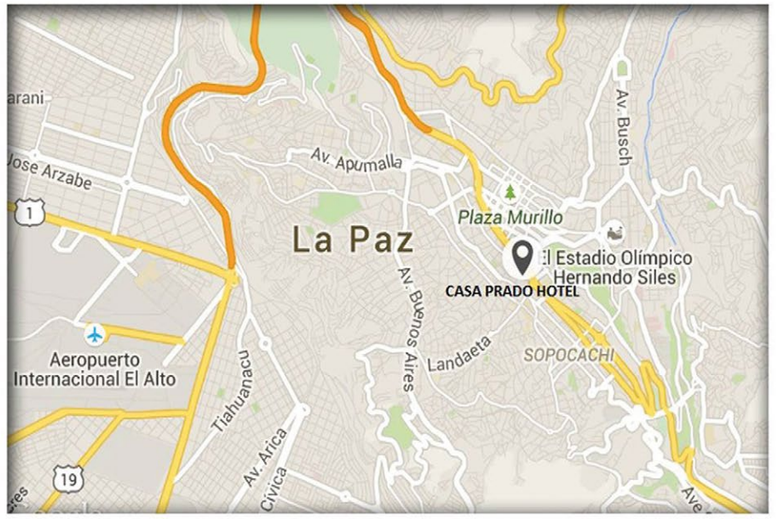

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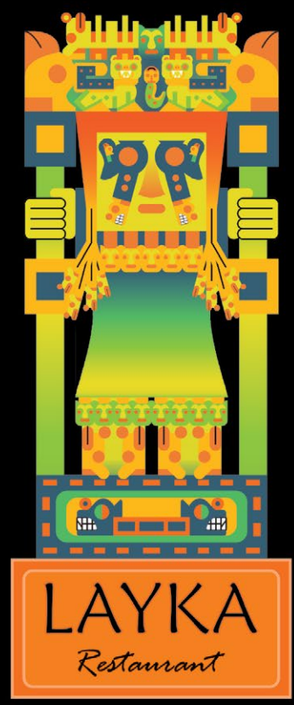

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THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE OF MARCHES

THE PLIGHT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: ANGUS MCNELLY
PHOTO:KARINA GUZMAN

'The 500 **bolivianos** we are asking for is nothing more than putting bread on families' tables,' Alex told me, looking down into my eyes from his elevated position in his wheelchair. 'It is nothing more than the right to live.'

I was sitting on the pavement outside the Ministry of Justice on El Prado, the main thoroughfare running through the centre of La Paz, talking to Alex Marcelo Vásquez de la Monte, one of the leaders of a caravan of disabled people. Riot police, armed with tea rgas and batons, had recently arrived on motorbikes covered with painted skulls. This was but the latest stage in Alex's journey, a battle for recognition and 500 *bolivianos* per month for disabled Bolivians.

Alex's caravan set off from Cochabamba back in March, travelling over 500 kilometres across the tough terrain of the tropical valleys of Cochabamba to the harsh **altiplano** of La Paz, before arriving in the seat of government. Police presence was a reminder of the repression and hardship faced by the caravan since its arrival in the city. The marchers were denied access to Plaza Murillo and to the Presidential Palace. The use of tear gas by the police represented a particular low point for the government in the plight of the caravan.

Despite this, Alex remains upbeat: 'It is only in the last 20 days,' he says, 'that the ministers have started working for people with disabilities. We are winning.'

Much has already been written about the politics behind the caravan, but just as interesting are the mechanics of the endeavour. What makes a convoy of 125 disabled people, from little children to grandparents, many of whom are in wheelchairs, travel such a distance in order to make their point? The long history of mass mobilizations in this Latin American country is undoubtedly an important factor. Marches from symbolic places to the centre of power – along with road

blockades and hunger strikes – are a central part of Bolivian politics. Tupaj Amaru and Tupaj Katari – the main protagonists of the indigenous uprising that swept across the *altiplano* of Alto Perú between 1780-1782 – both travelled long distances to the Royal Viceroys of Lima and Buenos Aires respectively to try and gain legal recognition from the Spanish crown.

More recently, miners used a march as a last-gasp, desperate attempt to prevent the closure of state mines, and indigenous peoples have marched in their struggles against the state. The historic March for Territory and Dignity from Trinidad in the eastern lowlands 600 kilometres to the city of La Paz in 1990 led to the legal protection of a natural park, which became known as the TIPNIS. Subsequent marches were organised against agrarian reform and, in 2011 and 2012, in protest of the government's plan to build a highway through the same TIPNIS national park. In short, marching is in Bolivia's blood, the way citizens can get specific issues on the government's agenda.

Even so, the decision to march cannot have been an easy one: 35 days on the road is hardly a walk in the park, and marching with disabilities makes the task even more challenging. Simple things, such as going to the bathroom, became serious problems on the march, with many participants getting rectal infections and developing stomach problems for the lack of proper toilets. Many of us may feel degraded when forced to relieve ourselves away from the comfort of a toilet, but for those who cannot stand unaided, this becomes a serious health threat.

The marchers faced 'cold, hunger, scarcity, wind and rain', another leader Jorge Flores Tobar says, which caused respiratory problems and pneumonia, further highlighting the strain that the march placed on the participants. This exposure to the elements was particularly difficult for those with mental disorders, epilepsy and Down Syndrome, with the harsh conditions worsening the effects of their disabilities. And, Jorge reminds me, much of the medicine that disabled people take as part of their daily routine, tires them and saps them of their already depleted energy reserves. This fatigue must have been overwhelming as the days of marching and sleeping on the highway took their toll.

Alex tells me that ahead of the caravan there were 60 consecutive days of protest in the city of Cochabamba, and 30 to 40 days in other departmental capitals, as people with disabilities tried to get the government's attention. All other avenues – including hunger strikes – were explored. Their demand for financial assistance from the government is one which will, in the eyes of the protesters, transform their lives, providing them with much-needed money for expensive medication and, as Alex suggests, basic necessities essential for survival. Many of the protesters were there with family members, reminding me that the need for full-time care often stops not with the disabled person, but with a member of their family. The government support, they insist, would relieve some of the burden that disabilities place on whole families in Bolivia.

Many of the marchers see their fight as one for survival. Given the history of marches in Bolivia, the caravan is a medium that forces the government – and the public – to listen, and gives the opportunity for this usually invisible group to show society what their lives are really like. Marching through rain and cold, up what is essentially one long hill, placing their health at serious risk may not seem like the best way for these people to protest. But Alex and the other members of the caravan seem to think it is effective. They see marching as a way to get what they need. Whether it will work this time has yet to be seen.

Regardless of the outcome, we have to admire the courage and tenacity of the participants of Bolivia's latest march for life and dignity. Their fortitude and hardship encapsulates the spirit of struggle that draws so many to this remote Andean land. And this spirit, for me, is what makes Bolivia, Bolivia.

In short, marching is in Bolivia's blood, the way citizens can get specific issues on the government's agenda.

COMING OF AGE IN BOLIVIA

THE LOCAL ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

TEX: KARINA GUZMAN - ILLUSTRATION: RICHARD SÁNCHEZ JAILLITA

Growing up is never easy. Around the globe, we have witnessed the so-called Peter Pan generation increasingly put-off adulthood and refuse to leave their cocoon. In Bolivia, however, things are slightly more complicated.

Álvaro Saico is a seventeen-and-a-half year old **paceño** who has shouldered some of the responsibilities of adulthood since the age of eight. He started working by helping his mother sell candy in the buses going to Los Yungas. After some years, he sold **arroz con leche** in El Alto, across town from his neighbourhood, Villa Fátima. He has worked as a **voceador** in minibuses around the city and, in his last job, he distributed pamphlets in the streets.

Shortly after he started working, Álvaro joined UNATSBO, the National Union of Working Children and Adolescents of Bolivia, which is an independent union that aims to defend the rights of this group of workers. At nine, he joined the departmental branch of the union and by ten, he was a delegate from the Children's Union of Villa Fátima, a position he holds to date.

Álvaro says that the youngest member of his group is six years old. This precocious group of working children and adolescents have come a long way in learning how to lobby and influence public policy. They have learned to forge alliances with the government and to negotiate rates and commercial spaces with the competency of an adult. They have also mastered organisational skills. These young workers make time for study, work, leisure, and for their union meetings. Sadly, they suffer constant abuse from grown-ups and the police while working, along with the discrimination and lack of protection from society in general.

In Bolivia, there are approximately 500,000 children like Álvaro. Unlike him, some of them do not have a family or a house to live in. Nevertheless, Alvaro says he has fully experienced childhood instead of losing it. So, does his life experience make him an adult?

Sociologists everywhere have tried to map the coming of age using markers: completing school, leaving home, gaining a secure job, getting married and having children. But adulthood is hardly a fixed concept. It varies from culture to culture and differs in meaning all over the world. One thing is for sure, though, adulthood is always synonymous with increased responsibility.

Escaping the responsibilities of adulthood is characteristic of the Peter Pan generation, which in the United States represents three million 20-to-34-year-olds who live with their parents. Young people across the world are experiencing a similar reality, since the milestones of adulthood have become more and more difficult to meet in recent years. In La Paz, the rising prices of housing and the growth of the urban centre have made finding a house – and being able to afford it – almost impossible. As in other countries, employment in Bolivia has become less stable over the past thirty years, with few people having jobs for life now. This has undermined young people's ability to gain independence from their parents. People get married later, they move out later and they have children later. In short, doing the things that make you an adult is getting harder.

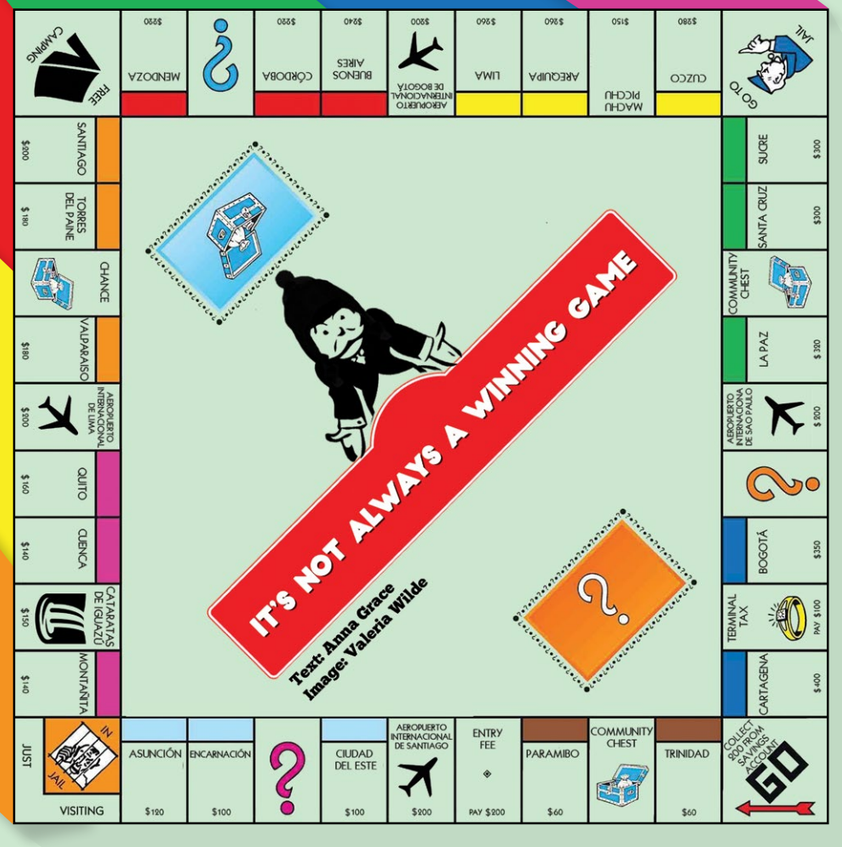
> In Bolivia, the cultural expectation is for people to live on their own only when they are married, especially in the case of women.

In Bolivia, the cultural expectation is for people to live on their own only when they are married, especially in the case of women. The Andean concept of **chacha-warmi** defines adulthood as that which makes a person complete, and thus a citizen, through his or her formal union with a partner. Moving out in Bolivia represents a big change. It intertwines several markers of adulthood.

This phenomenon could be rooted in the tight family bonds common to Latin American cultures, but it is also tied to the undeniable economic challenges that younger generations face in the country. The local Peter Pan generation – those between the ages of 20 and 34 – almost certainly live with their parents. It is a common practice in Bolivia to build a place big enough for the whole family; a place with enough room for all the children and their future offspring. Renting or buying a house near your parents is an adventurous equivalent that has become common in big cities.

Álvaro's case highlights the paradox that lies at the heart of coming of age in Bolivia. Not only is Bolivia experiencing many of the same issues with the Peter Pan generation as the rest of the world, but it is also home to a group of youngsters who are thrust prematurely into adulthood and forced to deal with the responsibilities that growing up necessarily entails.

It is hard to believe that youngsters like him are only about to reach the legal age of adulthood. Álvaro finished school last year and is now studying accounting, although he wishes he could become a lawyer. He says he wants to bring change to this country from his experience rather than from desk-work. His goals adhere to the markers of adulthood outlined by sociologists, but he has arguably faced enough adversity to last him a lifetime, or rather, a complete adulthood.



An eventful journey, a nomadic paradise, a transient hell – travelling is many things. But one thing remains certain: the traveller is always on the move.

It's part of the game, and a game for many it becomes. Imagine the great continent of South America as a Monopoly board. The aim is to collect the properties – or, in this case, countries – of greatest value.

The start of the board would see the not-so-oft visited countries of Suriname and Paraguay, widely said to be void of 'wow' factors. The safe bets, those invested in by many and bound to pay off, would be the backpacker favourites of Peru and Argentina.

The big hitter comes in the form of Colombia. On the rise, famed for beautiful coastlines and even more beautiful people, those who fail to add this to their collection are definitely missing out.

And Bolivia? Underestimated by some, most of the country is largely ignored, but it boasts a variety of backpacker must-do attractions. Worth a trip, some may say, but just a trip.

Hang around longer in any of these countries, though, and an attachment will be formed. Letting go of this attachment is the complicated part, as I found out…

The bluish tinge of a fiery newborn sun rising above the otherwordly salt flats; the composed reflection of a more mature blaze shining in the crystal waters of Lake Titicaca; the golden lights of a city asleep twinkling below the towering cable cars of La Paz; an aesthetic heaven. Bolivia has gifted me with sights that will stay with me for years, and memories that will last for significantly longer.

I set down roots. Yet feeling settled, finding a routine and building a normal life of sorts is not how you play this game. It was time to move on, to continue playing. After all, I never was one for losing. My next stop: Colombia. I knew Colombia was a strong contender in the running for South America's 'best' country, but I couldn't help but feel sceptical as to how it would compare to the country I was regretfully leaving. Or if it would compare at all.

Colombia didn't compare. After all, how could two such unique countries ever hope to do so? I showcased my lack of rhythm surrounded by passionate, whirling figures in a lively salsa bar in Cali, wandered between waxy palms on the green slopes near Salento in the coffee region and stumbled from tropical jungle onto golden sands and into the Caribbean sea in Tayrona National Park. Safe to say, my regret dissipated.

In the search for comparison lay my error. Why did I feel a need to determine a 'favourite'? As if countries were horses jostling for the lead at the Grand National, football teams competing for top of the table or, of course, properties to collect on a Monopoly board. I concluded that life isn't a series of comparisons, and that difference doesn't automatically qualify for better or worse.

After a well-welcomed return to Bolivia, the time approaches for me to say my renewed goodbyes to this country, a place that has been so kind to me, in which I have learnt so much and have regretted so little. What will stay with me most are the intangible impressions, the arbitrary encounters and the vivid sense of culture. Such non-concrete things, I have discovered, render comparison utterly futile.

I'm glad I didn't just pass through, and I know deep down that my **despedida** will be more of a **hasta luego**. 'Competitive' travellers may view this as time wasted. After all, there are more renowned properties to collect. At this rate, my collection may well remain small, but to hell with winning—I'm happy with my lot. In fact, I know I am not losing at all.

FACES OF THE CHORO

MEETING THE PEOPLE ALONG ONE OF BOLIVIA'S MOST BELOVED TRAILS

TEXT : DANIEL VIVEROS
PHOTOS: JULES TUSSEAU

Even if one feels prepared for the cold wind at the summit, a hiker here still has to face a soul-penetrating humidity. And the heat, equally intense, can be forceful enough to make someone strip off every layer of jacket and coat. At altitudes between 1,200 and nearly 4,900 metres, the Choro Trail, a 60-kilometre trek north of La Paz, is one formidable challenge.

> On a nearby hill rests Tajimi himself, his grave providing one of the area's most beautiful views.

This pre-Columbian trail was built by one of the oldest civilizations in Bolivia, the Tiahuanaco, and was later used and improved by the Inca. In both cultures, this trail connected the Amazon to the highlands, allowing for the distribution of important crops, including **coca**, among disparate biomes. Later, the Spanish used the trail in their monomaniacal quest for gold and silver.

This trail connects four ancient villages: Samaña Pampa, Chucura, El Choro and Sandillani. It takes the average tourist two to four days to traverse its length. During Easter, Bolivian nationals flock to it as an important pilgrimage for Christians celebrating **Semana Santa**. And despite this influx of tourists from Bolivia and abroad, these villages thrive, generation after generation, maintaining their agricultural traditions.

But the popularity of the trail amongst explorers has provided another way of life for those living along it. Francisca Mamani, a local from Chucura, travels with large groups of trekkers as a cook, preparing traditional Bolivian soups and breakfasts. But she does not have only Bolivian food on her menu; she is known for whipping up pancakes in the middle of the rainforest.

Other locals provide support and services for tourists. Miguel is a farmer from El Choro. In the 1990s he would sell tubers and corn to the other villages along the trail, but migration away from these communities was depleting the demand for his products. He saw a potential in the tourists, particularly the increasing number of foreigners coming to hike the trail.

'There would be between five and eight per month at the end of the 1990s,' Miguel says. 'But around 2004, there would be 20 to 30 per month.'

One day, Miguel received a request for the use of one of his horses to help carry the baggage of an exhausted tourist. Shortly thereafter, a local tourist office started offering carrier services, which kept both him and his horse quite busy. Soon after, he purchased more animals to grow his new business. That's when Miguel decided to meet with village authorities to discuss the incipient tourism industry that was developing. Today, most tourism companies require visitors to book carrier services in advance – and, following Miguel's lead, many locals offer horses, donkeys and llamas to aid weary hikers. Now it's not unusual to see up to 30 well-trained llamas carrying bags filled with tourists' tents and provisions.

In the community of Sandillani, at about 1,400 metres above sea level, there once lived a hermit named Tajimi Hannamura. Locals tell of this Japanese man's arrival in the 1970s. He was known to have built a beautiful garden with a lovely view of the mountain and the rainforest. Today this garden is a popular camping spot. Referred to by the locals as el **jardín japones**, it is a quiet place that locals maintain to preserve its singular beauty. On a nearby hill rests Tajimi himself, his grave providing one of the area's most beautiful views.

The influx of tourists along the Choro Trail has brought economic development to the area, but it has also changed relations here. Of course the locals are happy to keep living in their villages, and with the influx of trekkers offsetting some of the outward migration, the future of those along this trail is looking bright. It is as if a fog is slowly starting to disappear, revealing the once-hidden mountain valleys of this unique place.

DANCING THROUGH DIFFERENCE

AN EXPLORATION OF THE VARIOUS CULTURAL IDENTITIES SHOWCASED AT GRAN PODER

TEXT : SAREENA KAMATH
PHOTOS: SAREENA KAMATH, WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI AND VALERIA WILDE

La Fiesta de Señor Jesús de Gran Poder, often called Gran Poder for short, is the largest citywide festival in La Paz, taking place on the six-kilometre route where the historical neighbourhood of Ch'ijini once stood. Through colourful and highly ornate costumes, lively music and choreographed dances, this parade works to blend Christian themes and beliefs with the folkloric Aymara traditions of the city's indigenous past.

I was able to enjoy all the festivities from the elevated vantage point of the **Gran Palco Turístico Municipal**, sponsored by La Paz Maravillosa, the tourism department responsible for La Paz's being named one of the top seven cities in the world by the New 7 Wonders Foundation. So, with the added advantage of comfortable plush seating, bilingual guides and authentic Bolivian cuisine, I watched as nearly 35,000 dancers belonging to over 60 fraternities marched along the crowded streets of La Paz.

Some of the dances, such as the Tinku, are inspired by specific traditions that transpire within the various indigenous populations of Bolivia. The Tinku pays homage to an Aymara ritualistic combat of the same name which takes place in Potosí each year. During this time, members of neighbouring communities come together to dance and symbolically sacrifice one another as offerings to **Pachamama** *in the hopes of increasing their crops' yield for the coming season.*

Others utilise their dances and costumes to comment directly on the current state of cultural **mestizaje** *in Bolivia. An example of this is seen in the large congregations of marching* **cholitas**, *whose dance is especially important not only because it celebrates a common cultural identity shared by many Bolivians, but also because it shines light on the cultural marginalization and racism of Bolivia's past and explores the progress that has been made since*

Gran Poder attracts people from all walks of life: families with young children covered in sticky confections, boisterous and considerably intoxicated partiers, wide-eyed tourists and of course the ever-stoic security officers struggling to rein in everyone's antics. Yet perhaps the born-and-raised **paceños** *and newly arrived* **gringos** *alike have something to learn from this festive exploration of history, culture and social difference.*

ADVENTURING IN THE AMAZON

THE CURIOUS CASE OF COLONEL FAWCETT AND HIS SEARCH FOR Z

TEXT: SAREENA KAMATH - ILLUSTRATION : MAURICIO WILDE

Often referred to as a real-life Indiana Jones, Percy Harrison Fawcett was no stranger to mystery and adventure. Born in Torquay, England, Fawcett spent his early life and career serving in the British Army as a surveyor, cartographer and spy. As word of his skill as an explorer spread, he was commissioned in 1906 by the Royal Geographical Society to map and establish the boundaries of the previously uncharted regions of Bolivia and Brazil. Thus began his nearly twenty-year-long tempestuous love affair with the wilds of South America.

During his time in South America, Fawcett was quickly drawn into the world of spiritualism and the occult. Especially after learning of Machu Picchu and other Inca sites in Peru, he became increasingly convinced of the existence of a mythical city, which he termed "Z", hidden deep within the Brazilian Mato Grosso. In 1925, despite having failed twice due to the highly unfavorable conditions of the area, Percy Fawcett set out to find Z once more, this time with his son Jack and his friend, Raleigh. After his final dispatch, sent on May 29, 1925, nothing more was ever heard from Fawcett or his team. Eventually, in 1927, he was officially declared missing.

In the years that followed Fawcett's disappearance, a total of thirteen rescue missions were launched in an attempt to decipher his fate. Much to the dismay of those embarking on the search, however, nearly all his notes, maps and coordinates were written in code. Also, it was later thought that perhaps Fawcett's own family purposely concealed pertinent information in an effort to preserve his reputation and image. It is not surprising, then, that all efforts to uncover the truth have been mostly inconclusive.

Yet the search for Fawcett began to attract a wide range of theories and speculation as to his fate. Distraught by the loss of her husband, Fawcett's wife conducted a telepathic search to find him. During the time following his disappearance, she enlisted in the help of several mediums, including Geraldine Cummins, who went on to publish her exposé, The *Fate of Colonel Fawcett.*

Though never officially supported by the family, Fawcett's story was quickly picked up by many spiritualists and occultists who believed that he had in fact discovered the lost city of Z and was living there comfortably. Some even went so far as to say that he had stumbled upon a portal to an alternate dimension. Others claimed that, having been celebrated for his ability to form peaceful relationships with indigenous people, Fawcett had no intention of ever returning to Britain and instead assimilated into their society. A few individuals believed he was lured into a cult by some sort of spirit guide and joined a secret community in the jungle. Some fervently maintained that Fawcett simply succumbed to the hostile terrain and its many unique dangers during his search for Z.

Though the fate of the legendary Percy Harrison Fawcett is uncertain, it is clear that his story has inspired a number of literary explorations, real expeditions and creative projects. Some of these include Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, and W. E. John's *The Cruise of the Condor*. Most recently, American author and journalist David Grann attempted to analyse Fawcett's records and retrace his infamous last journey. He eventually added his own account, *The Lost City of Z*, to the ever-growing pile of spin offs. Each of these works has unveiled a small clue into the mystery of Colonel Fawcett and his quest for Z.

While it is unlikely that anyone will be able to follow his exact footsteps through the Mato Grosso, there is a way to satiate the thirst for a Percy Fawcett-esque adventure. The Mapiri Trail, which was used by Fawcett in 1906 as he trekked his way to the Amazon, follows a strenuous and demanding path from Sorata to Mapiri. It usually takes at least seven or eight days to complete. Starting in the Andean grasslands, the trek is relatively easier in the beginning as there is a partially cleared path and access to clean drinking water. But don't be fooled, the trail soon takes a turn towards the Yungas cloud forest: a dense, dark thicket of vastly overgrown vegetation that can only be penetrated with the help of a machete.

According to Alexander Von Ungern, a seasoned veteran of the Mapiri Trail and trekking guide from travel company Andes 2 Amazonas, 'You can plan all you want. You can come with the best boots you have – they will get wet. Your clothes will get soaked. You will get scratched in the face. You will get bruises. Only a small percentage of the time you'll be walking on two legs, the rest of the time you'll almost always be using your hands as well.' Only 20 to 50 people attempt the trail each year. As Von Ungern explains, this trek is not for fair-weather hikers, but the feeling of accomplishment after having mastered it is truly worth it. And who knows? You might just get lucky and spot a little something glinting through the vegetation along the way.

Interested in seeing the Mapiri Trail for yourself? Contact Alexander Von Ungern at info@andes2amazonas.com for more information.

'What was the food like?' is a common question posited by friends and family to those who return from a trip abroad as many countries have a cuisine that is recognised worldwide. Italy has its thin-crusted pizzas, India its spicy curries, and the list can go on. Bolivia, has two western neighbours and, between the two, Peru far outweighs Chile in terms of culinary prestige. I decided to venture out of Bolivia to sample firsthand a handful of national favourites from each.

In going to Chile, to be honest, my expectations were not all that high, but my Chilean culinary journey showed me one thing: Chileans like their food, and with passion comes good results.

Chileans like their food, and with passion comes good results.

Donde Kery, a food stall located in a lively **santiaguino** market, was a place of high spirits, large characters and even larger portions. After much debate, I chose a **chupe de mariscos**: a salty assortment of sea-dwelling creatures, cream, pleasantly soggy breadcrumbs and cheese. Slightly too rich and not very subtly flavoured, the *chupe* was not mind-blowing, but it was satisfying.

My next lunch was in a rather different setting. The 'Patio', an upscale food court in Santiago's plush tourist-filled Bellavista district, would not look out of place on the streets of London. Many of the eateries offer international dishes, but several others serve an array of Chilean favourites. I decided to sample the famous **pastel de choclo**, which had been described to me as 'a sweeter, Chilean Shepherd's Pie.' I was intrigued.

The topping of the pie is made from *choclo*, or corn, rather than potato. The mixture inside consisted of tender strips of beef swimming in a meaty sauce. Juicy black olives appeared from time to time, adding a bitter twist to the sweetness. If Shepherd's Pie were this good, I wouldn't have complained about its weekly appearance on my mum's dinner repertoire.

I was told the filling of the *pastel* is the same as that in Chile's **empanadas de pino**, the best of which can be found in the Chilean countryside. Grassy slopes, blue skies, olive groves and cacti greeted us an hour after leaving the urban tangle of people, traffic and buildings. As we approached the town of Til Til, a row of stalls stood close to the country lane, a small table outside each.

The baked parcel came filled with a mild, salty cheese and copious green olives. Since olives are a specialty of Til Til, the quality was evident. Surrounded by the thick, savoury, almost bread-like pastry, it was one of the best *empanadas* I have ever had.

My companions, not yet satisfied by my Chilean experience, insisted I sample the local liquid specialty, the infamous **Terremoto**. Plagued by *terremotos*, or earthquakes, Santiago's high-rise buildings are built to sway to the movement of quakes that have formerly brought the city to the ground. The unsuspecting human visitor to Santiago, however, has no such built-in mechanisms against the national drink of the same name.

The *Terremotos* arrived in tall glasses. A dash of red grenadine, rising into the brownish mixture of **fernet** and cheap wine, was topped off with a dollop of pineapple ice-cream. An inventive concoction, I must admit. I proudly finished the whole thing and left only slightly unsteady on my feet. A tremor at most. I was unconquered by the *Terremoto's* lethal effects.

Moving north towards Peru, we found ourselves in the Chilean seaside town of Arica, which is located just 8 hours by bus from La Paz. This is a town for seafood, and plenty of it. A line of strong-smelling harbourside stalls were packing up for the day. A seller took a break from gutting various heaps of slimy seafood and handed us two small plastic tubs of **ceviche**. Raw fish, presumably caught that day, marinated in citrus juice with some onions thrown in. It was a small taste of the ocean.

Then we crossed the border into Peru, the country in which *ceviche* is said to have originated. I was excited for my, albeit shorter, sojourn in Peru, which is famed for its archeological sights, geographical wonders and culinary excellence. My only stop was in Arequipa, a place known as "The White City".

When I arrived to the city, a neat courtyard dotted with white-clothed tables offered a wealth of typical food. I went for the **doble arequipeño**, a dish which – despite the name – consists of three regional favourites. A **chicharrón de chancho**, ubiquitous in various South American countries and basically a glorified chunk of pork scratching; a **pastel de papa**, made of layers of thinly sliced potato topped with cheese; and a **rocoto relleno**, which was the star of the show, an ever-so-slightly spicy pepper stuffed with minced meat.

There is one national treasure Peruvians refuse to share: pisco.

After such a meaty affair, the following day I went in search for the famous **papa a la huancaína**. My empty-stomached wanderings came to an end in a sunny passageway directly behind Arequipa's cathedral. Consisting of fluffy potatoes smothered in a bright yellow peanut sauce and topped with a sole black olive, *papa a la huancaína* is not the most aesthetically pleasing dish, but the spicy sauce was certainly tasty.

Chile and Peru may share a border, a coastline and variations of the same dishes, but there is one national treasure Peruvians refuse to share: **pisco**. Drugs, firearms and any foreign product bearing the name *pisco* are among the items that cannot be brought into Peru from Chile. Both countries produce the alcoholic spirit but, for the Peruvians, theirs is the only true variety.

My last night in Arequipa saw me in a city-centre bar. The distracting flashing lights and loud **reggaeton** tunes did not endear me to the place, but there was something I was yet to do: sample a *Pisco* Sour. The cocktail is made from Peruvian *pisco*, lemon juice and egg whites. The unusual final addition creates a fluffy, white layer which sits atop the other ingredients. Small yet strong, the drink certainly packs a bitter punch. After slurping the unique, sour concoction, I was ready to go home.

During the long journey back to La Paz, I reflected on the week-and-a-half I spent sampling national dishes. Granted, I had steered clear of a couple of specialties that didn't tickle my fancy. The Chilean **completo**, for example, made my stomach turn rather than my mouth water. The highly processed mayonnaise- and-avocado-smothered hotdog is named by many as the country's best invention, but simply seemed unappealing. And, call me unadventurous, but the **cuy**, a Peruvian favourite, placed far too low on my list to have been sampled during my time there.

I returned to Bolivia content in mind and in stomach. I had enjoyed trying a new assortment of food and drink. But, after arriving to my destination, I was ready for a hearty portion of sizzling **anticuchos bolivianos** and a tall, refreshing **chuflay**.

Boliviaexpress

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

A Review of the FCA Touristic Train from Oruro to Uyuni

TEXT: SAREENA KAMATH
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

Along the desolate outskirts of the west Andean town of Uyuni lies a dumping ground for abandoned locomotives, some dating back to the 19th century. Walking beside the long-forgotten railway tracks and hollowed-out train carcasses of this almost post-apocalyptic, dystopian landscape, accurately called **El cementerio ferrocarril**, it is difficult to picture the thriving centre of transportation that once existed here.

Before the early 1940s, this British-made railway was largely controlled by the mining industry and thus served as a central mode of transporting and distributing minerals to Bolivia's borders and beyond. However, as the mines began to yield less and eventually fall out of favour, so did their cargo trains. Add to this the political disputes that transpired between Bolivia and Chile over the maintenance of their shared train tracks connecting La Paz to the northern seaside town of Arica, and the development of better highways and the buses that traverse them, and it is not surprising that the passenger trains died out as well.

Enter FCA Empresa Ferroviaria Andina SA, a modern locomotive transportation service of both passengers and cargo. According to FCA general manager, Cynthia Aramayo Aguilar, the current route was formed by the pre-existing tracks of two major companies that survived the dramatic decline in train transportation and joined forces about 20 years ago. Commenting on the status of train travel after the introduction of Bolivia's highway network, Aguilar offered, 'We couldn't compete either in terms of time or price, so we as an administration looked for something to do with our passenger trains – how to reinvent them. Not to compete with highway travel, because that is impossible, but to offer something different.'

FCA oversees a myriad of different travel routes extending all over the country, but perhaps its most popular services are the tourist trains, the Expreso del Sur and the Wara Wara del Sur, which follow two separate tracks along the southwestern boundary of Bolivia. Both trains make up the principal 'T' line and travel from Oruro to Villazon, with stops in popular tourist destinations like chilly but breathtaking Uyuni and Tupiza. They are designed not only to transport passengers from one place to another, but also to offer them an entertaining and relaxing experience along the way. The primary difference between the two is their respective departure times from Oruro – while the Expreso del Sur has afternoon departures at 2:30 pm, Wara Wara del Sur departs at 7 in the evening.

The trains are divided into two seating classes, salon and executive, both equipped with several features to accommodate both the passengers' safety and comfort. However, for a respectable change in price from 60 to 120 **bolivianos**, passengers in the executive class can also enjoy larger, more comfortable seats, air conditioning, better video screens and other amenities, including more personalised attention from the train's staff.

Both classes have access to the train's dining car, which offers a clean and comfortable seating area and a menu housing a large selection of national and international dishes, including pasta, red meat and poultry, and a few healthy vegetarian options, ranging in price from 30 to 50 *bolivianos*. Also available are a wide range of alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, including a sizeable pour of Bolivia's own national liquor, **singani**, which I readily sampled along with my dinner.

While the other cars of the train are mostly quiet and peaceful to accommodate movie watchers and sleeping passengers alike, the general atmosphere of the dining car is far more animated. Sounds of laughter and spirited conversation filled the room as tour groups, couples and new friends ate and drank together while enjoying their meandering ride through Bolivia's highlands.

In fact, the view is probably the train's most unique and defining characteristic. Rather than simply following along a highway, the tracks are nestled right inside the scenic natural landscape of the **altiplano**. On the journey between Oruro and Uyuni, the gently undulating background does not change drastically, but passengers can still enjoy the vast stretches of farmland and meadow bookended by far-off mountain ranges and the almost piercingly blue, cloudless sky. Peppered throughout this serene countryside are herds of llamas, alpacas and cattle grazing or being led across the salt-encrusted plain. Around the shallow yet expansive lakes, one can also take notice of the huge flocks of brightly coloured flamingos, perched gently atop the water's surface or preparing to take flight. As one of the train's crew members, Pedro Montoya, commented, 'I was born in the *altiplano*, lived my whole life in the *altiplano*, and will probably die in the *altiplano*. But I never tire of this view.'

Sounds of laughter and spirited conversation filled the room as tour groups, couples and new friends ate and drank together while enjoying the meandering ride through Bolivia's highlands.

As the train shudders to a halt in Uyuni, the same town that houses one of the most infamous collections of its rusted, graffiti-covered ancestors, it is interesting to contrast the past and present moments of Bolivian train travel and think about where it is heading. While Aguilar still maintained that trains will not be taking the place of either highway or air travel any time soon, she did reveal FCA's plans to expand its existing tracks. She made note of the administration's ongoing negotiations with a similar train company in Chile to hopefully extend the current 'T' line to Arica and the coast of the Pacific in the next few years. An addition like this could have ground-breaking implications for the decades-old conflict between Chile and Bolivia and the fight for **el mar**. In this way, perhaps it is the humble train, not the shiny new plane or automobile, that is the most indispensable mode of transportation.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

アジアガーデンズ

TEXT AND PHOTO: JERUSA POZO

Jardín de Asia, in Zona Sur's Calacoto neighbourhood, is the David Carradine of La Paz's restaurant scene. And I mean the best of David Carradine: hot, with Asian inflections and an exotic elegance, rolled into a little bit of mystery. So, when people look for a high-end place to eat in La Paz, Jardín de Asia is often the first place they think of.

Maybe the Carradine comparison is a bit much, but Jardín de Asia has a unique atmosphere, serving dishes that are a fusion between Asian, Bolivian and Peruvian cuisine. Jardín de Asia welcomes you immediately when you enter through its door – you feel you are in the 'it' place of La Paz: a chic atmosphere, waiters as welcoming as can be, the bar able to seduce a teetotaler and everybody having a great time.

As I take my seat at a table, my waiter asks me how my day was, and I respond by telling him I had been thinking about food the last three hours. When I ask for the latest addition to the menu, he responds, 'Good choice, miss.'

I spend the next several minutes observing the place, which surprises me with its expansive and elegant design. Suddenly my first dish is on the table: **batayaki de mariscos**, made with seafood, **singani moscato** and **leche de tigre**. It tastes delicious, and the waiter seems pleased by the look on my face.

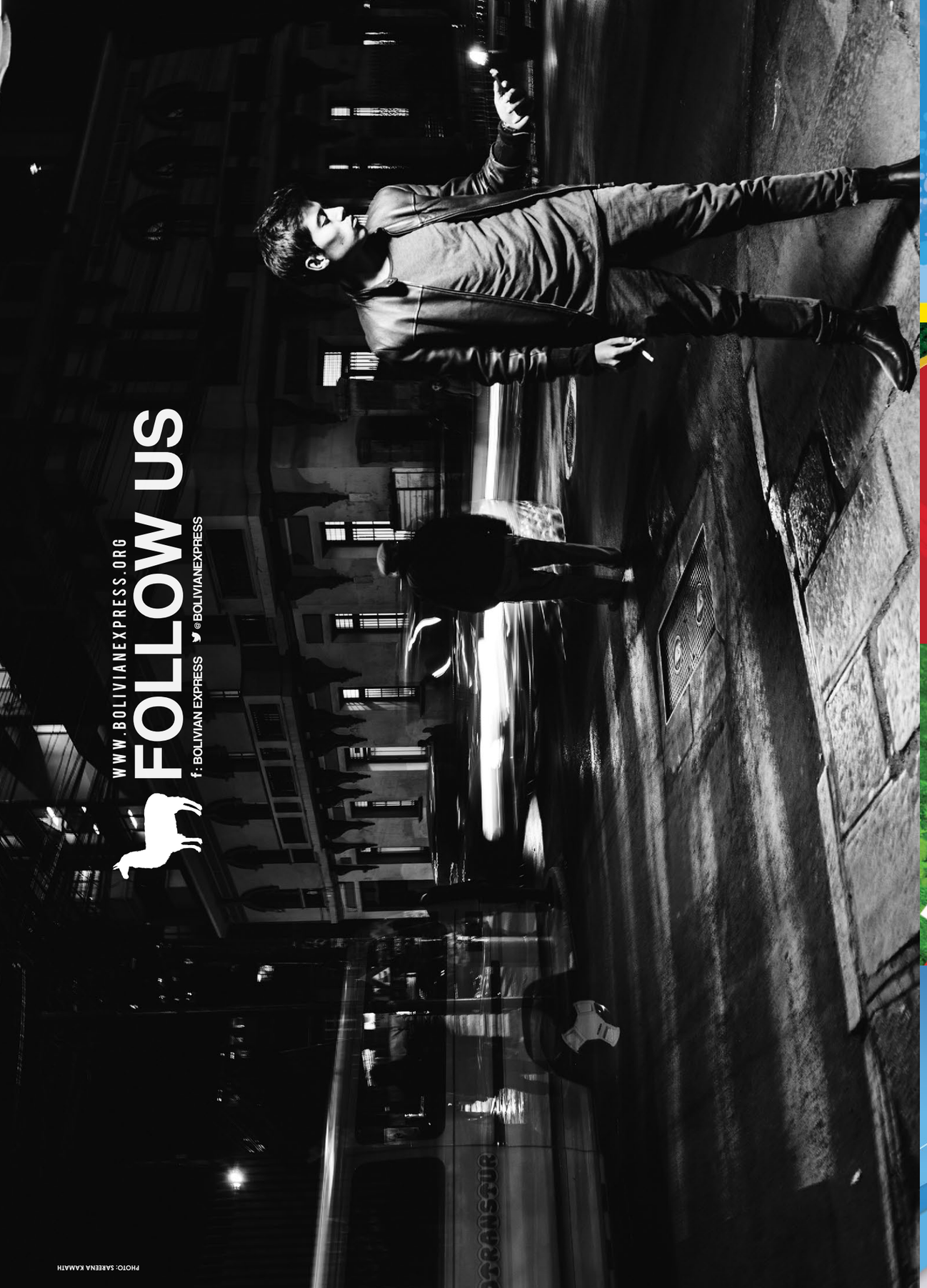
My second dish is **pato niquel**, duck bathed in oyster and soy sauce. Again, it is great. I like what I'm eating. It might look small on the plate, but it certainly satisfies.

My third dish, **vinagreta maracuyá**, consisting of **huacataya** leaves and a spicy peanut sauce, is too spicy for me, and I ask for a glass of water. Despite the heat, I knew my accompanying **maracuyá sour** drink should not be wasted by extinguishing the flames in my mouth.

My fourth dish, smokey yellow **tiradito**, consists of salmon, yellow chili and **mote**. What can I say? Jardín de Asia knows how to spoil you when you are looking for this kind of experience.

For dessert, a **maseta choco helada**. What can be better than a little flower pot made of chocolate with a sweet sauce inside of it?

The waiter asks me how my experience was, and I tell him it was the best I've had in a long time.



GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

ALTIPLANO: The Andean plateau or highlands region of Bolivia

ANTICUCHOS BOLIVIANOS: Grilled cow's heart served with potatoes and a spicy peanut sauce

ARROZ CON LECHE: Rice pudding

BARRIOS: Neighbourhoods of a city

BATAYAKI DE MARISCOS: A stir-fried seafood dish

BOLIVIANOS: The currency used in Bolivia

CEMENTERIO FERROCARRIL: 'Train graveyard'

CEVICHE: A dish made from raw fish marinated in citrus juice

CHACHA-WARMI: A part of Aymara cosmovision of dual complementarity

CHICHARRÓN DE CHANCHO: Pork belly fried in pork fat

CHOCLO: Corn

CHOLITA: Bolivian women who embrace both Aymara and Western traditions through their unique style and culture

CHUFLAY: A cocktail made of Bolivian spirit singani and ginger ale

CHUPE DE MARISCOS: A seafood bake

COCA: Coca plants

COMPLETO: A Chilean hotdog

CUY: Guinea pig

DESPEDIDA: A goodbye

DOBLE AREQUIPEÑO: A dish containing three specialties from the Arequipa region in Peru

EL MAR: 'The ocean'

EMPANADAS DE PINO: A typical Chilean meat empanada

FERNET: A bitter spirit made from herbs and grape-based alcohol

GRAN PALCO TURÍSTICO MUNICIPAL: A special box from which tourists can watch the festivities with food and guides

GRINGO: A slang term for a foreigner usually of American or Caucasian descent

HASTA LUEGO: 'See you soon'

HUACATAYA: A plant found often in the Bolivian highlands and tropical forests

JARDÍN JAPONÉS: 'Japanese garden'

LA FIESTA DE SEÑOR JESÚS DE GRAN PODER: A citywide festival in La Paz with dancing and religious roots

LECHE DE TIGRE: The citrus-based marinade used in the seafood dish of ceviche

MARACUYÁ SOUR: A cocktail made from the clear spirit pisco, egg whites and passion fruit

MASETA CHOCO HELADA: A chocolatey dessert with a sweet sauce

MESTIZAJE: A fusion or blend of different cultures or races

MOTE: Boiled wheat or corn

PACEÑO: Someone from the city of La Paz

PACHAMAMA: A Indigenous deity representative of a Mother Earth figure

PAPA A LA HUANCAÍNA: Potatoes in a spicy peanut sauce

PASTEL DE CHOCLO: A corn-based meat pie

PASTEL DE PAPA: Layers of thinly sliced potato topped with cheese

PATO NIQUEL: Duck in oyster and soy sauce

PISCO: A grape-based alcoholic spirit

REGGAETON: A genre of music heard in nightclubs all over South America with reggae influences

ROCOTO RELLENO: A spicy pepper stuffed with meat

SANTIAGUINO: Someone or something from Santiago, the capital city of Chile

SEMANA SANTA: 'Holy Week'; the week running up to Easter

SINGANI: A clear Bolivian spirit made from grapes

SINGANI MOSCATO: A certain type of singani

TERREMOTO: 'Earthquake'; also the name of Chile's infamous national drink

TIRADITO: A dish consisting of slices of raw fish and chillies

VINAGRETA MARACUYÁ: A spicy dish with a peanut sauce and flavours of passionfruit

VOCEADOR: Someone working in minibuses shouting out the destinations to passersby

The solution for high altitude sickness
La solución contra el mal de altura
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


Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia: 3,650 msnm


Altura ciudad de Potosí: 3,900 msnm


Danza Diablada, Carnaval de Oruro: 3,700 msnm

Lago Titicaca, Bolivia: 3,812 msnm

Nevado Illimani, La Paz: 6,462 msnm

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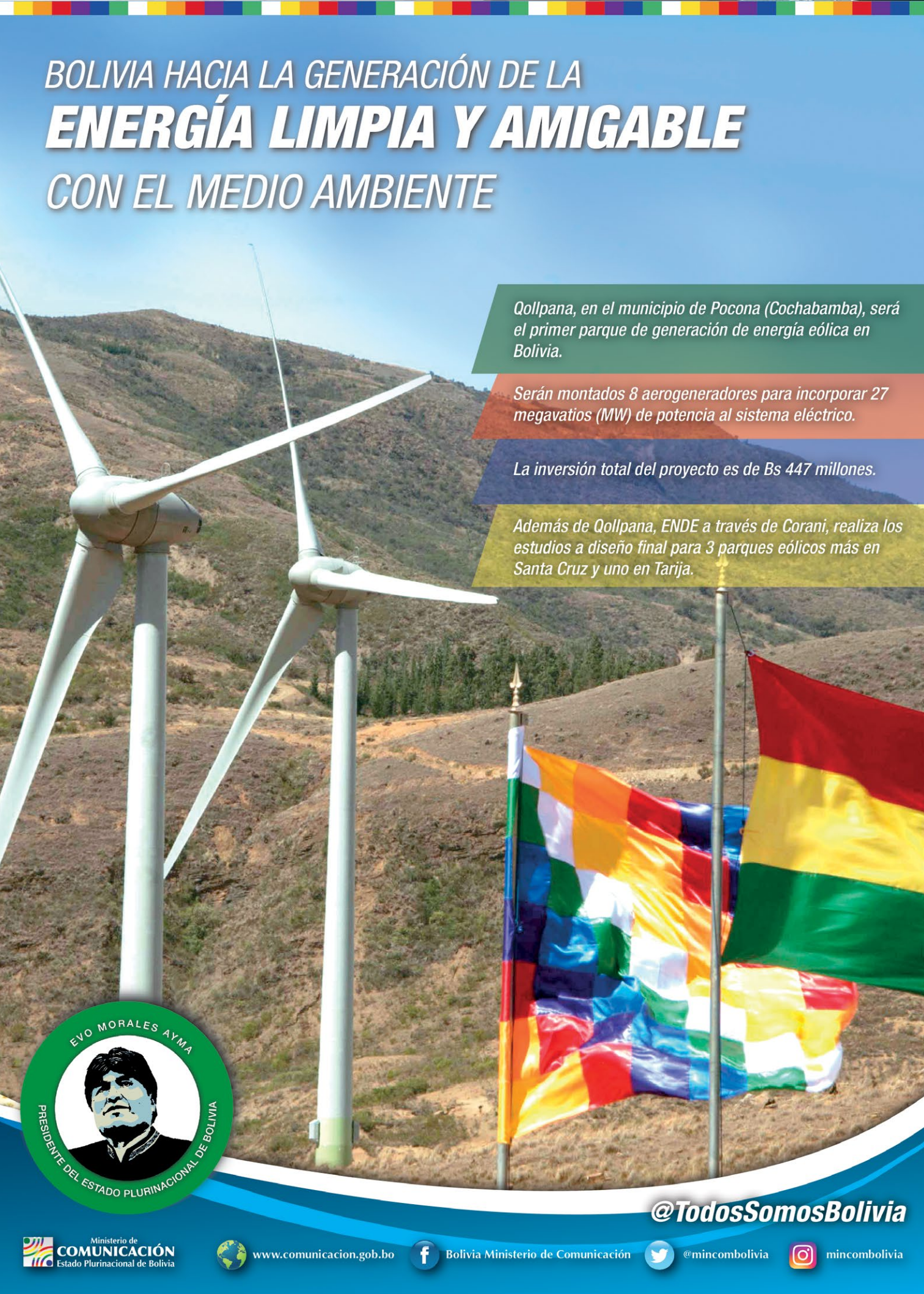
BOLIVIA HACIA LA GENERACIÓN DE LA **ENERGÍA LIMPIA Y AMIGABLE** CON EL MEDIO AMBIENTE



Qollpana, en el municipio de Pocona (Cochabamba), será el primer parque de generación de energía eólica en Bolivia.

Serán montados 8 aerogeneradores para incorporar 27 megavatios (MW) de potencia al sistema eléctrico.

La inversión total del proyecto es de Bs 447 millones.

Además de Qollpana, ENDE a través de Corani, realiza los estudios a diseño final para 3 parques eólicos más en Santa Cruz y uno en Tarija.

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