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Editorial #91: Reformulations

By: Caroline Risacher

According to the Bolivian non-governmental organisation Centro de Documentación e Información (CEDIB), nearly a million acres of the country's land are deforested every year, placing Bolivia among the 10 countries in the world with the fastest – and most alarming – rates of deforestation. Soy plantations and cattle ranches, combined with a lack of effective governmental regulations, are responsible for this loss of habitat, most of which has taken place in the last decade. Adding to environmentalists' concerns was the announcement last year from the country's minister of hydrocarbons, Luis Alberto Sánchez, who said that the government was considering the fracking of newly discovered gas reserves near Tarija, in the south of Bolivia. Sánchez called this move 'a paradigm shift' for Bolivia in the way the country exploits and benefits from natural resources.

The last decade has marked for Bolivia a political, economical and cultural shift from previous governments. Politically, Bolivia established a new paradigm in 2006 with the election of Evo Morales and the adoption of the **Vivir Bien** doctrine. Pluri-culturalism and respect for the environment are principles enshrined in the Bolivian Constitution. Currently, the decolonisation of education and religion is taking place. Indigenous languages are required in school curricula, and indigenous beliefs are accepted and embraced. Simultaneously, Bolivia has been experiencing economic growth and cultural and social changes which are reframing the current paradigms in potentially conflicting ways.

Bolivia's continuing economic growth and recent political stability have also put the country on the map as a tourist destination and a land of opportunities for multinationals. Santa Cruz de la Sierra is one of the fastest-growing cities in the world (it was 14th in the latest ranking), and La Paz is regularly featured in travel blogs and magazines as the next place to visit for its vibrant culinary and cultural scenes.

This exposure means that foreign trends are taking root and mutating into their own Bolivian renderings: The world of wrestling has mixed with the world of **cholitas**, creating a new cultural tradition attracting tourists as well as locals. The way Bolivians eat is also changing: Organic and locally-grown foods are increasingly popular and easy to find. Traditional ingredients are rediscovered and cooked using imported techniques. There is a real renewed appreciation for Bolivian heritage as the popular **chakana** and carnaval devil's tattoos attest.

Yes, Bolivia is changing. It is no longer an isolated society recovering from centuries of colonisation by foreign powers. Bolivia is shifting to a new paradigm of a modern plurinational nation and emergent regional power. It's re-discovering and embracing old and new scientific, spiritual, political and aesthetic ideas which are having a profound effect on the country's social structure, economy and foreign relations.

But this shift doesn't come without challenges. If the current deforestation rate continues, Bolivia will have no forest left by the year 2100. The 2006 *Vivir Bien* paradigm claimed that economic development and respect for the environment are not just compatible, but necessary. And as Bolivia endeavours to responsibly shepherd the exploitation of its natural resources within the global capitalist regime, it also embraces the modern world whilst celebrating and preserving its rich traditional culture.

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

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A LAND OF COLOURS AND EXTREMES

TEXT: AMARU VILLANUEVA

And so it begins. This publication is the product of the collaborative effort of over twenty individuals from four continents - aged eighteen to over sixty. Our mission is simple: to provide quality journalism from Bolivia in English. In this issue we have sought to explore extremes: from the most expensive haircut in La Paz to one of the cheapest, from the glossy world of advertising to the salty shores of Bolivia's former coastline. In what has been a breathtaking journey (you will know what we mean by this if you have experienced sorojchi) we have put together a collection of chronicles which chart our footsteps over gravel, stone, asphalt and a few potholes. We have learnt much during our time here but have unfortunately forgotten most of it. All that has remained is the following: knowing when to stop asking questions and start listening, when to stop taking pictures and start looking, and most importantly, that no matter what you buy at the Witches' Market you will never pass for a Boliviano. In this sense, we aim to steer you away from the gringo trail and allow you to share in the condor's eye. Read us, work with us, write home about us. You are always welcome aboard the Bolivian Express.

Bolivian Express editorial
Issue 1 - 2010
full issue @ www.bolivianexpress.org

LADIES **OF THE FIGHT**

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE WRESTLING RING

TEXT & PHOTO: ELLIE GOMES

As we navigated the bustling Sunday market in El Alto around stalls selling everything from shoe laces to car parts, we were approached by two women dressed in traditional **cholita** garb. They asked if we would like tickets to watch the *cholita* wrestling match which would be taking place later that afternoon. It was perfect timing, as we were in El Alto for that very reason. I had been fascinated by the concept of *cholita* wrestling, having read about its empowering message – something often noted by the women involved – but I was also curious about how it might be exploitative to those same women, as a potentially voyeuristic way for tourists to witness the exotic indigenous 'other.'

The women offered us a special tourist rate that would give us the opportunity to have our photos taken with the wrestlers, but we opted for the less expensive 40-boliviano tickets – just general-viewing seats, as we didn't want to draw too much attention to ourselves.

But when we took our seats in the open-air 'arena', cordoned off by a wire fence and consisting of a number of plastic chairs all facing towards a central wrestling ring, it was apparent how entirely out of place we were. We thought this event would be overrun with tourists, but it was dominated by locals, particularly families – including, naturally in El Alto, many other *cholitas*. Halfway through the event, the action stopped and there was an announcement that us **extranjeros** needed to take photos. Even though we had opted out of it, we found ourselves being photographed by the event staff as we stood alongside the fighting *cholitas* whilst the rest of the audience watched in amusement.

There are several locations across El Alto where *cholita* wrestling takes place. The larger venues, like the Coliseo de 12 de Octubre, feature events that are geared more towards tourists – with some review websites even calling them 'tourists traps.' Attendees can book through their hostel or hotel.

But our experience at the wrestling ring was different from what we had imagined it would be. The event started almost an hour late, in classic Bolivian fashion, but there was plenty to observe as we waited in the sun. Vendors passed through the audience selling various snacks whilst young children giggled and played in the open spaces. A rousing soundtrack boomed out from the overhead speakers between regular announcements that the action would start soon.

When it finally started, the action consisted of wrestling between men, wrestling between *cholitas* and then wrestling between *cholitas* and men. Notably, there was a complete level of equality between the wrestlers. At no point in this violent, traditionally masculine activity was the femininity of the *cholitas* mocked or even really considered – though the *cholitas* maintained it throughout. They fought ferociously, landing punches and throwing each other around. However, they were also victims of the violence too – none of the men exercised any caution as they grabbed the *cholitas* by their signature braids and pushed them to the ground. Interestingly, the only other tourists – two women who sat behind us – made more comments about the rarity of *cholitas* wrestling than any of the locals. 'Oh no, not her pretty dress!' one of them exclaimed at one point as the wrestler was beaten over the head with a wooden crate.

One local we spoke with emphasised the positive social impact of *cholita* wrestling. He said that the wrestlers involved demonstrated the strength of women, as many would fight a male wrestler, or even several, proving that women can excel in a violent, forceful sport too.

Though the wrestling was evidently staged, the violence was often genuine-looking enough to cause me to flinch on numerous occasions. But the other audience members were not so easily fazed; they shouted and laughed enthusiastically as the underdog in each match – oftentimes a victim of the referee's overtly emphasised bias – always managed to fight back.

This wasn't a typical Sunday-afternoon event; nevertheless, it was clear that the families in attendance were loving the spectacle. As we watched the fighting play out, two small Bolivian boys next to us began fighting in a similar fashion.

Recent coverage of *cholita* wrestling has tended to focus on the reclamation of traditional female power through an overt show of strength, which embodies the increasingly prominent Bolivian idea that women are as equal to men to perform any task. It's important, however, to remember that cholita wrestling, like most professional wrestling, is a spectacle designed to entertain and generate money. Although they might not be considered 'real' athletes, within the makeshift wrestling stadium the *cholitas* were as powerful as any of the men, and they were admired, supported and heckled by the audience in exactly the same way that the men were.

INTERVIEW WITH A YATIRI

THE WORK OF HEEDING THE CALL OF PACHAMAMA

TEXT & PHOTO: MIA COOKE-JOSHI

At the edge of the market in El Alto, beyond the never-ending stalls that sell everything you could possibly imagine, is one of the strangest local oddities. To the common tourist, the curious practice of witchcraft and spiritual healing in La Paz is limited to the **mercado de las brujas** in the centre of the city. But if the tourist asks further, she'll hear the whispers about 'where the real witches reside,' the **brujas** of El Alto.

Mounted high above the city of La Paz, is the place where those whispers will take you: a line of small green buildings flanked by stone frogs on the sidewalk and small ceremonial fires burning for the Andean deity **Pachamama**. Inside the walls, are the men and women known as **yatiris**.

One woman, named Angela (she didn't want to disclose her full name), sits restfully in a small room filled with Catholic effigies and bright fabrics. Inside her cluttered, but colourful space, she sits in front of a small table displaying a selection of coca leaves, playing cards, tobacco and what appears to be alcohol. With a warm smile she invites me to sit on a low wooden bench and agrees to answer my question about the mysteries of her work.

As I had suspected, one should be wary of using the term **brujería** or 'witchcraft' in reference to Angela's work, as it has become conflated with spiritual and healing work. At the start of our conversation, Angela clarified the derogatory nature of the label, explaining that a bruja works with el Tío or the devil, to bring about wishes associated with death. 'I am a yatiri, and spiritual worker,' Angela asserts, 'I work with the spirits of Andean **cosmovisión** in order to bring fortune and well-being to those who seek it.'

Becoming a *yatiri* is considered a birthright that is conditional on three factors: being a twin, having been born with six toes or having been struck by thunder. In Angela's case, she is **caída de rayo**. 'When I was five,' she says, 'I lived with my mother on the outskirts of El Alto. We were pastoral herders. One day, it was raining heavily and one of our donkeys escaped, so I went to look for it and thunder struck me.'

If a person survives such an incident, and is able to stand up without help, it is said they are granted the gift of becoming a *yatiri*. Since that day, Angela has experienced the strangest of visions and dreams, called cosmically by the Andean goddess of the Earth, Pachamama. 'One is who called to the spiritual path by *Pachamama*, has no choice but to dedicate their life to this work,' she says. 'I tried to go to university, but I kept being brought back to this career path. The life of a *yatiri* is inevitable.'

'I CANNOT PUT A PRICE ON MY WORK. YOU MUST PAY ACCORDING TO YOUR FAITH AND THE MAGNITUDE OF THE RITUAL.'
—ANGELA

Angela speaks about her spiritual work as a doctor or a lawyer would speak of his or her profession. She earns living exclusively by heeding her cosmic calling from *Pachamama*. Money is integral to *yatiri* rituals as an offering to the deity. Without it, *Pachamama* will eat the flesh and soul of the *yatiri*. Since the spiritual worker lends herself as a medium, she is allowed to profit from the offerings. Although ceremonies and readings require a financial contribution. the price depends on the discretion of the customer. 'I cannot put a price on my work,' Angela explains, 'you must pay according to your faith and the magnitude of the ritual.'

Angela and other *yatiris* who work in the row of square green buildings now belong to an association of spiritual workers. They ask the government for idleland and divide it among them. The *yatiris* pay taxes and are the rightful owners of their property. 'The current government has really helped my practice,' Angela says. 'I feel there is more support these days. I was even invited by Evo Morales to perform a ritual for him.' A large and off-centred portrait of Morales hangs above Angela's head, like an iconic saint.

Her spiritual work is rooted in Aymara customs and beliefs, in which the health and wellbeing of an individual relies upon a medium's communication with the spirits. Far from being a relic of the past, this Aymara heritage has been strengthened and reconstituted through the government of Morales, which endorses this vitally Bolivian practice. '*Pachamama* calls, and you must listen.' Angela says. 'No one can stop the work that we do, because [*Pachamama*] exists always and within everything.'

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A TOUCH OF MAGICK

LA PAZ'S RENOWNED CULTURAL CAFÉ IS JUST ONE ASPECT OF THE REGION'S INDEPENDENTLY PRODUCED LOCAL FOOD RENAISSANCE.

TEXT & PHOTOS: ALICJA HAGOPIAN

Café MagicK was founded in 2014 by husband-and-wife team Stephan Gamillscheg and Alison Masiel Pino Pinto, two years after they married. When he left Denmark to work for an NGO in La Paz, Gamillscheg found an vibrant artistic and cultural crowd here, but there was a lack of spaces for people to congregate and express themselves. Coming from Denmark, which has a notable café culture, he was surprised to find that the city was surrounded by rich coffee-growing regions but an absence of good quality coffee being made here. And so Café MagicK was born. But despite its name, MagicK is much more than just a café; it's also a bar, with live music and other events – and above all, incredible food. MagicK's dishes are seasonal and experimental, everything from healthy spins on traditional meals like **pique macho** to exquisite culinary creations featuring unexpected flavour combinations, such as the **hongos ostra** MagicK (oyster mushrooms, tempeh, polenta, manioc and various colourful vegetables, finished with a fragrant white wine sauce).

Gamillscheg considers MagicK to be one of the front runners of the city's burgeoning culinary scene, especially because of the restaurant's vegetarian-based menu (save for a few fish-based items). Gamillscheg is a vegetarian himself, and he wanted his restaurant to promote the same healthy lifestyle. That's no small task in Bolivia, whose residents traditionally have a meat-heavy diet. In fact, new customers sometimes cannot understand how meat does not feature on MagicK's menu. But people are warming up to vegetarianism, Gamillscheg says, even though 'the tempeh or the mushrooms cost above the price of the finest fillet.' Since the restaurant's opening, similar establishments have opened around the city, and MagicK itself will undergo an expansion in the near future – and Gamillscheg is even considering adding another location in the municipal theatre, reflecting La Paz's growing appetite for a bit of MagicK.

MAGICK IS ONE OF THE FRONT RUNNERS OF THE CITY'S BURGEONING CULINARY SCENE, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE OF THE RESTAURANT'S VEGETARIAN-BASED MENU.

From the start, the owners knew that they wanted to keep the menu as organic as possible and serve **paceños** unfamiliar and exciting ingredients. Gamillscheg says that the menu constantly changes, describing it as a 'conscious fusion kitchen', combining Bolivian produce and international techniques. For such special products, customers are willing to pay a higher price, as that is what sets MagicK apart. A good client-producer relationship is crucial, because on such an intimate scale a business is essentially codependent. Not only do the producers need their clients in order to keep their business afloat, but restaurants like MagicK need to be able to rely on their purveyors to stock their pantries. Due to the nature of small-scale agriculture, certain factors will occasionally hinder production, so it is essential to have a flexible kitchen that is able to adapt to its resources. One workaround is the popular and bountiful sharing platter, which doesn't constrain the kitchen but instead allows it to improvise with whatever ingredients are available that day.

For Gamillscheg, working with independent producers can be challenging and costly, but ultimately it reflects the ethos which he and Pino believe in, with regard to health, culture and the environment. We visited several of MagicK's producers and talked to them about the ups and downs of local, organic and sustainable farming, and why it just might have the potential to take on the agro-industry.

PRAAI

PRAAI *(Promoción Agroalimentaria Inclusiva, or the Promotion of Inclusive Farm to Table)* is a social project that promotes organic and sustainable production and rights for its producers. It provides a variety of produce, most notably baby vegetables, which gives PRAAI a unique position in the market. The organisation's eco-friendly philosophy is threefold: First, the nutrition for the plants which its members produce must come from compost. Second, no pesticides or chemicals are used to treat diseases; instead, natural products are used as alternatives. Third, in order to reduce water consumption, water-collection systems must be used as well as autonomous filtration and distribution networks.

We visited Noemi Mamani Pucho, a university student who participates in PRAAI, at her greenhouse in El Alto, where she is developing her thesis on the Mycorrhizal (symbiotic) relationship between certain fungi and the roots of plants. She raises yellow cherry tomatoes that are sweeter than the usual red cherry tomatoes, which make them popular with buyers such as MagicK. She's currently improving her greenhouse so that her tomatoes will grow year-round. Mamani's colleague and fellow PRAAI member, Tito Valencia Quispe from the Universidad Pública de El Alto, is also working on his own crops. 'It's a great thing for an agronomist to have their own greenhouse,' he says. 'For me, the greenhouse is where I can de-stress.' Along with leafy greens and a variety of herbs, Valencia grows strawberries and, of course, baby everything – radishes, carrots, beetroots, among others.

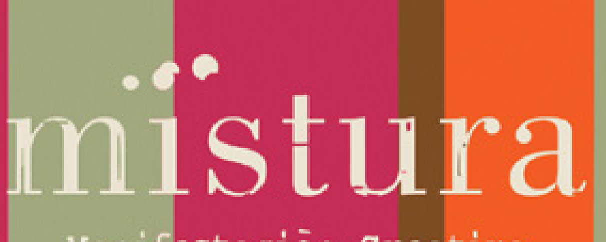
PRAII

Andean Champions

ANDEAN CHAMPIONS

Husband-and-wife duo Abel Rojas Pardo and Dunia Verastegui Baes founded Andean Champions, an oyster-mushroom farm, nearly ten years ago. They didn't have an auspicious start, as at the end of their first year, their yield fell far short of their goal. A harsh winter brought a frost which killed everything they had worked for. It was a huge blow, Rojas says, and they realised that they had to commit even more to their enterprise. Two years later, Verastegui decided to devote herself full time to the enterprise. The business is a constant experiment, staffed largely by students with an environment of curiosity and a drive to improve.

When I visited Andean Champions farm outside of La Paz, I expected to encounter a typical greenhouse. But mushrooms, unlike fruits or vegetables that sprout from seeds or roots, originate from spores in a laboratory-like setting. If this conjures up images of scientists in a lab coats, you're on the right track. The process begins in a controlled environment in which oyster-mushroom spores are incubated before they are inserted into containers of digestible materials like sawdust or straw, into which they grow their roots, or mycelia. The



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containers are then moved into an area with high humidity and controlled lighting, which then trigger the production of fruit bodies – the edible part of the organism – which erupt through small holes of the containers in clusters called troops. Once these troops emerge, the oyster mushrooms will be ready for harvesting in about a week.

Mushrooms aren't hugely popular in Bolivia, so it's a tricky business to be in. While some people are eager to snatch up the product wherever they can find it, business can be fickle. Many of Andean Champions' clients are restaurants, and when a dish accommodates rarer items like a fine mushroom, business is good. But if that dish suddenly disappears from the menu, the producers' livelihood disappears along with it. This is one of the difficulties they face as smaller-scale producers, alongside the complications that go hand in hand with learning the fundamentals of trade for the first time. Nonetheless, Rojas is optimistic about the future and hopes to increase production significantly in 2019. His advice on starting a business is simple: 'The most important factor isn't money or land – it's the decision to just do it.'

TIERRA CONSCIENTE

'We can't continue to form a society based upon animal produce, and we have to find an alternative source of protein,' Tierra Consciente's founder, Marcos Nordgren Ballivian, says. Four years ago, Nordgren founded the company, which ferments soy, beans and peanuts to produce a variety of tempeh that contains high levels of probiotics, calcium and vitamins, along with a healthy dose of protein. Nordgren has since branched out into other unconventional foodstuffs which are particularly revolutionary in the Bolivian market. In addition to a vibrant assortment of vegetables such as yellow zucchini, mushrooms and herbs, Tierra Consciente produces a gluten-free long-life bread made from potatoes in lieu of wheat. It's dehydrated for a week before packaging, ensuring a months-long shelf life.

But Nordgren's vision for local, independent production does not come without its challenges. He says that the largest difficulty lies with logistics – that is, delivery, distribution and price negotiation. Buyers are used to purchasing en masse, a practice that is in opposition to the essence of small scale production. Furthermore, consumers have become accustomed to a certain price range which is only feasible within the framework of big industry. When small businesses attempt to function within that traditional framework, prices are often hiked by middle men while the businesses themselves are left with, pardon the pun, peanuts. But who is to blame? As Nordgren puts it, 'We can blame industries, we can blame governments, but at the end of the day it is an issue of the producer-consumer model.' Moreover, it is a daily struggle for producers to stay organic when it is far easier and often cheaper to use chemical pesticides and fertilisers. Nordgren also says that society awards large-scale producers for being wasteful, because it's easier to sell a product which is packaged – and yes, that packaging is almost always plastic.

Independent producers don't just grow their products – they also have to teach themselves the ins and outs of the business. But despite all the demands, Nordgren finds his job stimulating and feels privileged to be able to do what he does. Though the existing market may be tough to crack, buying local offers unique organic and sustainable options, and producers like Nordgren are working hard to make this reality more accessible in the future.

Tierra Consciente

THE SPECTRE OF GLUTEN IN LA PAZ

A COELIACS GUIDE TO THE CITY

TEXT: DAVID O'KEEFFE / PHOTOS: DAVID O'KEEFFE & ELIN DONNELLY

A spectre haunts La Paz – the spectre of gluten. Unfortunately, the majority of restaurants and street food vendors in La Paz have not tried to exorcise it. The estimated 0.4 percent of the Bolivian population that suffers from coeliac disease is haunted by the temptation of gravy filled **salteñas**, cheesy **llauchas** and the taunting smell of **choripan**.

Gluten is what makes wheat flour puff up and bind well when heated to make the best pastries, or thicken a steaming soup. Over time, It has understandably become a go to ingredient for chefs and bakers. This, however, does not bode well for coeliacs, who are unable to digest proteins in wheat, barley and rye.

South America has the lowest occurrence of people with coeliac disease in the world. The Bolivians who are most likely to have this autoimmune disease are those of European descent, particularly German Mennonites. The number of diagnosed coeliacs, though, may rise with growing awareness and testing for the disease, particularly since gluten free diets have become a health trend.

So what tasty delights does La Paz have to offer for people who don't want to join in on life's feast? Fortunately there are a several great options:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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ANTICUCHOS

This snack is easiest to spot by looking for leaping flames in the night on a city sidewalk, erupting around a woman who tends to a delicious simple skewer of lightly marinated beef heart and potato, served with a peanut sauce. Not only is cow heart an incredibly lean and healthy piece of meat, it also has a great texture.

TRIPA

For the more adventurous, or desperate, Bolivian coeliac there's tripa: slightly chewy, almost bitter fried cow intestine that is harder to find than other commonly available street snacks.

PASANKALLAS

Bolivia's sugary alternative to regular popcorn, is found in oversized plastic bags on the streets of the city, waiting for you to break through the crisp outer layer of sugar on a piece of giant puffed corn and crunch on the starchy fluff.

ASSORTED DRIED FOODS

Great to stabilise blood sugar levels when consumed with freshly squeezed orange juice. These dried foods stalls offer a variety of treats: dehydrated banana, corn, peanuts, berries and beans, usually accompanied by a salt shaker to give them a flavour boost.

POT LUCK

Almost anywhere in La Paz you'll find silver pots covered in rain sheets and surrounded by tiny seats. This is coeliac pot-luck, with no advertising of what's on offer. It could be gluten filled sopa de fideo or, if you're lucky, a luscious side of pork served with **plátanos** and potatoes. Either ask the vendor or spy on others plates.

CEVICHE

This delicious dish comes in a variety of styles around the city, but the foundation is fresh fish cooked in the acidity of lime juice in a process known as 'denaturation.' A particularly delicious option is the Ceviche Show jeep parked facing the Alcala Hotel on the corner of Plaza España. It serves ceviche mixte or traditional with a side topping of crispy maize. Sit in the shade of a large tree or grab a bench to enjoy some of the best coeliac street food in the capital.

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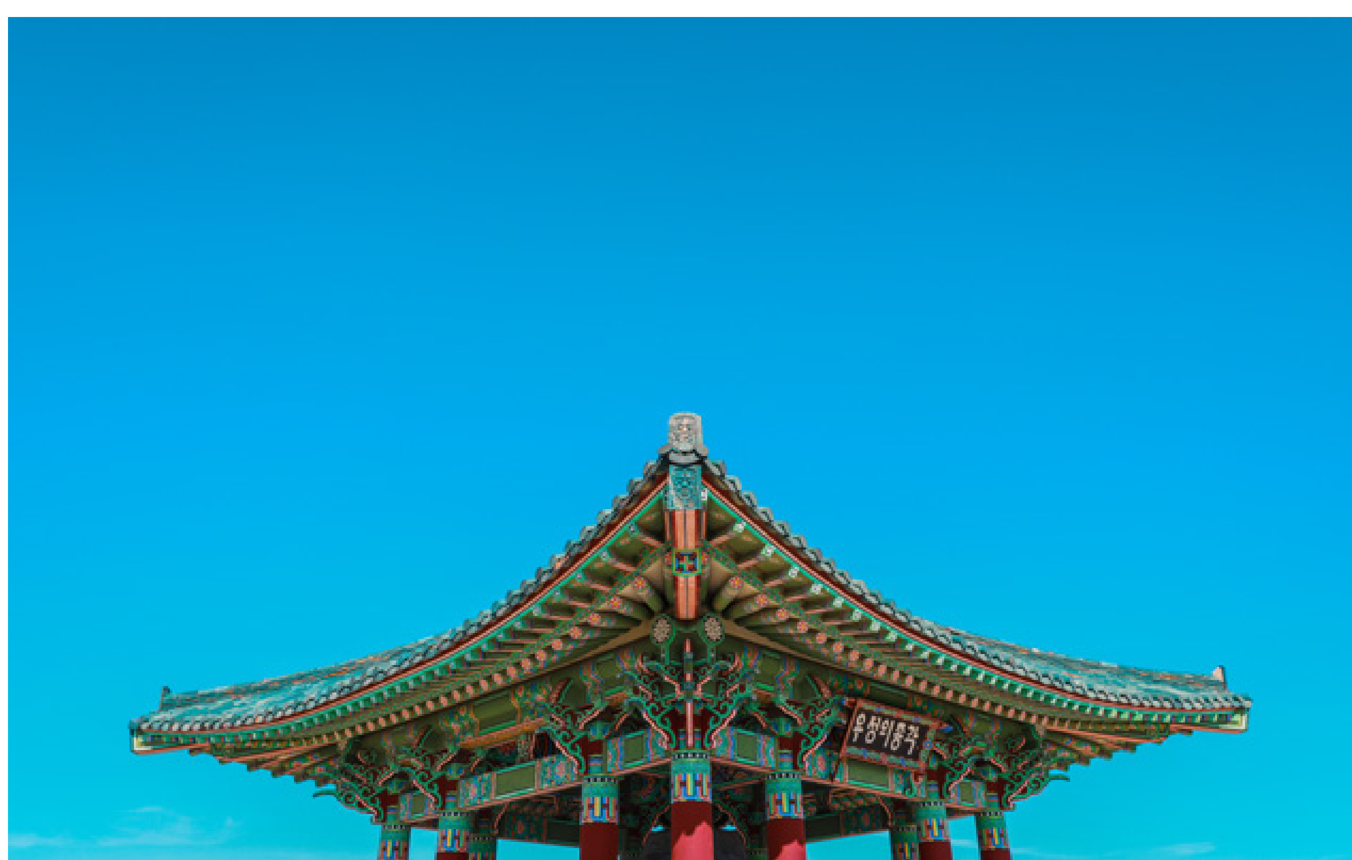
KOREAN EXPATS IN BOLIVIA

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF ADAPTING TO A NEW CULTURE

TEXT: DAVID O'KEEFFE / PHOTO: DREW GRAHAM ON UNSPLASH



The majority of Koreans who live overseas have settled in China, the United States and Japan. Lately, however, there has been a small, but increasing number of South Koreans who come to Bolivia for short term development work, and an even smaller number who et down roots in the country and become part of the Korean diaspora in Bolivia.

Korea's recent links to Bolivia led to the naming of an eight-lane suburb road in Santa Cruz as 'Avenida Corea' in 2017, to celebrate Korean investments in development projects. The two countries have had diplomatic relations since 1965 and the influence of Korean culture and businesses in Bolivia has grown significantly given the growth of Korea's 'tiger economy.' The Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), which originated as a recipient of foreign aid, has now become an international donor to assist projects in developing countries and serves as a bridge for young Korean volunteers to Bolivia.

Despite the growing economic bonds between both nations, what can these cultures learn from each other outside the realms of commerce? With this question in mind, we interviewed three Koreans living in La Paz to get their perspective on the similarities, differences and experiences of the two cultures.

It seems the most common difficulty in settling in to Bolivia is also one of the most predictable cultural contrasts: food. Sue Yong Park, a KOICA volunteer who has been living in Bolivia for less than two years, explains that Korean cuisine features fermented foods, like the famous cabbage dish, kimchi that are hard to come by in La Paz. In the absence of the comfort foods, she prefers to cook Korean food at home. Although Park hasn't become accustomed to Bolivian dishes, she professes a fondness for the eastern Bolivian dish **majadito**.

Soohyeon An and Hangyeol Choi, who are KOICA interns in La Paz, spoke of 'suffering from cilantro,' a non-existent ingredient in Korean recipes that tastes like soap to those who are genetically hypersensitive to the taste of aldehydes in cilantro, which is about 20 percent of East Asians. Despite the hurdles, however, food has served as a way of exchanging cultures for Korean expats. They cook Korean food for Bolivian friends, who are more adaptable to a change of cuisine, and have a newfound respect for the art of **salteña** making after taking a local cooking class.

An and Choi like how Bolivians are keen to share their national culture and they like to share their own Korean roots whenever the opportunity arises. Until the interview for this article, both of them thought the K-Pop fever in Bolivia was only something organised by the Korean embassy. They hadn't heard of the K-Pop festivals in La Paz, and asked if they could participate. After only a month of being in Bolivia, An sings along to reggaeton without understanding the lyrics. Music, like food is a cultural element that is prone to immediate enjoyment or rejection.

THE MOST COMMON DIFFICULTY IN SETTLING IN TO BOLIVIA **IS ONE OF THE MOST PREDICTABLE CULTURAL CONTRASTS: FOOD.**

Another cultural element that has been hard for Koreans to adapt to in Bolivia are the instances of unintentional or deliberate racism in the country. On the soft side of these incidents 'they love to call us "China"' says An. Choi doesn't mind the Chinese references, but recalls being told to 'get the hell out of my county' by people on the street or in the market on more than one occasion.

One part of Bolivian culture, however, that inspires admiration is the patriotic spirit of Bolivians and the pride they take in their traditions. 'You guys love your culture, so preserve that well,' Choi says. 'In Korea we developed so fast and so quickly that we didn't think about the importance of preserving our culture, so we destroyed a lot.' Sue Yong Park agrees and says she will miss the traditional dances of Bolivia. 'Many people in Korea don't know about [our traditions] and do not think we need to respect Korean culture,' she says. 'Korea has many other cultural attributes that are more beautiful than K-Pop.'

Although Bolivia is developing rapidly, historical icons and traditional ideas are often integrated into the country's growth. The Bolivian Space Agency named its satellite Túpac Katari 1 in 2013, showing the drive to preserve a specific heritage as the country changes economically and demographically with the influence of immigrants. Looking to the future, Choi says that Bolivians 'have a high concept of climate change... more than Koreans. We have just started talking about climate change, but people here already know about it,' she says. This is especially true due to Bolivia's vulnerability to climatic changes. 'There are a lot of limitations,' Choi adds, 'but if Bolivians keep trying, they will have a bright future.' Her experience has shown that the stereotype of the lazy Latin American worker is not true. She thinks Bolivians, like Koreans, are hard workers.

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PIGMENT IN LA PAZ

TATTOOS ARE COMING UP BIG IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: DAVID O'KEEFFE
PHOTOS: DAVID O'KEEFFE & RODRIGO JIMENEZ

There has been a long gap in the history of tattooing in Bolivia. Mummified remains found in Bolivia and Peru show that the decorative art was once a common practice in the region. People would use cactus spines to insert charcoal powder under their skin to create figures and designs. But with the rise of the Inca Empire in the 15th century, tattoos fell out of favour. The Inca belief in bodily perfection, and the later conquest and colonisation by Catholic Spain (and its conservative attitude and antipathy toward indigenous culture), help explain tattooing's long historical absence in Bolivia.

Now, however, tattoos in Bolivia have become much more mainstream. Once associated with only criminals and lowlifes, tattoos are now adorning the bodies of Bolivian sports stars and other popular culture figures, who have helped normalise the practice. And now regular Bolivians display elaborate works of art on their bodies. Tattoo artist Rodrigo Jimenez from Eternal Tattoo, a studio in La Paz's Sopocachi neighbourhood, says, 'You're often misjudged as a bad person' if you have tattoos. He recounts his aunt's grim reaction when she first saw one of his tattoos on his hand. Luckily, though, it was of his dog. 'It [would be] different, though, you know, if I had a skull' instead of a dog, he says. But Jimenez isn't a 'typical' tattoo artist. He's an animal lover who only uses vegan ink, and during his 'Claws, Paws and Ink' event in January, in which he inked ten animal tattoos for clients, he raised 5,560 bolivianos for the La Senda Verde wildlife sanctuary.

While the Bolivian tattoo scene is still small, it's been given a boost in recent years by several tattoo conventions, which have 'helped a lot for the growth of new artists,' says Rodrigo Aguilar Cruz of the Ritual Arte y Tattoo studio, also in Sopocachi. 'I came to see tattoos as something significant, and to respect the people who make them.' Eternal's Jimenez says the first tattoo convention he attended, in 2003, 'changed the game in Bolivia,' at a time when not only were tattoos generally considered unacceptable, but access to machines and international tattoo artists for inspiration was incredibly rare. Now, though, international influence has popularised the Bolivian tattoo scene, particularly Instagram accounts and TV shows that feature tattoo artists and their work, expanding the culture rapidly.

> **'I CAME TO SEE TATTOOS AS SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT, AND TO RESPECT THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THEM.'**
> —TATTOO ARTIST RODRIGO AGUILAR CRUZ

Tattoo by Rodrigo Jimenez

Global influence inspired Jimenez, now 32, to become a tattoo artist; when he was seven years old, he saw a tourist covered in tattoos. It was 'a very important moment in my life,' he says, leading him to pursue an apprenticeship at a tattoo studio 12 years ago.

Jimenez says that early on with his business, his clients were mainly tourists who 'fell in love with the culture' of Bolivia and wanted Inca-inspired drawings of suns and moons to be inked into their skin. Both he and Aguilar Cruz see this as a mark of respect for Bolivian culture and history, although Aguilar Cruz's designs run in what he calls a 'psychedelic surrealist' style. He combines realism with abstraction, psychedelic colours with monochromatic black and white, antiquity with modernity, and a street-art style with depictions of pre-Columbian ruins.

There's a distinctly Bolivian influence in both artists' respective oeuvres. The culture here provides tattooists and clients with 'much to exploit,' because 'each department [in Bolivia] possesses its own cultural identity,' Aguilar Cruz says. 'Western Bolivia's style of tattooing brings with it a variety of symbolism that identifies it with Tiwanacota culture.' Jimenez agrees: 'Yes, it's completely different,' he says when comparing the richness, diversity and symmetry of Andean designs to the figurative art common in Bolivia's lowland regions, where people are more likely to get designs related to their surroundings, like cats, leaves or flowers.

According to Aguilar Cruz, tattoos have 'become a fashion for everyone without distinguishing skin, colour or age.' But they are still a relatively rare fashion trend. They remain expensive for most Bolivians, and equipment must be imported from abroad. Nevertheless, an increasingly diverse and talented cohort of artists is driving the tattoo scene forward in Bolivia, with a unique take on the once-disreputable art.

Mural by Knorke Leaf

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES VS EXTINCTION

TEXT: ALICJA HAGOPIAN
PHOTO: ELIN DONNELLY

The year 2019 was proclaimed the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) by the United Nations in 2006. The aim of this year's celebration, is to raise awareness of indigenous languages and cultures that face the threat of fading entirely due to political and social isolation. On 1st February, President Evo Morales gave a speech to kick off the year, which is organised by UNESCO. Speaking before world leaders, Morales stressed the global significance of indigenous languages, not only as means of communication, but as vessels for culture and identity:

'Around 6,700 languages are currently spoken around the world, of which 40 percent are in danger of disappearing completely. The majority of this 40 percent are indigenous. By losing these languages, we run the risk of losing our cultures and understanding. Each language reflects the culture of the society that created it… the loss of a language just as much marks the loss of a worldview, and the impoverishment and diminishment of [human intelligence as a whole].'

IYIL will take place at a crucial time for global linguistic diversity. In 2004, a study conducted by British linguist David Raddol and published in *Science*, predicted that 90 percent of the world's languages will become extinct by 2050. The term 'language extinction' refers to a language that loses its last living speaker. These linguistic dead ends will have cultural consequences that are difficult to predict and perhaps even harder to measure.

Due to globalisation, many people think of speaking a second global language as something essential. Travel and international business are not only available on a growing scale, but have become common expectations. As people migrate towards international hubs and globalised urban centers, their mother tongues can fall out of use through generations. But indigenous languages have faced a more severe threat: colonisation.

In most of Latin America, colonisation used catholicism and the Spanish language as a means of imposing a certain ideology, and a way to control the cultural expressions of indigenous people. The power of linguistic subjugation is summarised by American writer Philip K. Dick; 'The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use them.'

In spite of the trend towards naturally and unnaturally caused language extinction, for the past ten years Bolivia has been actively combatting this issue with legislation. Only 60 percent of the 11 million people who live in Bolivia speak Spanish as their native language. This means 40 percent of the population has an indigenous language as its mother tongue. Bolivia's 2009 Constitution and its General Law of Linguistic Rights and Policies require that all governmental departments use at least two languages, one of those being Spanish and the other an indigenous language of the region. These pieces of legislation not only recognise the relevance of indigenous communities in Bolivia, but also ensure that their languages are actively maintained on an official level.

Bolivia has also lead significant reform in the context of education. For years, Bolivia faced a crisis of illiteracy that affected the country's indigenous groups. The fact that the state only recognised Spanish as the official language of the nation's system of education greatly limited the access of indigenous students to education, which exacerbated the issue. The 1994 education law aimed to diverge from imposed Western schooling techniques, and most importantly, promote the teaching of an indigenous language alongside Spanish in schools. A law signed by Morales in 2010, known as 'Law 070', reinforces those principles with a focus on decolonisation.

Bolivia officially recognises 36 indigenous languages, a number that may soon grow to 39 as more communities petition to be included in the Constitution. Of these languages, however, the three most spoken after Spanish are Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní. Though Guaraní is primarily spoken in Paraguay, the Guaraní people are spread over several countries in Latin America, including the southeast of Bolivia. Like many indigenous languages, Guaraní did not have its own writing system before colonisation. This is not to say that the Guaraní don't have a literature of their own. They have a rich oral tradition in which stories are passed down by communities from generation to generation.

Irande is the first novel to be written in Bolivia entirely in Guaraní. It was penned by Elio Ortiz Garcia, an Isoseño-Guaraní from the Gran Chaco. Ortiz had previously written about Guaraní social issues, such as healthcare, determined to give his people a voice. Although irande is a written piece of work, it reflects the storytelling techniques and philosophical values that are typical of Guaraní tradition.

Since the implementation of Law 070, there has been a strong government push for schools to adopt indigenous languages, which Florentino Manuel Aquino, a Guaraní teacher in Santa Cruz, believes is key for legitimising both indigenous languages and the Plurinational State. But to learn a language like Guaraní, one must also understand the culture and philosophy that goes along with it. 'The Guaraní have a very close connection to nature and the cosmos,' Manuel says. 'Spirituality is very present in our lives.'

According to him, language and identity are very tightly intertwined, especially when one has had to struggle to keep these elements alive. Manuel believes communities fight to maintain their language and culture 'because language is our soul.' He celebrates the International Year of Indigenous Languages as a worldwide statement. 'Decolonisation should mean respecting various cultures and identities,' Manuel says. 'Indigenous languages have a worldwide significance.'

Even with new legislation, Manuel admits that younger generations do not see the importance of maintaining indigenous languages and do not consider it useful. It is true that, with globalisation, language extinction seems an inevitable problem, but one could argue that this is why the International Year of Indigenous Languages has come at a pivotal moment. It conveys the universal message that all cultures and languages should be respected and honoured and that we must conserve indigenous languages to avoid losing a part of global heritage. In the words of Nelson Mandela, 'if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.'

For more information on the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and to find out how to get involved, visit: https://en.iyil2019.org

THE TAKESI TRAIL

HIKING WHERE THE INCA ONCE ROAMED

TEXT & PHOTO: DAVID O'KEEFFE

Takesi trail is one of our heavenly tourist **attractions.**

Destination Nature

Having spent a couple of weeks in La Paz, I felt that I'd adapted to the Andean altitude enough to pack my tent and hike the Takesi Trail, a 40-kilometre portion of a grand system of 30,000 kilometres of road used during the epoch of the Inca Empire that stretched from what is now Santiago de Chile to Pasto in Colombia. I'd prepared for a two-day trek, a somewhat leisurely pace compared to that of the **chasquis** (Inca messenger runners), who would cover that distance in around two hours.

The Takesi Trail is a tributary to the main Royal Road, one of the two centralised main Andean roads known as the Qhapaq Ñan, a transportation network developed to connect various productive, administrative and ceremonial locations for more than 2,000 years of pre-Incan culture in the Andes. Later, they became instrumental for military conquest and territorial control, both by the Incas and later of the Incas by conquistadors. These roads – which have been recognised by UNESCO as having 'outstanding universal value' – have proved remarkably resilient to weather erosion and flooding, conditions that still annually destroy many of the contemporary roads of modern Andean nation-states.

After a short taxi ride from Ventilla to the Takesi trail head near the village of Choquequta, I strolled along an unpaved road overlooking vast terrain occupied mostly by llamas and the occasional farming settlement sitting beneath a glacier. At a point where the road diverged, a man and his donkey came towards me on the path. He was the last person I'd see until the village of Takesi.

Llamas skipped across my path without paying me much attention – but with 5,000 people a year making the trek, they must be bored by passers-by. After a couple more kilometres, I ascended above the llama pasture towards La Cumbre, a 4,600-metre pass. Clouds rolled in, forcing me to put on my waterproofs.

The route isn't technical, and it's easy to follow, but hikers must be prepared for the thin air during the ascent to La Cumbre. It's a mental and physical battle. My lungs held a fraction of their normal capacity and, after covering 20-30 metres, I was almost breathless. But looking back at my progress gave me a boost of mental energy. Once I reached La Cumbre, thick mist blocked any views, but I was delighted to start heading downhill and I breathed a little easier along the pre-Columbian path. I trudged triumphantly through the clouds, which opened to reveal a startled fox darting across the trail ahead. I followed its grey bushy tail with my eyes until it scurried away once again into the mist.

After descending a few kilometres through open pastures of stone-pocked grass (a landscape that looked a bit like the West of Ireland) and passing an eerily desolate lake, I reached the isolated town of Takesi, the route's halfway point where walkers can stop for refreshments or accommodation. I carefully picked my way across stones and boulders to cross a river before setting up camp beneath a small waterfall just down from the village.

At 8am the rain stopped tapping on my tent, and it was time to set out again. The trail was becoming discernibly more tropical as I struggled for an hour or so down a lengthy section of paved Inca road that was a marathon of wet slippery stones. Although the trail has been resilient to weather erosion, it was also incredibly dangerous with a deathly steep drop for anyone who falls down the valley side. But by gripping my feet on tufts of grass, I was able to manoeuvre through this section with only a few stumbles.

Later, the rain clouds cleared and the gargantuan landscape revealed itself. Tall mountains surrounded me; narrow gully streams rushed with the recent days downpour. Instead of looking behind for motivation, I was filled with excitement to see what was ahead. The previous day's rocky slopes had transformed into the lush forest of the Yungas, which was beginning to explode with the colours of subtropical plants. Butterflies surrounded me and landed around my feet.

With the mist now beneath me, I had to remind myself to stop and take in the amazing scenery. I looked down over silvery clouds that had gathered in green valleys, and I spotted bright flowers along the thin winding track. Where a river blocked the route, fallen trees served as a bridge. The trek was simple and beautiful from here, particularly with the abundance of oxygen and sub-tropical warmth. After crossing the Takesi River, I knew there were only a couple of hours left in my trek, so I paused regularly and gawked at the scenery – abandoned buildings and a miners' post – before exiting the Inca trail onto a paved road that ran to Yanacachi. The final kilometres offered stunning views of mountains towering above me and the steep drop of the valley below. After passing through an unexplainable cliffside propiedad privada checkpoint, I was on the home stretch and felt exhausted. A roaming dog accompanied me to the sloping town of Yanacachi until it was shooed away by a restaurant owner who piled up a heavy plate of fried chicken, rice and plantain in front of me while I reflected back on the journey. I found a cheap but comfortable hotel room a few doors down and prepared to settle down for the night. After I finally changed out of my hiking gear and started to relax, I drank an ice cold beer in the warmth of my bed before I was overcome by tiredness and fell asleep.

Calle Comercio La Paz - Photo for sale (65 x 44cm): Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic ivan@bolivianexpress.org

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BRUJA	Witch
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CAÍDA DE RAYO	Struck by lightning
CHAKANA	The chakana (or Inca Cross) is a stepped cross made up of an equal-armed cross indicating the cardinal points of the compass and a superimposed square
CHASQUI	Messenger of the Inca Empire
CHOLITA	Bolivian woman of indigenous decent
CHORIPAN	Type of chorizo sandwich
COSMOVISIÓN	Wolrd view
EL TÍO	'The Uncle', is believed in Cerro Rico, Potosí, Bolivia as the 'Lord of the Underworld'. El Tío rules over the mines, simultaneously offering protection and destruction
HONGOS OSTRA	Oyster mushroom
LLAUCHA	Type of cheese empanada
MAJADITO	Typical Bolivian dish from Santa Cruz and Beni consisting of rice, dried meat, eggs and plantains
MERCADO DE LAS BRUJAS	Witches' Market
PACEÑO/A	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
PIQUE MACHO	Typical Bolivian dish consisting of bite-sized pieces of beef, and french fry-cut potatoes. Added to this mixture are onions, locoto, boiled egg, mustard, mayonnaise, and ketchup
PLÁTANO	Plantain
SALTEÑA	Type of baked empanada from Bolivia
VIVIR BIEN	'Living Well'
YATIRI	Medical practitioners and community healers among the Aymara of Bolivia

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CULTURAL AGENDA
MARCH 2019

OLD CENTRE - ARTISTIC WALKING TOUR
Organized by: NEXOS BOLIVIA
19:00
Friday, March 1, 2019
Departure from Plaza Riosiño, La Paz

ATMOSPHERES - PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION BY SALVADOR SAAVEDRA
19:00 to 22:00
Until March 7, 2019
Free
MIKO Art gallery
Street Genaro Sanjines, #541 La Paz

INAUGURATION OF TELEFÉRICO'S SILVER LINE MUSIC FESTIVAL AND MORE
14:00 to 23:00
Saturday, March 9, 2019
Free
Mi Teleférico - Estación 16 de Julio
La Paz

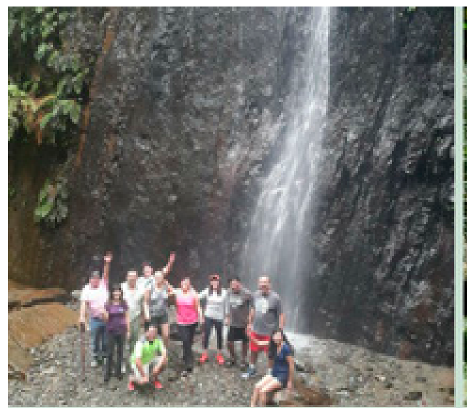
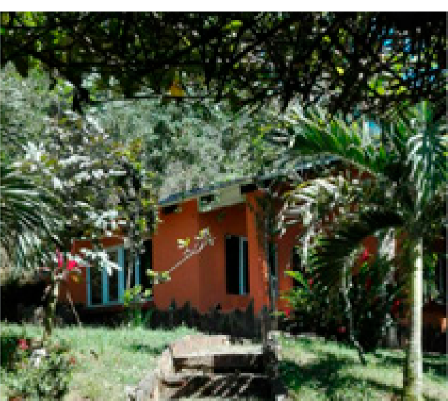
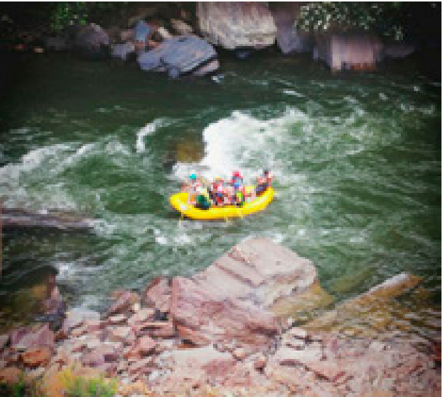
RETRO NIGHT, THE BEST OF THE '80S AND '90S
20:00 to 23:00
March 9-10, 2019
Bs. 80 or Bs. 100
Tickets: www.superticket.bo
Teatro NUNA Espacio Arte
Calacoto #8509. La Paz

TRAPECIO - LA FERIA (FIRST VERSION)
Organized by Trapecio - La Feria del Sur
11:00 to 21:00
Saturday, March 16, 2019
Free
Calle 15 Calacoto, between Sauces and Patiño Nº 8164
La Paz

HISTORY OF ART WORKSHOP: 'RENAISSANCE AND MANNERISM'
March 11-12, 2019
Inscriptions: Fundación Visión Cultural.org
Calle 16 Calacoto Edif. Temis Nº 791 from 09:00 to 13:00 (only mornings)
Tel. 22799562 - Whatsapp 60555196
email: cultura@visioncultural.org
La Paz

"POBRE RECUERDO MUERTO" (POOR DEAD MEMORY) BY GRACIELA M. GONZÁLEZ
Visual Artist. The exhibition will be composed of works that conjugate intervened photography, typed objects, artist's books, collages, among others.
19:30 to 22:00
Until March 26th
Free
Persona Casa Galería
Street Alfredo Ascarrunz #2592. Sopocachi, La Paz

EXHIBIT: LIGHT, SHAPE AND COLOURS FROM THE CARNAVAL PACEÑO
Tuesday to Friday from 9:00 to 12:30 and 15:00 to 19:00
Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00 to 13:00
Until March 30, 2019
Free
Museum Tambo Quirquincho, Plaza Alonso de Mendoza. La Paz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