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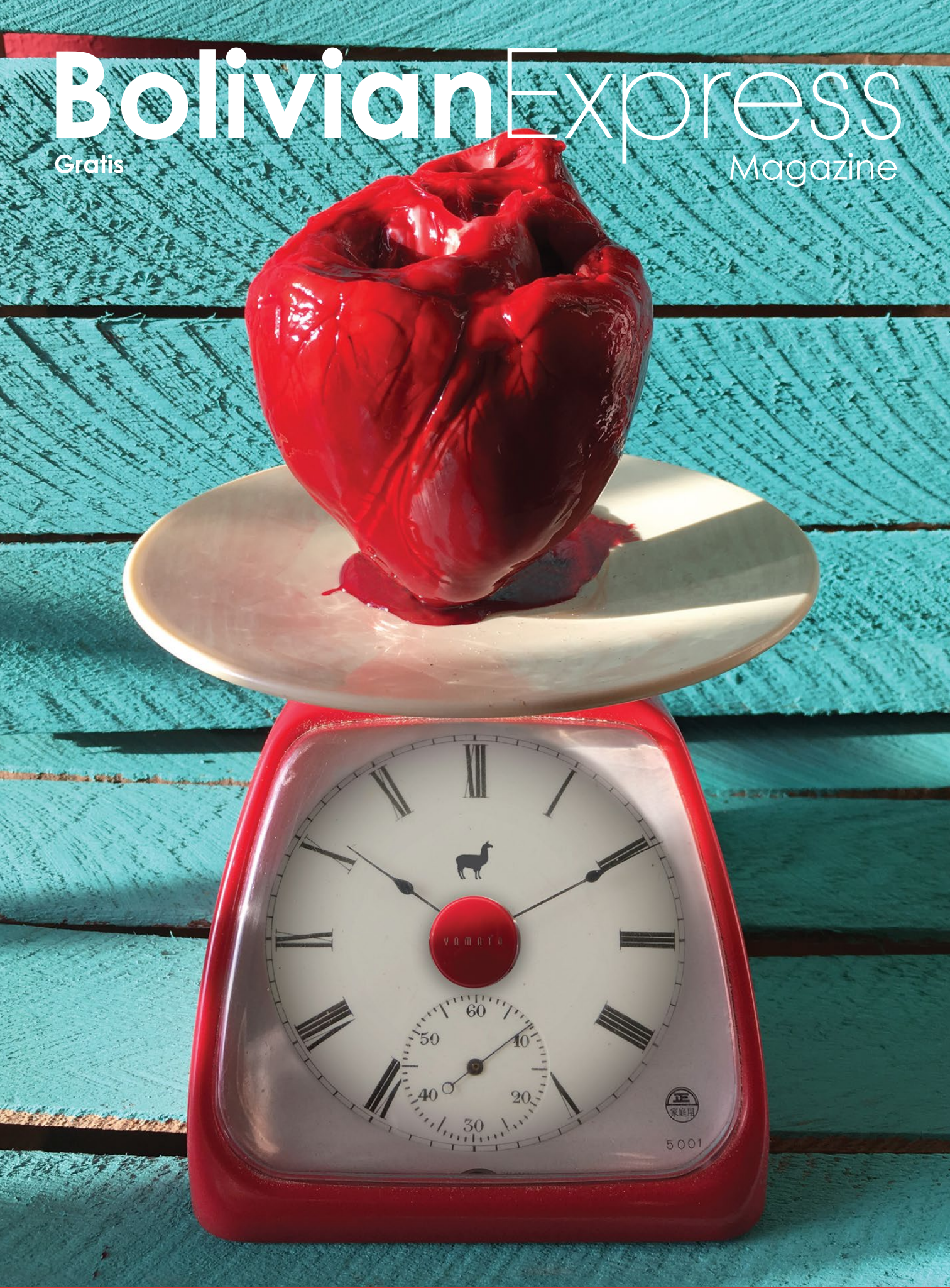

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Address: Calle Prolongación Armaza, # 2957, Sopocachi, La Paz.
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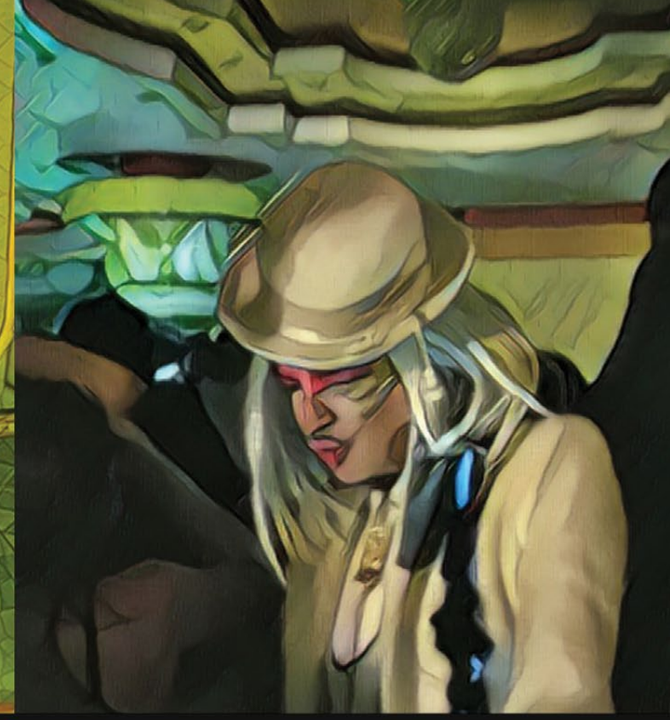
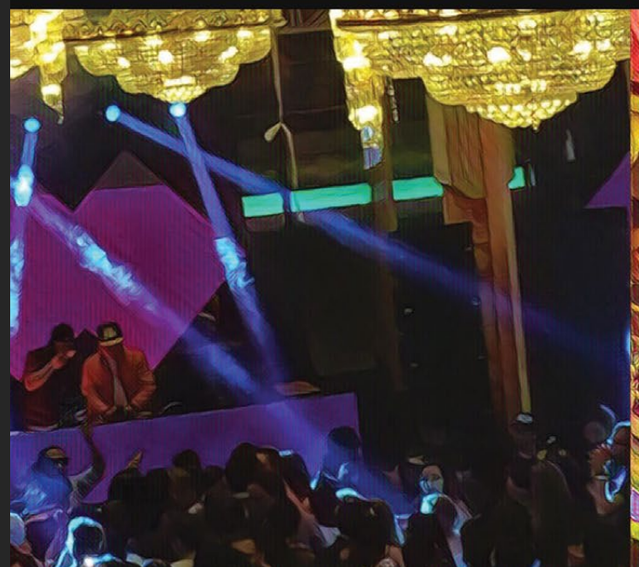
CONTENTS





The coca leaf is perhaps the most indelible symbol of Bolivia: iconic, recognizable, simple. But within its image lies millennia of history and unknown depths of energy and power. Cultivated in the Andes since at least the period of the Tiwanaku – predating the Inca Empire – the coca plant has been employed for a variety of uses, including as a stimulant, an appetite suppressant and as an anesthetic. It is prepared as a tea, applied to wounds and most famously chewed in the mouths of workers of all walks of life here.

Playing such a key role in many societies over centuries, coca is venerated as a sacred plant, and has purpose beyond its biological and medical uses. **Yatiris**, or shamen, incorporate coca leaves into their practices in many ways. They are spread around in sacred ceremonies and **ch'allas**, or blessings. *Yatiris* 'read' coca leaves to tell the fortunes of believers. And the leaf is reduced to its essence to make extracts.

It is no wonder that the coca leaf plays a special role in Bolivia's spiritual, social and economic spheres. It has driven civilizations to greatness, and has enlivened the spirits of their countless inhabitants, as it does today. At the core of this importance is the leaf's ability to store and give life to those who engage with it. In Bolivia, the coca leaf is more than a symbol, it is the single most potent giver of enduring vitality.

The spirit of the coca leaf resides in many corners of Bolivian society. Similar energising forces which enliven the spirit and bring people together can be found in other facets of day-to-day Bolivian life. In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we explore vitality through the stories of people filled with power and life, from Aymara **cholitas** scaling the heights of Bolivia's highest mountains to dancers taking their improvisational movements to the street. La Paz's famous zebras show us ways to imbue city streets with positive energy, and Korean immigrants and volunteers tell us how they are becoming part of Bolivian society to do good works. We celebrate big advances made for Bolivia's transgendered community, we also learn about objects and foods filled with the powers to enliven, including Bolivian spirits and the variety of items, old and new, sold at La Paz's famous Witches Market. Bolivia is known for a number of 'superfoods', and we explore their local origins and uses to provide healthy sustenance to people here and abroad. And we dive into the collective national promotion of **Vivir Bien**, or 'Living Well', an abstract idea turning into a tangible, measurable metric for creating and maintaining balance and wellbeing for all of Bolivia's citizens.

Bolivia is a place with its own kind of energy, its own vibrance. As is the case with every issue of this magazine, here we offer stories that show this beauty in many different ways. We want to show you, the reader, that the same enduring spirit that inhabits the coca leaf also resides in the people, places and things that call this country home. And we hope that you see Bolivia as a place that can be described as, above all, vital.

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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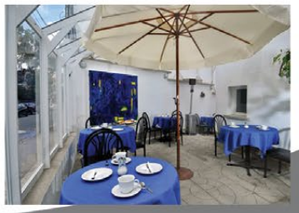

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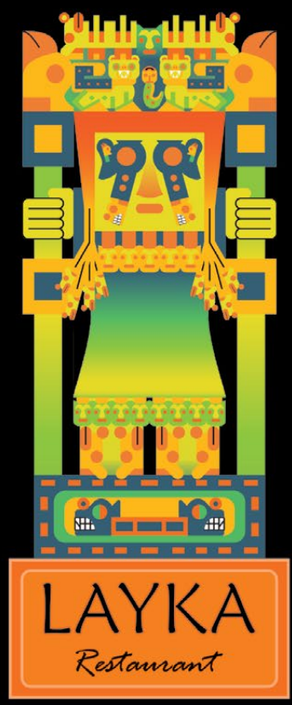

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A Universal Language

THE PULSATING PRESENCE OF DANCE IN LA PAZ

TEXT: MADELEINE POLLARD

From street performers contorting their bodies before halted cars in the glow of traffic lights, to shuffling feet as the beat of yet another parade drum tremours through the streets, dance is one of the energies that pulses through the charismatic city of La Paz. Performance bursts into parks and plazas, rendering the art of dance not only a privilege for theatre goers but a spirited social presence, a presence that I explore through the eyes of contemporary dancer Omar Ruiz.

I met Omar at his mural-covered studio in the Obrajes neighbourhood of La Paz. When I asked him to discuss his work as a dancer in the city, he began with a disclaimer: what is important is dance as a social, political and artistic force, not 'Omar the dancer'. 'There is definitely an ego aspect to performance,' he admits. 'However, its importance gets distorted. Dance itself is a force. It's not about individuals. As a dancer I am merely a facilitator, the communicator of an artistic idea... a middleman.'

This concept of dance as communication, the transmission of a 'universal language', is part of Omar's definition of

the artform. 'Dance is a global celebration of life,' he says. 'Whether that's celebrating Bolivian folklore in a college parade, or letting your body move ecstatically in a sweaty club at the end of the week. Dance is movement and movement is an expression of vitality. Take sharks for example: if they don't move, they die.'

Omar specialises in contemporary dance, a style he describes as a transposition of art into the physical. 'The body is just another artistic tool like graphite or charcoal,' he explains. 'Your body becomes your paintbrush and dance allows you to explore its possibilities.'

As I observed a contact improvisation session between Omar and one of his collaborators, this idea of traversing bodily boundaries came to life. The pair moved as though underwater, fluid yet controlled, maintaining contact at all times and reading each other's bodies to sense the next step. An energy was present between them, one which they had to navigate carefully as the session and their physical exploration progressed.

This improvisational technique prompted a new venture for Omar and two of his friends, a piece of urban dance entitled 'Improvisación en la Paz'. In this project, the trio set off without a planned sequence or choreography, just two months of improvisational workshops behind them and the sprawling streets of La Paz ahead. In a video of one performance, the dancers crawl, climb, pivot and spring along the pavement, through squares and down steps. The atmospheric film evokes the opening section of the Beat poem 'Howl', with Allen Ginsberg's 'best minds' 'dragging themselves' through the 'streets at dawn looking for an angry fix'.

The video exemplifies the architectural inspiration that La Paz offers the **bailarines** as they essentially 'dance with the city'. The dancers sculpt their movements to their surroundings, sensing the different dynamic triggered by an expansive park or narrow stairway, allowing their bodies to respond rhythmically to the buildings. Most of the dancing took place in Sopocachi, which, according to Omar, is a neighbourhood that is receptive to art. Omar prefers urban spaces to studios or theatres for his performances, arguing that theatre goers are often predisposed to react a certain way, whereas the reception of spontaneous urban dance is far more raw.

When I probed the possibility of dancing professionally in the city, Omar sadly reflected, 'It won't pay the bills unless you start teaching classes, but it's more than just a "hobby" for me. It's a lens through which I live my life – dance gives me this constant consciousness of my body. When I get up in the morning, I'm thinking about how my body is waking up, how my feet are getting up.'

Although art is perceived as a privilege in parts of the Global South, where people have to meet basic economic priorities before they can indulge in it, Omar sees art as a necessity. 'Art doesn't have to be consumed or bought,' he says. 'It is a social presence that isn't elite. You can dance in a plaza, sing in the street... you don't need a studio space.'

DANCE CAN BE A CELEBRATION OF THE BODY IN GENERAL, ALLOWING IT TO BREAK OUT OF ITS SOCIALLY-CONSTRUCTED CONFINES.

Dance in Bolivia has even reached the political. No Nos Madrugan is an organisation that danced alongside the disabled in recent protests in La Paz, enriching the campaign with performances on a stage in Plaza San Francisco. 'Art isn't a privilege,' Omar insists. 'It is integrated into social struggles.'

Omar has taken his philosophies to the streets by working with the Hormigón Armado, a group of La Paz's famous **lustrabotas**, or shoeshiners, who publish a newspaper and participate in a variety of job-training and public health workshops. During an improvisational dance workshop with these young kids, Omar was struck by the physical language of many of the participants. 'They sleep on each other and live together in small spaces on the street, so they have a totally different concept of personal space, an intense tactility,' Omar points out. 'This translates into the way they dance. During the contact improvisation I expected them to be reserved, but they threw themselves into it quite literally, falling backwards during trust tests without a second thought.'

'There was this incredible reaction,' Omar recalls, as he meditates about the power of dance as a uniting force. 'Even the difference in dresscode between myself and the kids meant we could physically feel each other as socially disparate. I'm from a different part of town, a part that usually discriminates against them. As we worked closely on a physical level, we broke down these social boundaries. They felt accepted.'

Dance in La Paz functions as more than just a leisure activity. It works as a glue that melds together different parts of society – again, a 'universal language'. 'When you dance, you're in touch with a sensitive side of humanity, you're perceptive to the difference between humans,' Omar points out. 'You notice how his or her body moves differently, leading to a celebration of this diversity.' Dance can be a celebration of the body in general, allowing it to break out of its socially-constructed confines. As Omar says, 'Wherever you are, dance is a part of human liberation and acceptance.'

SPIRIT OF THE ZEBRA

AN EXHAUSTIVELY HAPPY PHILOSOPHY

TEXT : JACOB KLEIN
PHOTO: ELLEN WEAVER

'¡**Actitud, Cebra**! ¡**Acción**, **Cebra**! ¡**Espíritu**,**Cebra**!', shouted a herd of students, dressed to the neck in zebra suits, holding long snouted hats in the crooks of their arms. The shouts intermingle with gales of laughter and voice-stopping grins. They had just spent the day as volunteer traffic monitors and the culture and vision of their host organization was evident on their smiling faces.

Only a half-an-hour before, these young volunteers were assisting the elderly to cross dangerous street corners, chiding cars that ventured too deep into the walkways and dancing under the **semáforos** of La Paz, bringing order, if ever so briefly, to busy intersections near Plaza Murillo. Under the trained eye of their equine-dressed **paceño** peers, first-time and temporary participants followed fulltime zebras, who were aggressively happy and helpful. They led the newcomers by example. Waving at pedestrians as they passed, stopping to hug timid toddlers, and high fiving intrepid teens, their positivity was endless.

Beyond their eccentric uniform, all employees strive to embody the core philosophy of the organization: the spirit of the zebra. It begins with disposition.

'WHEN YOU TAKE OFF THE SUIT YOU STILL WISH TO HELP.'

–SOLEDAD

'We teach them to always be positive with their words and with their actions,' says Soledad, a community organizer for Club Zebra. The traffic monitors are encouraged to speak without negative connotations, greet everyone they come across, and throw away any trash they find. But the spirit of the zebra transcends these friendly gestures.

'The spirit of the zebra is the desire to help,' continues Soledad. 'When you take off the suit you still wish to help.' The philosophy runs deep for the zebras, and has been imprinted on those who have left the programme. 'There are thousands of youths who no longer wear the suits, but go on to demonstrate themselves as zebras,' Soledad says. 'They are always greeting, always helping, always being leaders.'

The joy and mirth provided by the city's 265 zebras is known for educating *paceños* about street safety. Their mission, however, expands beyond the chaotic streets. 'We work with different themes like street safety, bullying and littering,' Soledad explains, claiming that 'bullying is down, conductors are driving safer, cars are stopping at stop signs and people are making safer decisions in the streets.'

Though the presence of the zebras is profound, in their absence the chaotic pace of the city seems to resume, calling to question the true extent of their impact. They certainly bring moments of safety to daily life on the city streets, but the reason for their celebrity is their exuberant positivity. Their smiles and demeanor have made the zebras a welcome government outreach program. 'People always thank the zebras,' concludes Soledad. 'They are grateful for the work they are doing to change the city.'

THE PHILOSOPHY RUNS DEEP IN THE CLUB AND HAS BEEN IMPRINTED ON THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT THE PROGRAM.

LOOKING FOR A KILLA DRINK?

TWO PARTNERS ARE LOOKING TO REDEFINE THE WHISKY MARKET IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: ISABEL COCKER
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

★ ★ ★

Barely five minutes after arriving at Bolivia's soon-to-be first-ever whisky distillery, I find a shot glass half-full of a clear liquid in my hand. I sip it, and the rich taste flows smoothly – no burn, but a warm glow fills my stomach. This is a 45-abv moonshine distilled from corn, and its name, **Killa**, is taken from the Quechua word for 'moon'.

But this is no ordinary moonshine. In Bolivia and Peru, the popular drink **chicha** is produced by fermenting a certain variant of maize known as **jora**. Here at the small four-room distillery, the makers start with the traditional *chicha* fermentation process, but then distill it in order to make it stronger, turning it into moonshine.

This moonshine has a unique taste partly due to the combination of traditional distilling processes with parts of Bolivian and high Andean culture. In order to put a **paceño** spin on it, the makers have been experimenting with using local grains and processes mixed into the distillation.

According to Fernando Marin, part-owner of the company, this is not the only thing that makes this distillery so unique. Another factor in its originality is the location of the distillery, settled at 3600m in the world's highest capital. At this altitude, water boils at a much lower temperature, so the process has to be altered slightly for best results. 'You could take the exact ingredients, the exact equipment, and have the same distillers repeat this process at sea-level, but it would not be the same,' Fernando says. 'We have a very unique atmosphere here.'

At this point, the distillery is not yet up and running commercially. Small batches are being tested to refine the production before it is eventually scaled up. Fernando and his business partner, Felipe Gonzales-Quint, are eying quinoa and amaranth, both traditional Andean crops, for use as ingredients. These plants would lend the moonshine flavours distinct from those of the barley used normally in Scotch or Irish whisky. Although this recipe is still in development, the distillery has samples of early experiments, which, once unstopped, fill the room with the unmistakably earthy aroma of quinoa.

THEIR ENTHUSIASM IS APPARENT IN THEIR EXCITEMENT WHEN THEY SPEAK ABOUT THE PRODUCT.

Located in a colonial building off Calle Sagarnaga in La Paz's tourist district, the distillery was once a burnt-out shell, but is now coming together as an impressive micro-production plant. Fernando and Felipe reconstructed the original rooms by hand and filled them with all the equipment needed to start their business. Even the distillation tanks, big behemoths made from stainless steel, have been designed by the pair and made to their exact specifications. It has also been a family effort: much of the facility's furniture was donated by relatives.

'We started exploring the possibility of making whisky five years ago,' Felipe says. 'But not in a serious way. We were just curious about where the alcohol comes from. Then we started joking about it, bought some books and did some research. It just grew from there.'

The project is in its infancy, and the pair still have to get certified by the government before they can start production. But they already have ambitious plans for the future. They're looking to hostel bars and popular tourist restaurants for distribution, and they will be offering tours to interested people, tastings included.

Upon visiting the plant, I was not prepared for the tiny scale of the operation. However, this was more than made up for by the boundless enthusiasm of the two partners. Their enthusiasm is apparent in the immaculate production rooms and their excitement when they speak about the product. But more importantly, their passion is encapsulated in the taste of their chicha-like moonshine, so carefully curated as to renew the vivacity of the drinker, raising her own spirits even as she raises the spirit in a toast to this new endeavour.

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DEFEATING DEATH ROAD

RUNNING IN BOLIVIA'S SKYRACE

TEXT: TOBY CLYDE
PHOTO: ALFREDO ZEBALLOS

It's not the finish line that decides the winner of this race – it's the mountains. Every year, a pack of leading runners climbs into the sky and every year they are dragged apart by the green slopes of the Bolivian wilderness. It is less a competition and more a conquest, a battle against exhaustion, altitude and pain. 'Your legs just can't do it anymore,' says Marco Chura. 'Then you have to run with your head and your heart, because there is no strength left anymore.' This is the Skyrace, on Bolivia's infamous 'Death Road'.

Marco, 22, has won the Skyrace three times, setting a new men's record this past August. Slight and quiet, Marco's appearance belies his accomplishments. He ran in the very first Skyrace, back in 2012, when i3 Impacto Social, a social enterprise for low-income communities, chose a uniquely challenging venue for a new race: the 'Death Road' in Nor **Yungas**. A largely single lane track, it has few guard rails as it winds around cliffs of up to 600 metres high. Over the years it has claimed thousands of lives, although the danger lies more in late-night bus journeys than in a gradual two-footed ascent. Instead, the excruciating difficulty of the Skyrace comes from the sheer height and distance demanded by this event: 28 kilometers of dirt and jungle over a climb of 1,800 meters.

'THE SKYRACE HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART.'

—FABIOLA IBARNEGARAY

The race starts in the tropical humidity of Yolosa; at 1,230m, the route ascends for 15 kilometers to La Etapa. Many of the runners choose to quit here, but for Marco this is the halfway point. The hardest part lies ahead, with a steep climb into the forested heights of Chuspipata. When runners collapse over the finish line, they stand a whole 3,030m above sea level.

When Marco first competed in the Skyrace, he wasn't even an adult. Remarkably, he won, and had cemented a deep love for one of the most punishing races in Bolivia. The race attracts competitors from all over the country, from La Paz to Santa Cruz. La Paz resident and active runner Fabiola Ibarnegaray said, 'I love the trail, love the scenery, love the challenge. The Skyrace has a special place in my heart.'

Like many emerging sports, the Skyrace is caught between increasing athletic professionalism and frustrating limitations in funding. Sponsorships remain few and far between – and not just for the runners. Beatriz García, the founder and managing director of i3 Impacto Social, admits that finding committed sponsors is a challenge, although organisations like Gatorade and the Red Cross are now involved.

Ultimately though, the Skyrace exists not just for its runners but for the causes it supports. Unlike many long-distance races around La Paz, it comes with an entrance fee (420 bs), in part to pay for the numerous transport and safety costs (the winners receive no remuneration). This year's race raised funds for Metro Parada Juvenil, which provides youth centres in El Alto, and the Senda Verde Animal Refuge, which protects illegally trafficked animals.

'YOU HAVE TO RUN WITH YOUR HEAD AND YOUR HEART, BECAUSE THERE IS NO STRENGTH LEFT ANYMORE.'

—MARCO CHURA

However, neither money nor social enterprise truly explain why, year after year, runners return to face down the 'Death Road'. For Marco, it's the struggle. The Skyrace is so difficult in his eyes that 'everyone who reaches the finish line is a winner and a champion'. In those awful and lonely final kilometres, he says that 'everything comes to mind – your training, your friends and family. Even though you may be alone, you feel like someone is accompanying you and pushing you to keep going.'

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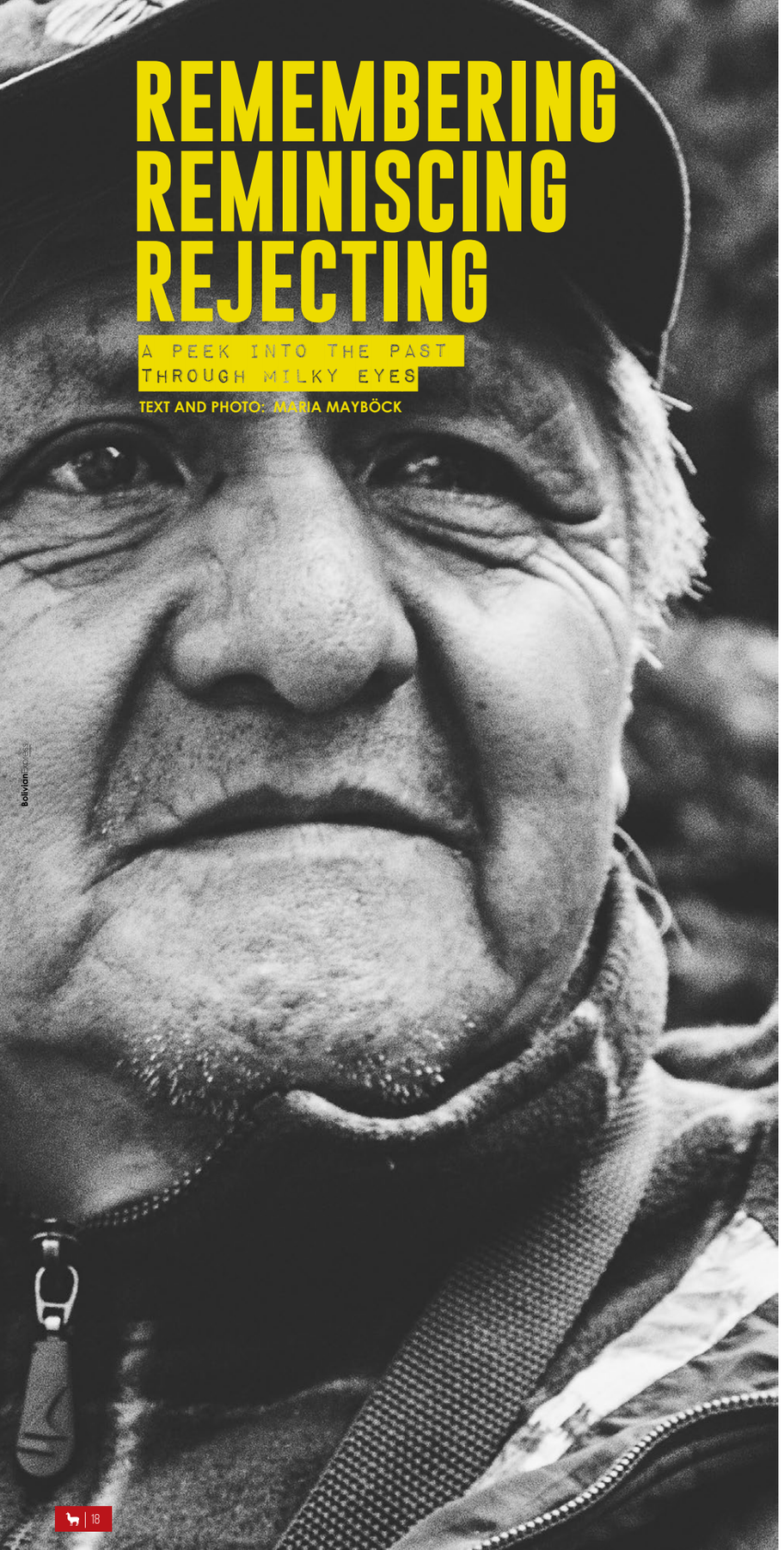


REMEMBERING REMINISCING REJECTING

A PEEK INTO THE PAST THROUGH MILKY EYES

TEXT AND PHOTO: MARIA MAYBÖCK

They are almost invisible, unless they are part of our families. But the elderly are still a force to be reckoned with. They are many, they are opinionated. They are a fountain of knowledge, possessing a wealth of experience that can only come with age and time.

'I think a positive aspect of my age is experience,' says Celeste Pérez Mercado, 82, sitting in her daughter's living room. 'I think not one day passes in life in which one does not learn something new. It may be minimal, but every day teaches us something.' The lines on her face dance when she laughs or lovingly reprimands the family dog. '¡**Afuera**! ¡**A la cocina**!' Celeste shouts at the **perro**. The tea in front of Celeste grows cold as she reminisces about her childhood, days spent climbing trees and crossing rivers – even escaping death, like when she tested the theory of electricity by submerging her hand in a tub of water that was being heated by an electric device. 'I believe I have been accompanied by divine help all my life because I have lived through situations in which I should have died,' she says. 'But I didn't!'

'I BELIEVE I HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY DIVINE HELP ALL MY LIFE.'

—CELESTE PÉREZ MERCADO, 82

Javier Torres is 65. He sits on a bench, white hair sneaking out under his blue hat, his green fleece sweater zipped up all the way to his chin. But as he starts speaking, his face lights up and a youthful, eager attitude takes hold of him. To Javier, the past is the centre of his work and studies. 'I live in Bolivia. I have my Bolivian identity, but I do not feel Bolivian,' he says, before launching into an exegesis of his grand theory of Andean genealogy and botany: the indigenous genetic modification of the potato, and a 13,000-year-old human footprint found in Bolivia, which could potentially disprove Darwin's theory of evolution. 'I am in love with my ancestor's work,' says Javier, as he catches his breath just to introduce yet another theory about those ancestors' discoveries.

Not all memories are sweet, however, and not everyone can look back nostalgically. With experience, inevitably, comes disappointment, frustration and pain. Julio Sevilla Mencia spends his days in a tent on El Prado, camping out to seek justice and raising awareness of the Bolivian government's human-rights violations in the 1970s. 'I used to make shoes,' he says of his youth. 'I was left without work, without nothing. I was tortured. They pulled off my fingernails. I was shot in my leg here. Scars here in my shin, my collarbone,' he says. 'This is why we are here. Waiting for there to be cooperation ... But unfortunately this government does not want to listen.'

'Are you married or single?' repeats Arsof Puente Ervas, 99. He is a robust man with a black moustache, strong political opinions and a confident temper. 'I feel young. I dance, I play the piano ... I will make you dance!'

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A HEAVY ROCK, SOMETIMES AS LIGHT AS COTTON.'

—CARLOS VENTURINI SANDALIO, 89

he exclaims. He is sitting in the patio of the 'San Ramón' assisted-living home in Achumani. Arsof repeats certain anecdotes and similar questions over and over again, but he is far from a boring conversationalist. Still, will he once forget that his daughter has an **almacén** in Obrajes, or that his third wife lives in Valle Grande? Memory can be fragile and let us down as age creeps up on us.

Carlos Venturini Sandalio Herrera sits on a bench, slightly slanted to one side, yet he never falls over. 'Sometimes I feel like a heavy rock, sometimes as light as cotton,' he says. At 89, his speech is soft and slow; his hair a pure white; his gaze fixed on something in the distance as he searches for the name of his disease, Parkinson's. When talking about his former job as a carpenter, his hands seem to remember better than his words as he mimics the motion of sanding wood.

Growing old isn't always graceful. It requires acceptance: of years gone by, of limited physical ability, of life as it is – and also of death. But there's also hope, oftentimes in future generations. 'Happiness came in the form of my children,' says Arsof. 'In that moment, I felt like the happiest man alive. Why? Because I was able to give them their profession. And I told them: Now you are this, son; you are that. Now you have your whole life in front of you. Mission accomplished.'

FROM BHUTAN TO BOLIVIA

THE CHALLENGES OF MEASURING LIVING WELL

TEXT AND PHOTO: ALEXIS GALANIS

'This is the challenge of our generation,' states Simón Yampara, a leading Aymara sociologist, speaking at the presentation of his new book **Suma Qama Qamaña**. And yet, as I listen to Yampara and his fellow academics discuss *Suma Qama Qamaña* and **Vivir Bien** (Living Well) at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) in central La Paz, I look around and notice that I, a young Englishman who has spent all but two weeks in Bolivia, am the only person under the age of 30 in the room, aside from Ecuadorian thinker Atawallpa Oviedo's infant child.

When Javier Medina comes to the podium, he begins by saying that he had prepared a talk to explain the concept to university students, but there are none in the room. It comes as both a surprise and a monumental disappointment to the panel. Plenty of engaged listeners, yes, but an entire generation, the generation who are to take this challenge forward, absent.

'Living Well' is the guiding principle and the ultimate goal of the Plurinational State of Bolivia since its symbolic foundation in 2009. The recognition of Bolivia's plurinational status, of its diverse cultural, linguistic and folkloric traditions, has prompted a rediscovery of a worldview lost under the rubble of five hundred years of colonization. Like the complex mosaic of Bolivian identity, *Suma Qama Qamaña* is a complex network of Aymara-Quechua thought, translated to *Vivir Bien*.

That translation, however, is no simple process. Medina, who has been a key figure in the construction of 'Living Well', underlines the difficulty of applying this philosophy to State policies. '*Suma Qama Qamaña* is a world view which cannot be expressed in Spanish [...] The West does not have the capacity to express its complex ideas, its semantic networks,' Medina says.

So in the transition from *Suma Qama Qamaña* to 'Living Well', we are sure to lose something. In its most basic terms, *Suma Qama Qamaña* is a system of dualities, balance and reciprocity with **Pachamama**. But what does *Pachamama* really mean? Pa – two, cha – energy, ma – one, ma - one. Not simply 'Mother Earth', but the world conceived as a dual-plane of energies. On one side, **Japhalla Siqi**, the spiritual plane. On the other, **Yänaka** *Siqi*, the material plane. 'Living well,' Medina claims, 'is what results when these energies meet and find balance.'

Colonization, capitalism, globalization and Western thought have unsettled the balance, accentuating the material plane and all but casting aside the spiritual plane. 'We need to restore the balance between these two energies,' Medina says. 'This is the challenge of humanity.' This is not just about 'Living Well'. It's about decolonizing thought on a national scale. 'Living Well,' he adds, 'is not absolute, but changes according to context; it's relative to each individual.'

Ethereal, abstract and entirely subjective, what does all this mean in concrete terms? 'Living Well' is defined by the state as 'a philosophy that values life, seeks a balance with oneself and others, an individual and collective well-being, promoting respect and the harmonious coexistence between mankind and nature'. It is intended to offer an alternative model to economic development, precisely encouraging 'living well', as opposed to 'living better', the individual pursuit of prosperity and success – the model of capitalism, the model of the 'American Dream'.

This vision, though firmly entrenched in Andean ideology, is not an entirely novel concept. In the small Eastern state of Bhutan, traditional measures of national development have been rejected in the belief that 'Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than GDP'. This famous quote from Bhutan's former king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, has served as the country's guiding principle since 1972. In 2005, it became a new metric to measure national development.

Conceived as a model to promote Bhutan's culture and spiritual values, GNH has called into question the very role of the State. What's more important, moral and ethical guidance or economic development? The broad narrative paints a pretty picture: rejecting traditional economic measures of development and prioritizing environmental, cultural and even spiritual concerns. But is it realistic in practice? Can concepts like human happiness, self-worth and emotional stability truly be measured in any meaningful way?
Concrete statistics from Bhutan only add to our doubts. In a 2012 UN study of global happiness, Bhutan ranked 84th out of 157. Additionally, Bhutan is among the top 20 countries with the highest suicide rates in the world. But does this totally discredit the metrics of happiness, or rather suggest an injudicious application of those metrics in its policies? That's up for debate.

Fast forward to 2016 in Bolivia. Seven years on from the establishment of the Plurinational State, it is clear that the implementation of 'Living Well' has yet to be successfully realized. What now then? Follow Bhutan.

The National Institute of Statistics (INE), together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Bank, is in the process of creating indicators to measure 'Living Well'. It feels like a step in the right direction, From a vague idealist discourse, romanticising Bolivia's cultural heritage, to a new metric to guide policy. But can 'Living Well', the balance of the two planes of energy of *Pachamama*, really be measured? 'Yes, we think so,' answers Ana Maria Durán of INE. What about broader ideas of happiness or spirituality? 'Yes,' she says.

Durán explains that Bolivia has learned from the Ecuadorian 'Buen Vivir', which she deems unconvincing. 'Their model seems to me to be based largely on an individual's use of time. I think we are on the right path, we have advanced the idea.' Rather than just time use, the Bolivian 'Living Well' encompasses 'knowing', 'feeling', 'being' and 'doing'. But isn't that even harder to measure?

Perhaps sensing my enduring scepticism, she hands me a booklet outlining the process of the construction of the 'Living Well' metric. Almost immediately some of my reservations dissipate. Models developed from Aymara-Quechua numerical systems define and categorize – according to dual-energy plane of *Pachamama* – the nine qualities of 'Living Well': being, learning, relationships, nourishment, working, enjoyment and rest, loving and being loved, dreams and aspiration, communicating.

Each of these nine qualities come with a set of 'demands', 49 in total. Next February, a nationwide survey will ask questions based on these demands. The results of these questions will create a collective score for each quality, each of which has a relative weight in the aggregate metric of '*Vivir Bien*'. The metric, Durán assures me, will be used to guide social, economic and environmental policies.

While the metric is undoubtedly well-planned, no degree of preparation can ever overcome its restrictions. Since 'Living Well' is relative to each individual, its qualities cannot be objectively quantified with accuracy, especially once we recognize its spiritual and intangible elements.

Will the inherent limitations of the metric render it completely useless, or will it be able to provide meaningful results? It is difficult to know at this stage. Regardless, the State's aims of decolonization and social harmony will not only depend on the metric itself, but also on the engagement of the people, on instilling the principles that underpin this philosophy. The challenge of a generation, of humanity...

'What legacy do we want to leave our children, our grandchildren?' asks Yampara, as a final thought at the presentation. At that moment, Atawallpa Oviedo's son noisily bounds on to the stage with youthful exuberance and goes to sit on his father's lap. A poignant moment. Tragic or heartening? Only time will tell.

THE COLOURS OF WATER

TEXT: MARIA MAYBÖCK,
PHOTOS: MARIA MAYBÖCK,
DAVID KAVANAGH, ISABEL ION, VALERIA WILDE

it is life, it is birth, it is a drop, it is a torrent, it is mist, it is dew, it is clear, it is muddy, it is pure, it is polluted, it is stagnant, it is rapid, it is dripping, it is flowing, it is blue, it is green, it is purple, it is brown, it is turquoise, it is yellow, it is white, it is a commodity, it is scarce, it is survival, it is abundance, it is our planet earth... it is vitality.

OLD MARKET, NEW MEDICINE

THE CHANGING PRODUCTS OF THE WITCHES MARKET

TEXT AND PHOTOS: TOBY CLYDE

The name, El Mercado de las Brujas or the Witches Market, does little to accurately describe the bustling medicine and ritual trade just off Plaza San Francisco. In reality, the market is constantly changing to meet the demands of modern life and tourism as well honouring ancient practice. Here are a few products that embody this diversity – some new this year, some older than the streets on which they are sold.

POLVO

In the market, special **polvos**, or powders (often from Venezuela) come in all sorts of packages promising to do everything from improving your sex life to building muscle. A 'new and improved formula', Polvo Del Dominio, guarantees dominion over your lover if applied daily to 'intimate areas'. Although it is a popular and established product, the shopkeeper confesses to having no idea what the powder actually contains.

FETO DE LLAMA

If tourists remember anything from their time in La Paz, it is the dessicated and blackened llama fetuses, or **feto de llama**, whose brooding gaze gives the stalls much of their unearthly aura. An ancient and important offering to **Pachamama**, these fetuses usually come from accidental miscarriages. But the increased demand, suppliers have been known to use sheep instead, elongating their necks to pass them off as the bona fide product.

DULCES

Brightly coloured sugar tablets called **dulces** are household offerings that cover just about any need. Older designs meet elemental human demands. The sun opens the way for new projects, so it is often packaged with other sweets. *Pachamama* doesn't begrudge specificity, it seems, and new sweets like the dollar reflect how these offerings continue to be an important feature of daily life.

MACA

Known as Viagra from the Andes, **maca** is a root vegetable that is a new addition to the market. Natural, energising and rich in protein, *maca* is boiled for a useful boost, particularly to the older gentleman. It also reflects the extensive trade circuit throughout Bolivia that keeps urban markets busy with new products and plants.

STEVIA

A natural sweetener from the Yungas, **stevia** has become very popular, not just with locals but often with tourists. It has become a trendy, calorie-free alternative to sugar and together with **hojas de coca** sells well to the health-conscious visitor.

HERCAMPURI

The sale of herbs to treat everyday ailments has always been central to the market, and packaged versions are now readily available. Billed as 'from the age of the Incas', **hercampuri** provides a complete body cleanse to treat conditions like diabetes and obesity. It even comes with a number to call in order to satisfy your *hercampuri* needs.

Thanks to Professor Lynn L. Sikkink at the University of Colorado; Milton Eyzaguirre at the Museo Nacional de Etnografia y Folklore; and Natalia Mamau Castuo, a local shop keeper for their help and expertise.

LEGALISING IDENTITY

A WATERSHED LAW FOR TRANSGENDER BOLIVIANS

TEXT: GABRIELLE MCGUINNESS

Over the past few years, the global understanding of gender within cultural and social spheres has advanced with the increasing presence of transgender issues in the public eye. In 2016, Bolivia joined the discussion by passing its Gender Identity Law on the 19th of May 2016 in the Chamber of Deputies. This marks a major constitutional change that gives unprecedented recognition to the transgender community.

The trailblazing law permits citizens over the age of 18 to change their name, gender and photograph on their legal identification documents through a confidential process carried out before the Civil Registry Service. Gender reassignment surgery is not a requirement. Applicants are only obliged to participate in a simple psychological test that verifies the sincerity of their request before their documents are processed. Fast-forward 40 days and the new I.D. is ready.

AFTER DECADES OF OPPRESSION, THE LAW RECOGNIZES TRANS BOLIVIANS AS LEGAL CITIZENS.

As of August 1st, when the law came into full effect, at least forty people have begun the process of changing their documentation, with 2,000 people projected to follow swiftly after. This pioneering law is an evident sign that the transgender community has been given a place at the forefront of Bolivian society, after decades of being marginalised by the mainstream political agenda.

The deaths of Dayana Lazarte, Carla Suárez, Luisa Durán and Virgina Wanca Aliaga as a result of transphobic violence are evidence of the towering ideological barriers that the LGBT community has faced in the country. The fact, however, that the head of the Chamber of Deputies, Gabriela Montaño, dedicated the law to their memory shows that the government is willing to facilitate lasting progress.

David Arequipa, a prominent campaigner for the law and eminent member of La Familia Galán, a group of Bolivian trans activists, explains that at the 2007 national congress of the LGBT collective, the community voted to be officially renamed TGLB. This meant to prioritise the rights of transgender people, who had previously struggled to find work or finish school, and were often left homeless or forced to turn to prostitution. After decades of oppression, the law symbolises the full recognition of trans Bolivians as legal citizens. In theory, this should wave goodbye to an era of discrimination and welcome a more equal future.

'The law is not the end, it is a beginning,' Arequipa exclaims from his office chair, passionately speaking of the many battles yet to come. In this **lucha**, activists must focus on creating more employment opportunities for their community and improving its access to education, health and the justice system. The legalisation of gay marriage is yet another hurdle to be overcome, but Arequipa proudly believes that the TGLB community can continue its fight for equality, empowered and armed with a newly earned dignity.

Resistance to a more nuanced and progressive perception of gender and sexuality exists due to a degree of hostility amongst the population. Arequipa recounts the initial ripples of opposition that spread in the wake of the law being passed. Some felt it went against nature and the concept of the 'ordinary' family. A survey in 2013 found that 57% of Bolivians were hostile towards TGLB issues, a reflection of the underlying conservatism in the country.

A prominent source of opposition in Bolivia are the Catholic and Evangelical communities. Sergio Gutiérrez, a local church leader, would have preferred a national referendum to settle the issue. Objectors in Santa Cruz took to the streets to protest against the law, armed with their own ideological demands. Despite mixed views on the subject within the Catholic Church, it seems this tension will be difficult to resolve since the tenants of the faith view gender change as an action that overrides the will of God.

Manuel Canelas, a member of parliament who coordinated between the activists and his fellow deputies, explains that the main barrier to equality is the ignorance that results from a lack of information. While La Paz is more tolerant due to the visibility of La Familia Galán and other public figures, in the **campo** and amongst the indigenous population, the idea of transgendered citizens remains largely alien.

'The majority of Bolivians were apathetic when the law was announced,' Canelas explains, although he hopes that the recent communication and education initiatives will better inform the people. The government is taking measures to ensure that trans people become more visible across various media outlets, such as the news, TV shows, radio broadcasts and social network sites. In schools, the curriculum is being improved so that children have a broader view of gender and sexuality from an early age. The goal is to show that being trans can be something normal.

'THE LAW IS NOT THE END, IT IS A BEGINNING.'

–DAVID AREQUIPA

According to Canelas, in contrast to the arduous battle fought by TGLB activists, the parliamentary process was surprisingly smooth, with a quick turnover after the initial proposal. Once the law was explained to the members of parliament, 85% of them voted in favour. This suggests education is key required to tackle the lingering antagonism to TGLB rights.

After being asked about next steps, Canelas explains that efforts are being made to pass a law that allows for gay marriage. Although deeply-embedded traditional values will almost certainly make it a turbulent process, he hopes civil partnership, the first step toward equal marriage rights, will be legal within three years. By increasing the visibility and public discussion of TGLB issues in the country, the transgender law has paved the way towards a more diverse, equal and accepting Bolivia.

A TWO-WAY ROAD

두 방법 도로

A KOREAN ORGANIZATION'S GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH LA PAZ

TEXT: EDUARDO BAPTISTA
ILLUSTRATION: MAURICIO WILDE

It is no secret that, by definitions set by the United Nations, Bolivia is one of the most 'underdeveloped' countries in South America. A recent UN Human Development Report ranked it 119th out of 188 countries, behind all of its neighbors. The improvement of its Human Development Index is technically in the hands of the Bolivian government, but as with most countries in the Global South, foreign aid in Bolivia has always been of great value.

Disease prevention, improved medical training and increased access to computer skills are but some of the development gaps that the Korean International Cooperation Agency, or KOICA, aims to close in the country. The agency's overall mission is to enhance 'prosperity through inclusive and sustainable growth'.

KOICA was founded in 1991 and has since spread to 44 countries around the globe. In Bolivia it aims to promote agriculture, health, transport and energy. KOICA designated it a 'priority' country in 2010 and opened its first office in La Paz.

The organization carries out its aims mainly through two channels: projects advised by South Korean specialists and a volunteer program that receives and trains around 55 Korean men and women per year. In alliance with Bolivian firms and government branches, the advisory projects employ around 100 paid professionals per year.

IN KOREA, VOLUNTEERING IS AN ACTIVITY THAT RECEIVES LITTLE TO NO SOCIETAL PRAISE.

On the other hand, the volunteer program focuses on providing young Koreans with the necessary skills and resources to have a meaningful impact in the country. Every volunteer is given a two-year "mission" that tackles a specific issue related to one of the four KOICA target sectors.

After interviewing KOICA members in La Paz, it is clear that the organization is working to provide the city with small injections of vitality. But the personal stories of its paid and unpaid workers show that their stay in Bolivia is providing a good dose of vitality for themselves.

Speaking to Kwak Byeong Gon, an experienced doctor who advises local hospitals, and Song Min Chol, a volunteer IT teacher, it is clear that both of the agency's channels are geared around local needs. Dr. Kwak shares his valuable expertise with health centres in El Alto and runs crucial training courses for Bolivian doctors. Min Chol focuses on improving the IT skills and the access to computers of a low-income community in the south side of La Paz.

Before volunteers such as Min Chol can begin their mission, they undergo an intense two-month training programme in Bolivia. The training includes eight hours of Spanish lessons a day and useful crash courses, such as an explanation of '**la hora boliviana**', which Min Chol admits is a concept that can be difficult to handle.

Why face all this adversity thousands of miles from home for no material remuneration? Bo Shin Sang, a 26-year old volunteer, has some answers to this question. It is a sociological fact that young Korean males like Shin Sang are subject to highly palpable social pressures in their native country. There is a well-drawn path that Korean males are expected to follow, an expectation enforced by parents and the country's results-driven education system: do nothing but study in high school so you can go to a prestigious university. Repeat this process in order to land the best job.

Min Chol's description of Korean society confirms this picture. 'What's the value of social life or hobbies,' he asks, 'when following this well-trodden path is all you need to be "successful"?' Under such restrictions, Shin Sang admits to have been plagued by a feeling of powerlessness in Korea. 'It's my life,' he says, and volunteering in Bolivia has allowed him to regain some control.

The convention-breaking aspect of Shin Sang and Min Chol's decision may be hard to grasp, given that volunteering is not uncommon in European and North American nations. In Korea, however, volunteering is an activity that receives little to no societal praise. Whilst American colleges and English universities view humanitarian work experience in a positive light, Korean universities base their admissions solely on exam scores. This narrow-minded approach creates an ultra-competitive and ultimately selfish mentality amongst many young Koreans. This could explain why the number of KOICA volunteers in Bolivia has remained stagnant since its first year.

The rejection of this culture of individualism is also what motivates KOICA's hired experts, who make professional sacrifices to work in other counties. Although Dr. Kwak runs a private clinic in Seoul, his desire to 'spread happiness and plant hope' first led him to work with KOICA in 2007, for a significantly smaller wage.

On a personal level, Dr. Kwak's family has also had to make some sacrifices. His three boys, for example, struggle to communicate with their Bolivian classmates. His widowered father, who stayed in Korea, misses Dr. Kwak very dearly. Not being able to take care of his elderly father has been emotionally burdensome for the doctor, as he worries about upholding his duty as a son according to Confucian values.

Dr. Kwak admits that it is difficult to accept the many peculiarities of Bolivian society, be it the reckless driving, endless bureaucracy or the heavy local gastronomy. Amidst these cultural shocks, 'bravery', he says, is what holds the family together.

He has harsh words for Korean doctors, describing some of them as 'money-making machines'. Raised by a father who frequently volunteered for his community, Dr. Kwak is a city doctor who places ethics ahead of profits. Only this can explain why he is here in Bolivia rather than in Seoul, competing with his colleagues over who can run through the largest number of patients per day. As Dr. Kwak summarized, it is important to remind doctors, be it in El Alto or in Seoul, that there is no such thing as a 'hospital for doctors', only a 'hospital for patients'.

Dr. Kwak's energetic disposition feeds off the close patient-doctor relationships he has formed abroad. In Korea, he says,'patients can often be rude or stressed-out'. In Bolivia, Dr. Kwak has found that patients are more grateful. Perhaps this has something to do with what Shin Sang has learned as a volunteer: Bolivia is '**lento**, *lento, lento*'. Korea is '**rápido**, *rápido*, *rápido*'.

These three Koreans are not only trying to push forward the development of Bolivia's political capital. They are also developing daily relationships with **paceños** that allow them to experience what they find lacking back home, or perhaps escape what they find discomforting. In the process of doing so, their sacrifices are remunerated with happiness, a much more valuable good than money.

TO HEAVEN AND BACK

CHOLITA CLIMBERS BREAK BOUNDARIES AT THE SUMMIT

TEXT: TOBY CLYDE
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Perhaps the hardest part of climbing a mountain is coming down again. Standing at the 6,088m peak of Huayna Potosí you are met by a view so vast it is encompassed only by the curvature of the earth itself. Yet this spectacle is dwarfed by the unbearable exhaustion that such a vista entails. There is no sudden moment of completion, no immediate release at the top. The long, difficult return awaits, more painful and more arduous than the upwards journey could have suggested. Such a testing path is almost solely reserved for the all-male Bolivian mountain guides and the foreign adventurers they ferry. Why would it be any different?

Except this year it has been different, radically and powerfully different. A group of **cholitas**, largely a community of cooks with mountain-guide husbands, have made this journey and many others like it. They have endured the peaks of five mountains so far (with the aim of scaling the eight Bolivian summits over 5,970m), and in the process have drawn the attention and acclaim of international media. Only a few months ago, they conquered the so called **Patrimonio** of La Paz, the colossal Illimani, accompanied by a sizable film crew and even drones to record their achievement. The resulting documentary, produced by Indomita SRL, is aptly called 'Mujeres de Cumbre' (Summit Women) and is due to be released this year

I spoke at length with Lidia Hauyllas Estrada, one of these *cholita* climbers, and joined her family on a hike up Huayna Potosí. At 49 years old, she's fairly typical of the group whose ages range between 40 and 50, which is extraordinary given the challenges posed by such extreme conditions. As she puts it, their desire to climb doesn't come from an aspiration to exclusivity: 'We are the women who have taken the first steps, and we've taken them for other women so they can feel what it is like to go [up the mountain] or at least feel they can do this,' she said. The determination of the *cholitas* to see the summits for themselves and to do so dressed in their traditional **pollera** and petticoats (with the addition of modern climbing equipment) reflects the message of tangible action that these women wish to convey. There is something glorious and brilliantly disjointed about the contrast between vibrant patterned skirts and deathly white mountain snow.

Perhaps the greatest example of what these *cholitas* have achieved is their scaling of Illimani. The symbolic momentousness of this feat aside, the climb is a brutal one. At 6,438m it is the highest peak in La Paz, and second overall in Bolivia. The ascent contains a notorious 200m, near vertical, ice section named the 'Stairway to Heaven', so called for all the accidents it is has caused over the years. Certainly there is real danger involved. Lidia says the hardest part of the trip is leaving her children and grandchildren behind. 'They would always say goodbye and ask that I dedicate the summit to them,' she says.

The trip up to the top took place over three days. Laden with recording equipment and six camera operators, the eleven-strong group, along with some of their husband guides, arrived at the high camp the evening before the final climb. They tensely prepared the night of the big ascent and set off at 12 am, long before the dawn.

> 'WE ARE THE WOMEN WHO HAVE TAKEN THE FIRST STEPS, AND WE'VE TAKEN THEM FOR OTHER WOMEN.'
>
> –LIDIA HAUYLLAS ESTRADA

The idea is to climb while the snow remains firm and before the fickle sun has a chance to alter the path altogether. This doesn't change how fundamentally disorientating this night time departure can be. Heavy with equipment but little sleep and even less oxygen, it is hard to muster the colossal energy needed to place one foot in front of the other, let alone safely navigate the treachery of high altitude glaciers. Temperatures plunge into negative. On the trip I joined up Huayna Potosí, my water bottle was nearly completely frozen. The cold makes the trail even more of a battle. I can only imagine the ice of the most technical and challenging section of Illimani, the 'Stairway to Heaven'.

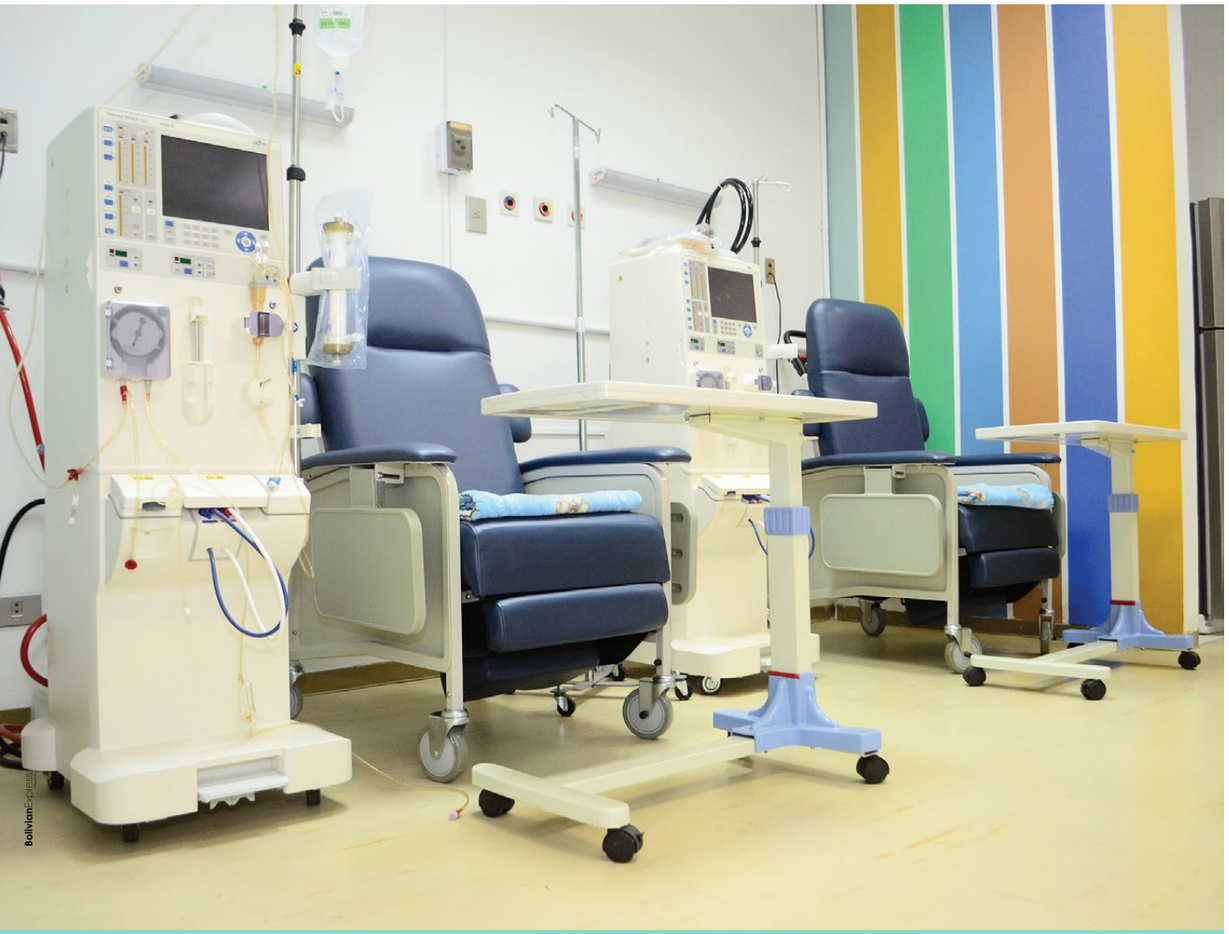
So close to the sky, maybe something heavenly did await the *cholitas* scaling *Patrimonio*. Cresting the final ridge of the mountain that looks over La Paz they too shared the vision of a goliath. 'Just beneath us there was a light mist. It was if we stood in the sky,' Lidia said. 'Then it started to clear as if the clouds around us were erupting out of a volcano.' Still, it was the trek back that was truly gruelling. 'It wasn't the difficulty of the [return], but the exhaustion,' she explains. A thick cloud of snow descended on to the group in their journey back to the high camp.

The difficulty of these mountainous comedowns also points to another challenge inherent in what these *cholitas* are doing. Returning to the world below the clouds and after the media fervour presents a number of problems for these women who hope to continue climbing. Simply put, the time, supplies and equipment necessary for each trip adds up to an expensive bill. The Illimani climb was sponsored by the La Paz Municipal Government under the promotional project, La Paz Ciudad Maravillosa, but other sources of sponsorship are harder to come by.

There is also the possibility that marital concerns make it difficult to freely schedule climbs. Lidia's husband, Elio, was eager to talk about how he supports his wife's endeavours. 'I feel very proud because I've been a mountain guide for eight years and this was a collective project,' he said. However, on a later trip, he hinted that some husbands may be less supportive.

Whatever the limitations, endurance is at the heart of their endeavor. Lidia hopes to scale mountains for as long as she's physically able, and the ultimate aims of the group aren't small. In terms of climbing, Illimani is barely a warm up for the colossus that lurks at the end of the group's checklist: the largest mountain in South America, Argentina's Aconcagua. In turn, their desire to inspire other women is intergenerational. Just behind me for most of the Potosí climb was Lidia's daughter, Suibel Gonzales Huayllas. The guides and *cholitas* want to help Bolivians re-discover the mountains on their doorstep. A sport, Elio wryly notes, they might have more success in than football.

My time with Lidia demonstrated that to climb a mountain is to undertake a journey of epic proportions, a journey that doesn't end with the high point. These *cholita* climbers have not only travelled further than anyone could have imagined, but they have created something special in the process. 'We were over the moon that we had created a story right here in Bolivia,' Lidia says, 'that we, the *cholitas*, had climbed a mountain, something that has never, ever, been seen before'.



AFFORDING AN ORGAN

THE CHANGING REALITY OF RENAL PATIENTS IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: MARIA MAYBÖCK,
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

'There was a moment in which I wanted to die. I didn't want to shower, I didn't want to eat. I was depressed. But now I am better,' says Jesús Rojas, who is 35 and was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease more than ten years ago.

'I ignored that it was a chronic disease, that I was going to be ill all my life,' Roberto Chipana comments, who is 37 and developed kidney failure partly due to high alcohol consumption. 'I could barely walk up two flights of stairs,' he says. 'My work was on the fourth floor.'

Jesús and Roberto do not reflect the successful story of their kidney transplants. Their young faces are lined with worry, fear, resignation, depression. Roberto currently walks on crutches. The dialysis treatment has weakened his body to the extent that the slightest fall could break his bones. Jesús' voice is quiet. He speaks in short and clipped sentences, pausing frequently to look for a word. He finishes his accounts of depression with, '... but now I am better,' as if to remind himself of his surgery's success and that he is supposed to feel better now.

VARIOUS BELIEFS REGARDING DEATH AND THE BODY ARE OBSTACLES TO ORGAN DONATION.

In some places of the world kidney transplants are common surgical procedures, but in Bolivia they used to be practically inaccessible due to high cost and cultural reservations. A few years ago, Roberto had to turn down a kidney simply because he could not afford it. The organ cost about US$14,000 at the time. With the transplant process and necessary treatment, the cost added up to US$30,000 or $40,000. 'A transplant was impossible for me,' he recalls. 'I was resigned to that reality.'

Because of the Programa Nacional de Salud Renal, launched in 2014, Jesús and Roberto can now speak about the nightmare of their illness in the past tense. The programme has made kidney transplants and dialysis treatment accessible and free of charge across Bolivia. This has doubled the number of transplants in the country since 2014. Before the programme, patients who could not afford a transplant or 'access a dialysis unit due to its high cost, had to go home and pass away there,' says Dr. Silvia Paz, who heads the initiative.

THE PROGRAMME HAS MADE DIALYSIS AND KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS FREE OF CHARGE ACROSS BOLIVIA.

Despite the programme's success, there are cultural barriers that lead Bolivians to reject organ transplants in general. 'We have been able to partially break the paradigm surrounding transplants and organ donations,' says Dr. Paz, although she is aware of the remaining challenges. In El Alto, she says, the rejection, especially to cadaveric transplants, is most aggressive. 'One almost had to run out the back door because people wanted to lynch you,' she remembers from her outreach experience in the area.

According to Milton Eyzaguirre Morales, an anthropologist from the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, various beliefs regarding death and the body are co-responsible for this cultural rejection. In many faiths, the cycle of life and death requires that the human body returns the way it was conceived, 'without a cut or a missing organ,' he explains. In Andean thought, the body is viewed as the connection between the **Ayamarka**, or World of the Dead, and the **entorno terrestre**, or physical world. 'If someone were to change the appearance of the body, the connection would be broken,' he says.

Beyond spiritual matters, uninformed fear also presents an obstacle to organ donation. 'People don't donate because they are scared,' Roberto says. 'They are scared of falling ill like us.' This is particularly painful for patients awaiting a lifesaving transplant.

Through educational outreach and the programme's growing presence across the country, attitudes toward organ donation are slowly changing. 'People listen to you now,' says Dr. Paz. 'They are starting to understand. But if eventually they say "no", we also respect that decision.'

After years of hardship, misunderstanding and denial, things are clearly getting better for both the programme and its beneficiaries. Jesús and Roberto are on the road to recovery, and the programme is growing and reaching more renal patients. The Programa Nacional represents a milestone for the Ministry of Health and the medical world in Bolivia, but it is only a small battle in the fight for making transplants accessible in the country.

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FROM THE JUNGLE TO THE KITCHEN

AMAZONIAN SUPERFOODS ARE SPICING UP THE MENU AND HEALING THE BODY

TEXT: ALEXIS GALANIS

Myriad stalls fill Plaza Avaroa on this bright Thursday morning as vendors look to promote their business on this unique market day for young and growing businesses. As the intense La Paz sun beams down on the streams on passers-by and the air fills with a cacophony of voices and blaring music, I stop to find Marisa Quito setting up her stall surrounded by posters of exotic fruits. Intrigued, I ask her to tell me a bit about her business. She tells me that she travels around Bolivia's three major commercial cities, La Paz, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba, promoting these Amazonian foods on behalf of Madre Tierra, a company based in Riberalta, at the heart of the Bolivian Amazon. Madre Tierra works with local Amazon communities to collect, produce and commercialize the superfoods that sustain life in Alto Beni.

AÇAÍ

Euterpe precatoria
Acai bowls, smoothies

With the highest antioxidant content of any known food and packed with fibre, amino acids, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals, açaí is the undisputed king of Amazon superfoods. Sourced from palm trees in the local communities of Alto Beni, the pulp of the small purple berry is often described as tasting like a rich blueberry or raspberry with overtones of dark chocolate.

The antioxidants within the berry, anthocyanins, improve heart health, lower cholesterol and increase blood circulation. Among its many other benefits, açaí has remarkable energizing effects, combats ageing, boosts the immune system, helps promote a healthy digestive system and, some claim, increases sexual drive and performance!

CUPUAÇU

Theobroma grandiflorum
Juices, ice cream, liquor, baked goods, dairy products, jams

'Big cacao' in the tupi language (cupu – cacao, azu – big), cupuaçu's creamy, white pulp is a kind of cross-breed between pineapple and chocolate. The pulp is rich in protein, calcium, phosphorus and potassium, and it contains pectin, a soluble fibre beneficial for the digestive system. Additionally, butter is extracted from cupuaçu seeds and used in cosmetics to hydrate, repair and protect skin. With the popularity and production scale booming in recent years, cupuaçu has transformed into one the of the main sources of economic development in Alto Beni.

CASTAÑA AMAZONICA (BRAZIL NUT)

Bertholletia Excelsa
Eaten whole or in a variety of dishes

Despite its name, Bolivia is in fact the world's greatest producer of the Brazil nut, accounting for around 70 percent of the world's market. Indeed, the production of this unique nut is the economic pillar of life in Alto Beni. While the Brazil nut contains high levels of monounsaturated fatty acids and vitamin E, what sets it apart from its nutty cousins and makes it a verifiable superfood is its unprecedented levels of selenium, an antioxidant which has been shown to reduce the risk of artery disease, liver cirrhosis and certain cancers.

MAJO

Oenocarpus bataua
Juices, smoothies, ice cream, jams

The least well-known of our Amazon superfoods, the pulp of majo, from which both oil and majo 'milk' (or wine) can be extracted, is rich in fats, protein, amino acids and antioxidants. With a protein content of 7.4 percent, its milk, similar in taste to the pulp of acai, is typically drunk by local communities as an alternative to cow's milk, while the oil, similar to olive oil, is used both for cooking and in cosmetics due to its high antioxidant content.

GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

'A LA COCINA' - 'Off to the kitchen you go'

ACCIÓN - 'action'

ACTITUD - 'attitude'

AFUERA - 'out'

ALMACÉN - corner store

AYAMARKA - Quechua for 'world of the dead' or 'cemetery'

BAILARINES - 'dancers'

CAMPO - 'countryside'

CEBRA- 'zebra'

CH'ALLA - a ceremony of blessing to Pachamama

CHICHA - traditional Andean drink made from corn

CHOLITA - a term of endearment for indigenous Aymara and Quechua women

DULCES - 'sweets', small, brightly coloured sugar tablets that are burnt as offerings to Pachamama

ENTORNO TERRESTRE - physical or material world

ESPÍRITU- 'spirit'

FETO DE LLAMA - 'llama foetus'

HERCAMPURI - a herb used to cleanse the body of impurities

HOJAS DE COCA - 'coca leaves'

LA HORA BOLIVIANA - 'Bolivian time'

JAPHALLA - Aymara word for 'spiritual energy'

JORA - type of corn used to make chicha

KILLA - Quechua word for 'moon'

LENTO - 'slow'

LUCHA - 'fight'

LUSTRABOTAS - shoe shiners

MACA - a root vegetable known as 'Andean Viagra'

PACEÑO - a person from La Paz

PACHAMAMA - a Mother Earth figure in Aymara and Quechua cultures

PATRIMONIO - 'heritage'

PERRO - 'dog'

POLLERA - the traditional skirt worn by Aymara and Quechua women

POLVOS - 'powders'

RÁPIDO - 'fast'

SEMÁFOROS - 'stop lights'

SIQI - Aymara for 'horizon' or 'plane'

STEVIA - a plant whose leaves can be used as a natural sweetener

SUMA QAMA QAMAÑA - Aymara-Quechua system of thought, commonly translated as 'Living Well'

VIVIR BIEN - 'Living Well'

YÄNAKA - Aymaran word for 'material energy'

YATIRIS - Aymara healers

YUNGAS - A mountainous and forested region that stretches from Peru to Argentina

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