BolivianExpress

Gratis

Magazine

The Countryside

#61

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BX 61: THE COUNTRYSIDE

EDITORIAL

I first came to Bolivia in 2008 to spend seven months volunteering at a rural college. The Unidad Académica Campesina-Carmen Pampa is a small university nestled in a village about 40 minutes by minibus from Coroico, in the heart of Bolivian coca and coffee country. It is a place where hundreds of students, largely the children of farmers and other rural dwellers from all over Bolivia come to study agronomy, veterinary science, nursing, education or ecotourism. These students mingle with faculty and administrators, who are often from La Paz, and with a small band of foreign volunteers from all over the world. It's an intriguing mix of cultures and perspectives from all over Bolivia and the world concentrated in one little place.

Integrated into this microcosm of higher education is a rural community of coca, fruit and coffee farmers; chicken breeders and sheep herders; shopkeepers and taxi drivers. Undoubtedly, the campus serves as a force that ties Carmen Pampa together, but an additional, largely agrarian economy continues here as well. And so during a recent visit to the village it was not a surprise to meet Benita Mollisaca, an elderly coca farmer, harvesting in her **cocal** (see the cover of this issue). She is just one of many people who would be here regardless, with or without the college. She is a true local **campesina**.

In this issue of Bolivian Express we step outside of our urban confines to learn more about the Bolivian countryside, or the **campo**. We visit tourist destinations that provide a taste of rural life, from wineries in Tarija to coffee farms in the Yungas to **ayahuasca** ceremonies outside of La Paz. We meet craftspeople bringing a bit of the country to the city, including talented artisans near Santa Cruz and restaurateurs providing farm-to-table dining experiences in Bolivia's major cities. We talk with some young women bringing Bolivian craftspeople onto the stage of global high fashion. And aside from the market and tourism opportunities coming from the countryside, we take a critical look at some of the key issues facing rural communities in Bolivia, including dangerous effects of climate change and the challenges in providing adequate healthcare to far-flung communities.

In working on this issue of the magazine, we realized that the *campo* is not just another place to visit and experience; in fact, country and city are deeply intertwined here. In every story that we chased, we discovered profound connections between the rural and the urban, and witnessed how what happens in the cities in Bolivia has profound impacts on the countryside, and vice versa.

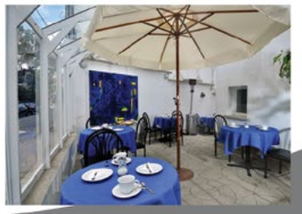
One of the most important forces shaping rural communities in Bolivia, including the area surrounding Carmen Pampa, is migration. As agriculture continues to be a difficult way of life, and as major industries – particularly mining – change and adapt to global market and environmental forces, more and more rural residents are moving to the city, at least part-time, in search of economic opportunities. In my travels around Bolivia I've seen this much too often. Two years ago I visited the village of Yulo, about three hours from Potosí, where nearly half the homes were empty. Knocking on doors was more often than not a lost cause, and I remember neighbours calling to us as we waited on countless doorsteps. 'No hay nadie,' they would say. 'Todos se fueron.' Entire families had uprooted and moved to Argentina in search of work. In many places in rural Bolivia, all that remain are the elderly and the very young. Working-age adults and students have moved elsewhere.

In many ways, Benita is lucky (which may explain her infectious belly laugh that never ceased throughout our photo shoot). While she wakes early every day to work in her fields, her son remains by her side. Despite graduating from the college in Carmen Pampa a few years ago with a nursing degree, Reynaldo has opted to stay at home to help his parents in the fields. He certainly has the option to come to El Alto or La Paz and look for work in a clinic or health centre, but instead is happy to be in his community, with his family, picking coca and avocados in the morning sun.

The Bolivian countryside has its own attractive forces that keep people rooted there, and makes it something not to be missed by visitors here. We hope this issue of Bolivian Express offers a window into this often-overlooked side to the Bolivian experience.

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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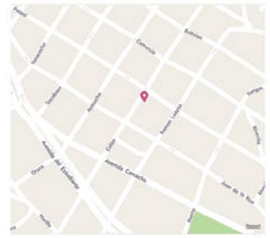

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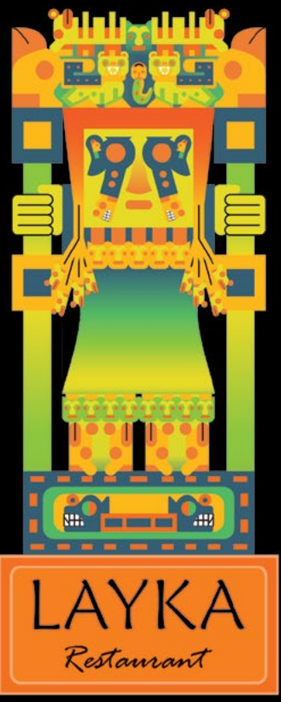

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Quality tradition

CERVICAL CANCER IN RURAL BOLIVIA

ALMOST ENTIRELY PREVENTABLE, THE DISEASE STILL TAKES ITS TOLL

TEXT :KARINA GUZMAN
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

Nicolasa, an 84-year-old widow, says that she moved to Pucarani – a community 55 kilometres from La Paz – after getting married. The passing of time would see her witness all of her children leaving in the search of better opportunities, as well as the death of her husband, leaving her all alone to tackle the duties of working the fields and raising the cattle in her rural dwelling. One day, the pain she felt grew unbearable. Nevertheless, the **posta de salud** of her village was neither able to diagnose the affliction nor heal her. Luckily, being over 60 entitled her to free medical treatment, so when referred to a clinic in La Paz, the only barriers she needed to overcome were the costs of travelling to the city and waiting for a hospital bed to become available. When she finally saw a doctor, the diagnosis was made: Nicolasa had cervical cancer.

According to the the Bolivian government Health Ministry, by 2010 almost five Bolivian women were dying everyday because of cervical cancer. This staggering figure did drop slightly in 2013, according to the Pan-American Health Organisation, to two women per day. But these deaths are almost all preventable, as cervical cancer is usually caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is transmitted sexually and presents no symptoms – except for certain strains that cause genital warts. Like many other countries, Bolivia has a vaccination program that combats the infection and spread of four different strains of HPV – between 2009 and 2011, an average of 28,000 Bolivian girls were vaccinated every year. But there has been no free, state-sponsored vaccination campaign since. (Currently, the HPV vaccine can be bought privately for around US$300 – more than the national monthly minimum wage.) However, HPV and cervical cancer can be treated when detected early by Pap tests, which are provided for free in public health centres. Nevertheless,

only 14 percent of Bolivian women took the test in 2010.

After Nicolasa was diagnosed, she was placed in the hospital's 14-bed room. Chemotherapy, blood transfusions and several other tests and medications quickly followed. Her son did not stay for long, and she was left alone, waiting for the treatment to end. Unfortunately, Nicolasa's plight isn't unusual, one of the main reasons being that cervical cancer is rarely caught in its early stages, when less invasive and more efficacious treatment is possible. In most rural communities in Bolivia, **postas sanitarias** are the only medical resources, and Pap tests are not regularly included in routine checkups. Furthermore, conservative rural communities frequently shun discussions of female sexuality and sexual health.

> The combination of shame, fear and ignorance contribute to HPV's deadly toll.

Some doctors report that husbands forbid their wives from seeing medical professionals. The combination of shame, fear and ignorance contribute to HPV's deadly toll.

Making matters worse, Bolivia has only three public hospitals to treat cancer, according to Ana Carola Torres of the Association of Volunteers Against Child Cancer, all of them located in the central axis of the country: Hospital de Clínicas in La Paz, Hospital Viedma in Cochabamba and Hospital Oncológico in Santa Cruz. Additionally, Torres says that these medical centres often lack the proper equipment and infrastructure for treatment. For example, cobalt radiotherapy machines – an outdated technology from 50 years ago – are still in service. These conditions would prove daunting to a relatively sophisticated cosmopolite from La Paz, let alone a poor, uneducated woman from the countryside.

However trying Nicolasa's story is, the scenario gets worse for women who live in even more remote communities, where logistics prevent any commute to one of the three public hospitals in the far-flung metropolises. And, with no free national medical insurance for women younger than 60, a bed, blood transfusions and chemotherapy can easily cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Nicolasa's story is but one of many, her plight highlighting the challenges that cervical cancer poses to many in rural Bolivia. But Nicolasa, as difficult as her story is, is one of the fortunate ones. Cervical cancer has proven itself to be a silent and deadly killer amongst many other women from the Bolivian countryside – one that is treatable and preventable. There is room for improvement, but Bolivia faces an uphill struggle. The public healthcare system is not properly equipped to provide timely diagnosis and treatment, which can prevent or ameliorate the deadly effects of cervical cancer. Women need to be informed, empowered and encouraged to demand their rights and own their bodies. And the state needs to respond to these demands and provide rural women the healthcare and medical infrastructure they deserve.

Bolivian Express

ANDEAN FASHION ISTAS!

VIRTUAL BOUTIQUES CONNECT BOLIVIAN ARTISANS WITH GLOBAL MARKETS

TEXT :RODRIGO BARRENECHEA
TRANSLATION: ANNA GRACE
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

A strange fact about Bolivian business ventures is this: according to the World Bank, a very high percent of businesses established in Bolivia are not officially registered and undertake their business informally. 95% of these businesses are small or medium-sized, with the owners acting as the business's main employees. Or they are family businesses, or ones which only employ an average of five people. There are too many obstacles, caused by a lack of knowledge or training, which prevent them from being able to develop as enterprises and to penetrate new markets.

In Bolivia, many business ventures fail upon entering the market and, working with the same few clients they have had since the start, they sometimes never manage to expand into the international market. Nor do they see the need to do so. At present, there are many non-governmental organisations, mostly foreign, who have tried to shed more light on the issue and to help these small enterprises develop their business strategies.

I have always been curious about the trading of specialist artisanal textiles which takes place on Calle Sagárnaga, in the city of La Paz. This place is better known by foreigners as 'The Witches' Market', a tourist area of great prestige, where hundreds of these manufacturers gather together to sell their famous 'backpacker' favourites – items made from alpaca or **vicuña** wool; leather artefacts; and fabrics sporting traditional andean designs, native to the culture of this part of the world. Mostly, these are used as gifts from tourists who delve into this corner of the city and bring the products they find back to their native lands.

The company's two founders work with various communities, including with women who worked previously as escorts and with small-scale businesses who mostly produce leather items.

This kind of clustering of businesses is seen in other touristy spots of the **altiplano** like Cuzco and Puno. And there are many connotations associated with this group of small businesses who are dedicated to selling their products. Firstly – and this is known by almost all – is the fact that these salespeople have had to make little effort in order to sell their items. Rather, they just wait until the clients arrive on their doorstep and hope that, if luck would have it, they don't move on to the stall next door. Secondly, these small ventures mostly came, or still do come, from families located in the rural communities bordering La Paz, and, thanks to the sale of their hand-crafted items they continue to support their children and household. Finally, it's worth noting that just about everybody is aware of the market potential of these items.

The wider market viability of these products is particularly notable when speaking to former Bolivian Express interns – and that's over one hundred people – who reaffirmed the potential and success that these sorts of products could have. This is due, first and foremost, to their high quality, but also to the climatic conditions experienced in Europe once winter arrives. This is a market still in its infancy, but with great potential.

Recently, there has been a substantial increase in the promoting of businesses through social media. This has been the main source of commercialisation and publicity for all sorts of products and services, not just in Bolivia, but all over the world. The correct usage of these enormous media outlets can see products flying off the shelves not only in the interior market of whichever country it happens to be in, but also in the foreign market. Tools as accessible as Facebook ads, a good Instagram hashtag, the correct approach to Google Analytics or a memorable ad campaign can revolutionise a business venture instantaneously. This is so widely known that every salesperson gets to grips with the technology, and becomes familiar with these outlets.

Today, there are more and more new businesses making a name for themselves in La Paz city, such as Mistura or Walisuma, two local boutiques renowned for working with, and in some way promoting, artisanal Bolivian producers. And they are using the media platforms previously mentioned. this is also the case with Entremetteuses, an 'intermediary' business venture – as the name suggests – that provides yet another link between artisans and the global market.

Launched in February of this year, Entremetteuses was brought to life by Laura Lapointe from Canada and Marlene Bevillard from France. Thanks to their experience working in Bolivia with a Canadian NGO, both realised the need of many Bolivian artisans to launch their textile and leather products into the market, often as a way to leave behind poor living conditions and get ahead. Despite being a for-profit business, which has the aim of selling their products through their website and Facebook page, the company also has many aspects of a social project. The company's two founders work with various communities, including with women who worked previously as escorts and with small-scale businesses who mostly produce leather items. The designs are the artisans' own creations, and in working with the company the producers have to be innovative and work hard. Their webpage, which reminded me a lot of London-based online retailer Asos due to the method of buying, is very accessible and user-friendly for all, and is impeccably designed.

We at Bolivian Express strongly believe that this type of business venture promoting Bolivian products should be encouraged. We support the daily effort of these artisans who are trying to create better opportunities for themselves in this world, one that demands our creativity and expects us to do our bit for the economic and social development of our land.

For more information visit: www.entremetteuses.com

ALI PACHA

Conscious food in La Paz

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JERUSA POZO

In today's culture of food-centric television, speaking of 'food design' or '**cocina de autor**' is all the rage. The idea of 'conscious food', which is part of that discussion, has begun to penetrate Bolivian society. It is a novel idea in a country that has not paid respect historically to the rights of animals.

This is where Ali Pacha comes in: a restaurant in central La Paz, on Calle Colón near Calle Potosí, that takes its name from an Aymara phrase that means 'universe of plants'. While restaurants that offer new cuisine are usually found in the southern part of the city, someone thought to bring a new dining experience to the centre of town.

Ali Pacha has a small door. When you're inside, however, it offers a respite from the visual chaos of the city centre. The aesthetics of the place take over your attention: seats made of sacks of rice or flour, exotic liquors, vintage artifacts. You know you are paying for a visual experience as well as a gastronomical one.

You sit down at your table and the waitress asks you what 'kind of experience' you want to have. I look at the menu and select the 'executive menu' (the cheapest option available), which has three dishes. Shortly thereafter, I am delivered a glass of water, coconut butter and homemade bread to 'warm the stomach.'

Everything has an eco-friendly look. The restaurant has a very 'chic' atmosphere. While I wait for my first dish, I carefully observe the place. The room offers partial views of the kitchen where you can watch interactions between the chefs.

The first dish to come is papaya with something similar to **ceviche**. The waitress explains in detail how the dish was made and that there is no recipe for it. At Ali Pacha the menu is revamped every two days.

Flavours mingle in my mouth and I like what I feel. Although the food looks small on the plate, it satisfies my palate. At the same time, I wonder if Bolivians could ever become accustomed to such small portions, as we are used to heaping plates of food that nourish our eyes as well as our stomachs.

Then comes the main dish: rice pasta bathed in beet juice with targui flowers. Again, the waitress explains in detail how they made the dish. The flavours invade my mouth and I savour the unique creation.

Finally, the dessert, which is the star of the show: a raspberry sauce with quinoa and vanilla ice cream.

I pay the bill, which is ten times more than a regular lunch at a popular restaurant, but I'm happy and satisfied with the whole experience.

I LIKE MY COFFEE HOT!

The World of Boutique Bolivian Coffee Production

TEXT AND PHOTO: ANNA GRACE

A black coffee arrives steaming to the café table I have commandeered as my personal desk this morning. It is a fine, bright Wednesday in La Paz and finally my day can begin. As I take careful sips of the dark burning liquid, I slowly shake off the dregs of the former night's sleep which continue to plague my body. Minibuses crawl past outside and taxis sit impatiently in mid-morning traffic. Pedestrians pass by, clad in business suits, sports kit or casual dress. I pity the caffeine addict who has forgotten his or her coffee this morning, in this ever-moving, hustling and bustling urban centre.

Many people associate coffee with the morning work routine. It is the highly-coveted pickup at the start of a highly-strung day. Others enjoy a more relaxed coffee culture, one in which friends unite over a cappuccino mug or an espresso in boutique cafés. As I sip the remnants of my morning coffee, I look beyond how we consume it and wander to a place of greenery, to the shady tropical forests that are home to Bolivia's coffee plantations.

Bolivian coffee production takes place in Los Yungas, a region of high-altitude tropical rainforest in the department of La Paz. From above, the trees resemble vast heads of broccoli clinging to the mountainside. Below, the mixture of sun, shade and humidity provides conditions in which coffee plants can thrive. With an annual production far lower than that of Colombia or neighbouring Brazil, mass coffee production is not exactly thriving in Bolivia, but quality coffee production certainly is.

'I want to show that here in Bolivia, we can produce the best,' explains René Brugger, owner of Munaipata, an artisanal coffee production company located four kilometres from the municipality of Coroico, in Nor Yungas. He refers to his terrain as SHANTI, which means 'peace' in Hindi. And the naming is apt. Birds sing, the sun shines, flowers blossom and the stunning views keep on coming. Even the incessantly biting bugs cannot diminish the tranquil beauty and familial happiness of this place.

> Coffee seedlings are guided through infancy to adulthood by dedicated and caring hands.

Coffee seedlings are guided through infancy to adulthood by dedicated and caring hands. Then the beans are toasted in a top-of-the-range Bolivian made **tostadora**. Brígida, whose family has produced coffee since before this machinery existed, underlines the importance of coffee for the people of the region. 'Coffee helps us to study, to support our families and to make savings,' she tells me.

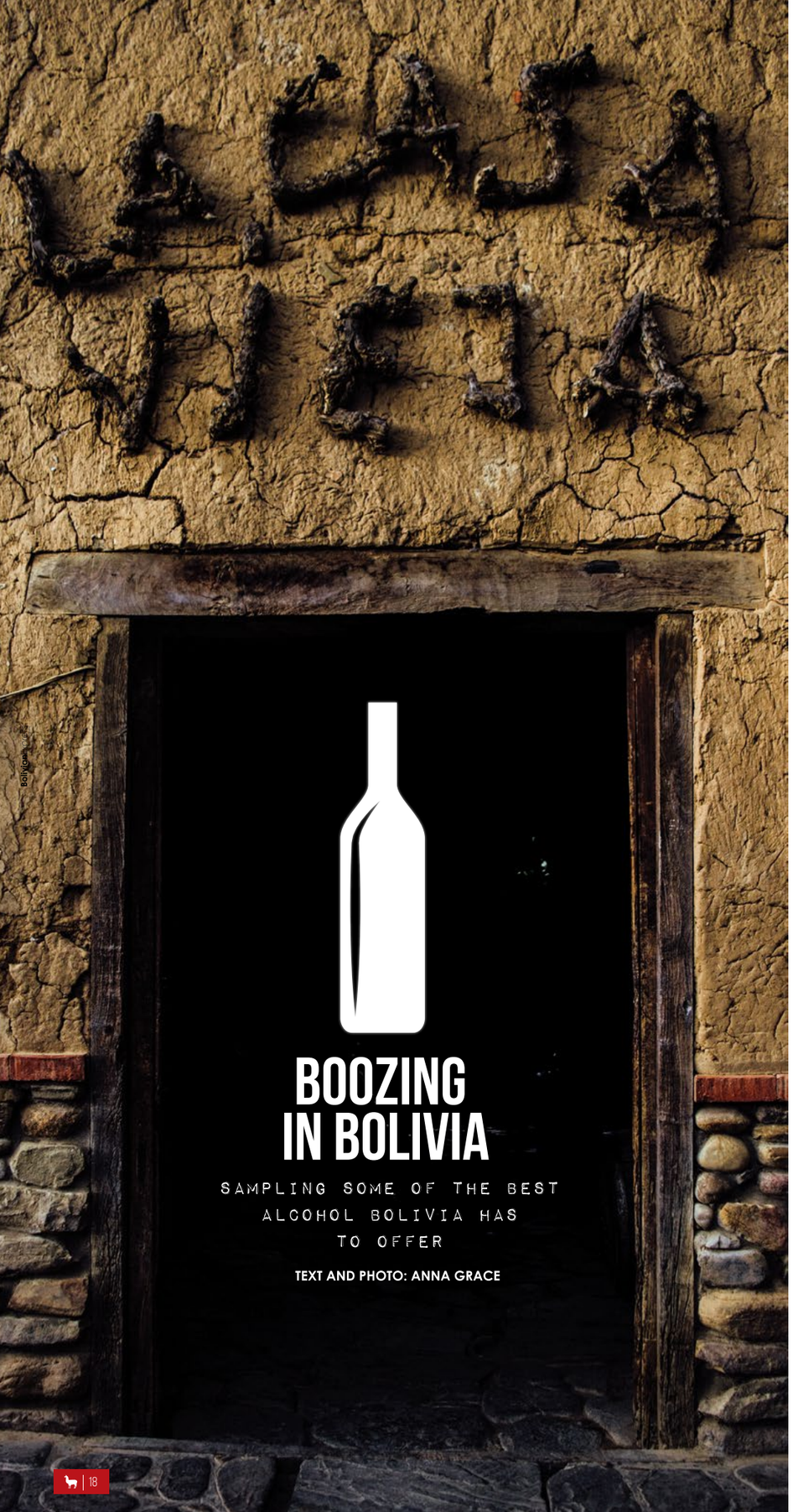
The work is less lucrative than other local industries, which is why many producers in Los Yungas have abandoned their **cafetales** in favour of **cocales**. But the workers at SHANTI stick to their coffee plantations, as they have pride in the what they do. 'I love coffee', Brígida assures me. 'René does too, he really loves it!' And that makes three of us. Everyone here is a coffee lover, it seems.

Following a common Latin American trope, the best Bolivian coffee is exported and locals rarely experience the joys that their land bestows and their own hands cultivate. This, however, is not the case with the coffee produced at SHANTI. Although they only have a modest harvest, 95% of it is consumed in Bolivia. Between delicious mouthfuls of llama lasagna and sips of sultana juice, I learn more about how Munaipata came to be.

Before starting his project eight years ago, René was strongly advised against entering the market of Bolivian coffee. His advisors deemed it unprofitable. Needless to say, he did so anyway. 'I like to swim against the current,' he chuckles. René views Munaipata as still being in its early days, but he mentions a scepticism on the part of many locals. 'They see what we are doing here, and they don't believe it will last,' he says. 'They think this **gringuito** will leave after a few years.'

Their doubts, perhaps, are understandable. In the 1990s, a spate of cold weather saw coffee production in Brazil drop drastically, which made the international price per **quintal** rise enormously. Many producers came to Bolivia to profit from the favourable weather conditions and high prices. Once normality was restored in Brazil, however, the producers flocked back, abandoning *cafetales* all over Los Yungas. Given the long-term aims and the passion and knowledge with which everyone at SHANTI speak of their work, there is no doubt Munaipata is in it for the long run.

Despite the rich taste, strong aroma and eco-friendly nature of Munaipata coffee, Nescafé continues to dominate the market. It seems beans, grinders and cafetières are too much of a hassle for most. If the average consumer, however, would stop and consider the skill that goes into producing artisanal coffee, they would see that the wait is no hassle at all. They may even come to enjoy those few minutes it takes to prepare a good cafetière coffee. I certainly do.



BOOZING IN BOLIVIA

SAMPLING SOME OF THE BEST ALCOHOL BOLIVIA HAS TO OFFER

TEXT AND PHOTO: ANNA GRACE

South America does alcohol well. Think Chilean Merlot or Argentinean Malbec and you are bound to find your mouth watering and your taste buds tingling. Chileans and Peruvians both claim **pisco** originated in their respective homelands, and everyone who has enjoyed a **caipirinha** knows the worth of Brazilian **cachaça**. Bolivia, seemingly, is nowhere in sight. Yet maybe we should be enjoying a glass of Bolivian red with our steaks, and sipping a cocktail made from **singani** on nights out.

I pass neat rows of healthy, green vines bathed in the light of a pleasingly strong sun as a golden, heat-baked track winds down towards a factory-style building. Only a short ride from the city of Tarija, in the heart of Bolivia's prime wine country, this is the site of the new headquarters of Kuhlmann Vineyards.

'The world is full of wine connoisseurs. They know quality.' I am speaking to Franz Molina, the manager of Kuhlmann. 'They try our wines and they are surprised. It's the same with *singani*,' he says. 'It's different, exotic, elegant.' The company has been producing *singani* – the subtle yet strong grape-based spirit unique to Bolivia – for years. The Tres Estrellas line is targeted towards the east of the country, and Los Parrales to the west, I am told. The company's youngest and most pioneering venture is Altosama, the world's first high-altitude sparkling wine. Launched in 2011, the wine is still a newcomer, but Franz is confident that it will find its place. 'Little by little we are introducing the culture of sparkling wine in Bolivia,' he says. Fruity, bubbly and good fun on special occasions, Altosama is sure to be a hit.

As we speed down the main road connecting the country to the city, I discover the brains behind the naming of their sparkling wine. I already knew that alto means 'high', but 'sama'? I didn't have much of a clue. Franz points out a green **cordillera** surrounding the valley. 'That's Sama,' he informs me. 'Without Sama, Tarija would be desert, and the land infertile.'

Later in the day, I head towards a very different sort of winery, trundling down narrow streets and past small town squares. Chairs are scattered outside village stores, unoccupied save a single white cloth – a more traditional yet less transparent version of the **Sí hay pan** signs seen in shop windows across the country. This place is called Valle de Concepción, and now we have left the city much farther behind.

> We laugh at stumbling clients and bumbling tourists. I could get used to it here.

Entering Casa Vieja, an old Jesuit house turned winery, Julián Lazcano ushers me into a low-ceilinged, wine-bottle-lined room. Julián's family started producing wine here 40 years ago, and I am told to help myself to a glass of red. Whilst I enjoy my late afternoon tipple, a group of Bolivian tourists enter for a wine tasting, and I am to join. We are instructed to form a crescent-moon shape. None of the 'taste and politely spit out' nonsense here – as a group we are to finish a glass of each wine amongst ourselves. As fortune has it, I find myself at the farthest tip of the moon. 'You have to drink everything that is left in the glass. **Seco**. It's a Casa Vieja tradition,' the leader of ceremonies informs me.

Amid introductions of each new **trago**, jokes and plenty of laughter, we make our way through dry and semi-sweet wines, a few ports and, last but not least, a full-strength *singani*. 'We offer wine tasting to everyone who comes here,' Lazcano tells me. 'Visitors have the chance to taste some good wine and afterwards to sit down in the restaurant and have some good, typical food.' The rustic house, paved with its uneven, coffee-coloured stone slabs and backed by rows of picturesque vines, is certainly worth a visit.

'This is an artisanal vineyard; everything is done **al patero**, by foot,' Julián explains. 'There's no machinery here.' Thinking back to the high-tech machinery seen in the large production room behind Franz's office at Kuhlmann Vineyards, the two manners of turning grapes into alcohol seem worlds away. Yet Kuhlmann has achieved a 96 percent eco-efficiency rate, meaning the company is highly sustainable. The only waste produced is inevitable. It seems that both Franz and Julián have, in their own ways, a natural, green-friendly mode of production at heart.

Next on my enjoyably extensive tour of Tarija's vineyards comes Campos de Solana. Owned by the Granilla family, who also own the *singani* brand Casa Real, Campos de Solana is one of the newest members on the Bolivian wine scene. If I had become more versed in the commercial side of Bolivian wine and *singani* at Kuhlmann, and more expert in the tasting of said wine and *singani* during my time at Casa Vieja, my trip to Campos de Solana taught me more about the process from vine to bottle.

Grapes here are ready to be picked from February through to early April. The process is done by hand, early in the morning to avoid excessive heat. It's good for the grapes but less so for those picking them – a fiddly, tiresome business to be undertaking at such an ungodly hour. The grapes are then sorted – again, by hand – to pick the good from the bad. This stage over with, the machines are allowed to do the work. The **uvas** are put into the **molienda** which separates the ground grapes into juice, peel and seeds.

> 'Without Sama, Tarija would be desert, and the land infertile.'
> —Franz Molina, Kuhlmann Vineyards

Now comes the technical part. Red wine, the deepest, richest and arguably best of them all, uses all components. The juice, peel and seeds of the purple grapes are fermented at a temperature of between 20 to 25 degrees Celsius. Rosé and white wines use only the juice and are fermented at lesser temperatures.

Afterwards, the wine is filtered of impurities; no one wants poisoned customers. The wine is then left to age in wooden barrels. Ageing can take from a few months up to two and a half years – the longer the ageing process, the better the wine.

I realise that, no matter how 'industrial' the company, the rustic is always present, be it in the beautiful grape-filled vineyards outside the office at Kuhlmann or the dependence on manual labour at Campos de Solana.

As for Casa Vieja, I've yet to see where the industrial part lies. Producing 80,000 litres per year, this business is ever-growing but has yet to lose its personal feel. I head to the restaurant to share a jug of semi-sweet wine with two local girls. A jug filled to the top and a sole glass between us, it seems that the Casa Vieja traditions extend further than the tasting room. My companions greet various friends as they pass and tell anecdotes of 'Valley Life'. We laugh at stumbling clients and bumbling tourists. I could get used to it here.

Yet life is not all rosy in the world of Bolivian alcohol production. High taxes on internal products and an increase in imported wines and spirits spells a tricky future for those producing nationally. Back at Kuhlmann, Franz shakes his head, lamenting, 'Bolivia doesn't know the treasure it has. *Singani* should be the pride of the country.' He explains how Bolivians often choose Argentinean fernet, Russian vodka or Caribbean rum over their own national drink.

The same goes for wine. 'You go to the supermarket and 90 percent of the wines are imported,' Franz points out. 'You don't see that happening in any other wine-producing country in the world. They protect their market.' Maybe, I think to myself, it's time Bolivians start to protect theirs.

HEARTS AND CRAFTS

INDIGENOUS ARTISANS CREATE SOLIDARITY

TEXT :KARINA GUZMAN
PHOTO: COURTESY OF ARTECAMPO AND CIDAC

Ask backpackers who have spent any amount of time straddling the spine of the Andes what they remember about Bolivia, and they'll reply that artisanal crafts, multicoloured textiles and alpaca knitwear are high up on the list. These 'traditional' crafts have become an integral part of the tourism sector in this landlocked South American country.

But in the past, it was common for artisans to be ripped off by intermediaries, who would reap large profits without sharing. In some cases, they would pay with a bar of soap for a finished product. Unequal power relationships between artisans and traders – the gatekeepers to the marketplace – meant that the skill and hard work that went into each product went unremunerated. The difficulties and hardships faced by the artisans at this time is highlighted by a hay-hat weaver artisan: 'We think about how unfair our situation was, for our working day consists of waking up early; cleaning the house; making the beds; making breakfast; going to collect water; feeding the animals; getting children ready for school; doing the laundry; making lunch and taking it to our husbands in the field; making the coffee for the siesta; weaving a hay-hat; making dinner; doing the dishes; cleaning the kitchen and then weaving again the hours we have left.' Something had to change.

The artisans self-organised and formed a collective, ARTECAMPO, using methods promoted and fostered by CIDAC (the Research and Design Centre for the Arts and Crafts). CIDAC's objective was to foster the generation and consolidation of self-sustainable socioeconomic initiatives to improve the situation of indigenous women. CIDAC provided ARTECAMPO with training in management and design, in addition to supporting the **usos y costumbres** (customary practices and technology) of the region. The endeavour is led by Ada Sotomayor de Vaca, director of CIDAC. 'The work started in Cotoca, Urubichá and the Ichilo communities,' Sotomayor says, 'which were difficult to access back then.' CIDAC persevered by approaching the village elders – mostly women – who were caretakers of the communities knowledge. 'Little by little we rescued designs, techniques and materials,' Sotomayor says. 'At the same time, the groups of women started to feel the need to organise themselves in associations.'

> The unequal power relationships between the artisans and the traders meant that the skill and hard work that went into each product went unremunerated.

Today, ARTECAMPO is 32 years old, comprising 14 cooperatives spread over 64 communities in the department of Santa Cruz (more recently, it has made inroads to some communities in the Tarija and Chuquisaca departments), and it has helped approximately 6,000 artisan women since its inception. These craftworkers create cultural gems from their indigenous communities, including Guarayo, Chiquitano, Ayoreo and Izoceño. Their products include hammocks from Urubichá; corn husks dolls from Vallegrande; ceramics from Cotoca; woodcarvings from San Miguel; and tapestries from Izozog. Last March, three members of the association were awarded the "Eduardo Abaroa" national prize for native arts.

Although members of ARTECAMPO have exported their products overseas, the organisation's focus is the national market. Bolivians' pride over their cultural heritage and the continued growth of tourism have meant that the internal market for ARTECAMPO's products is more than sufficient to absorb its members' current output.

Furthermore, expansion into foreign markets would create market and legal pressures that might not dovetail with indigenous cultural practices that emphasise the building of personal relationships, trust and solidarity over capitalist imperatives.

ARTECAMPO, then, is a good example of how Bolivian society protects its cultural heritage whilst at the same time finding ways for indigenous people to better their lives without capitalist exploitation of their patrimony. The mediation between progress and tradition is key to understanding the dynamics of a country with 36 recognised indigenous groups and a long history of indigenous repression and resistance. ARTECAMPO highlights the way in which these dynamics have entered the 21st century.

For more information: visit www.artecampo.com.

Special thanks to Irene Mairemí Pita for her help in researching this article.

ALLKAMARI

LIQUID ENLIGHTENMENT IN VALLE DE LAS ANIMAS

TEXT AND PHOTO: JERUSA POZO

I once heard that if you want to move forward, occasionally you have to exorcise your demons, give yourself a spiritual jolt. One '**huasca**', they say.

Just 45 minutes outside of Cota Cota, in La Paz's Zona Sur, is the Valle de las Ánimas, a place where even Bolivians can feel like a **gringo** in their own home. Here everything is different. It's like entering another world.

Allkamari is a spa resort in the valley. Most of its customers are foreigners. The place offers relaxation exercises, spa and cleansing rituals, but its real highlight is the spiritual healing therapies: from **San Pedro** to the famous **ayahuasca**, 'the mother who shows you the way'.

How is this place different from the city? Is it what they eat? Are they happier here (a myth that we buy about country people)? Are they more hospitable? Do they have more values than we do in the city? Do they age better? When I think about things that don't belong to the city, I immediately imagine 'pachamamic' entities, things or people that are connected with nature, like **yatiris**.

It seems we flip a switch when we leave the city. Not when we're on vacation, but when we barely make it out of La Paz to the countryside that surrounds it. When we go to that place, outside of the city, we become other people. Different laws are at play when you live or experience rural life. There are no status symbols, no occidental codes.

In recent times it has become fashionable to visit rural places in South America to take *ayahuasca*. People like Sting have gone to the Amazon in Peru to try the precious drink. Although it has been openly marketed in Cusco, where you can find it in pills, in La Paz, *ayahuasca* is still a taboo subject for many Bolivians. It seems that foreigners are better informed about the sacred plant than the locals.

Tupak Wayra is the shaman at Allkamari. He and his partner, Wara, are leading the ceremony. It's easy to tell who is going to the ceremony for the very first time because newcomers are the most restless. Don is 67 years old. That same morning his plane arrived from California and he will fly back the next day. He wants to take *ayahuasca* before he dies, a goal that inspires a certain respect among all of us.

> Its real highlight is the spiritual healing therapies: from San Pedro to the famous Ayahuasca, 'the mother who shows you the way'.

One by one, we (two friendly girls from Iceland; a son of a Bolivian congressman who wants to make everybody believe he is from Germany; four friends from England who think they're going to try something like LSD and have the greatest time of their lives; and me) enter the **chullpa**. Inside, there are objects you can find in La Paz's famous Witches' Market: llama fetuses, incense, **palo santo**.

Wayra tell us to introduce ourselves and say why we are there. While we are doing that, we have to hit a stick to the ground, shouting '**Jallalla**!' The most unimaginable reasons bring people to the valley. Once we have introduced ourselves, Wayra offers us the *ayahuasca* that Wara was preparing while we were talking.

I am fifth in line to try it. When it's my turn, my hands are sweaty. I'm thinking as if my life will change forever; as if I'm going to jump off a cliff. The drink has a nauseating bitter taste that welcomes you to a world where your traumas, dreams and aspirations are presented to you one by one.

What happened from that time until four hours later I can only describe as a moral shock. Each one of us had a different experience. Mine was something like Dumbo, the scene where he gets drunk for the very first time. I proceeded to dig through a lot of junk in my subconscious. I think we all vomited into the chamber pot at least once.

The next day we gathered in the *chullpa* and everyone shared their experiences. The guys from England did not look so happy. One of them began to cry as he recounted what he saw in his journey. One by one, we shared some of what we saw in our personal trips. The man from California had to take a flight in the following hours. He looked pleased.

After the stories, we were asked to take the containers with our vomit and empty them outside of the hut, after which we washed our chamber pots.

A DROUGHT IN THE LAND OF THE EAGLE PEOPLE

TEXT : RUBEN MAMANI PACO
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

Usually the rainy season on the Bolivian **altiplano** – the arid high plateau that stretches from northern Chile and Argentina, through western Bolivia and to southern Peru – comes at the end of December and lasts through March and April, but this year was different. The province of Pacajes, in the south of the department of La Paz near the Desaguadero River, is suffering from an unusual drought, probably as a result of **el Niño**. In the past, *el Niño* brought more rain to some Bolivian lowlands and drought to the area of Pacajes, but now experts think climate change is making *el Niño* conditions even worse.

I went to this region at the invitation of Clemente Salzurri, a local elder from the area. I was part of a team from Fundación Ingenieros en Acción, an engineering organisation in La Paz that brings water and sanitation projects to rural communities in Bolivia through international partnerships. We planned to visit communities in the municipality of Calacoto, in Pacajes, for a possible future water project.

Our journey started on a recent frigid morning, departing La Paz at dawn to meet Salzurri and community authorities in El Alto to drink some **api** and eat **buñuelos** for breakfast. Afterward, we headed towards Viacha, passing Comanche and Coro Coro, finally driving our vehicle on dirt roads and crossing a large bridge over the Desaguadero River. The snow-covered peak of Sajama, Bolivia's tallest mountain, was always in the background, tucked behind the hills with the llamas, sheep and **tholas** that dominate the landscape.

Salzurri described the region, Pacajes, as the Land of the Eagle People (in Aymara, paka means 'eagle', and jaqi means 'people'), who lived in the territory long before the time of the Inca empire. The Pacajes belonged to the Aymara kingdoms that were later conquered by the Incas. Some relics of this culture can still be seen in the different **chullpas**, or adobe monument graveyards, along the way.

Water is what brings life to this area. Communities survive mostly on herds of llama, sheep and a few crops like potatoes and barley. They count on the rainy season for water, and things go awry when the rains do not come. The communities build **cotañas**, or artificial ponds, to collect water during the rainy season and hope to get enough to get through the dry season. This time, we saw the *cotañas* almost dry and with many animals around looking to quench their thirst. Many will probably not survive the dry *altiplano* winter.

One of the communities that we visited that caught our attention was Jancko Marca. As we approached the village, Gladys, a local leader, showed us a dry area where there once was a small lake. We saw a local home water well, about 14 metres deep. There was still water at 12 metres, but the owner told us that in the past his family could get water at four metres. The situation worsened at the water wells near the primary school – here, none had water. Community members told us that teachers have to bring water from La Paz to get by.

The community's water shortages and their emergency situations are self-evident, and our team plans to visit again and start looking for a possible international engineering partner in order to assist Jancko Marca.

Experts think climate change is making el Niño conditions even worse.

On our way back, we took another road to try to get home early and catch one of the main roads to La Paz. Salzurri guided us, and we were confident that the terrain was dry. But, ironically in this land where water was usually hard to find, some rain had fallen in the past weeks and suddenly our vehicle was trapped in wet clay and sandy terrain. One of the back tires was completely underwater. We had to find a way out and looked for stones and dry *thola* branches, using the jack to lift the vehicle. Our diverse group, Aymara men and woman, a **gringo**, some Bolivian engineers, all strained to get the vehicle unstuck. And after an hour of trying, the car was finally free. Together we solved this one small problem, and together we all hoped that, when we return, we'll be able to solve the another, seemingly intractable one.

After thinking about the whole ordeal, it looks like the diverse teamwork that I saw trying to get out of this situation is a good sign for the challenge to bring water to this troubled village. It will take the participation of everyone involved.

Quechua
In The City

TEXT AND PHOTO: AMY BOOTH

The switch is instant. I'm in a dry river bed with my tour guide, David. One moment, he is explaining in clear, relaxed Spanish how fossilized dinosaur footprints are formed. The next, another tour guide passes and he switches into a swift, lilting chat punctuated by explosive little sounds, entirely unintelligible to me. He is speaking Quechua. David is one of several million Bolivians who are bilingual in Spanish and an indigenous language.

In the undulating, dusty national park of Torotoro, in northern Potosí, everyone from the shopkeepers to the toddlers speaks Quechua. Spanish feels like the language of tourists and outsiders, a **lingua franca** used to communicate but not to crack jokes or declare love.

We are four hours' drive on unpaved roads from Cochabamba, the nearest city. On the bus during the journey here, we passed small ramshackle huts made of adobe, the dried-earth building material traditional in the area. Small children spurred large herds of goats and sheep at the side of the road. Every so often, I would see a sign marking projects completed under the government's drive to eradicate extreme poverty.

Quechua – technically a family of languages given the difference between the varieties – is the most widely spoken indigenous language family in South America. Famously, it was the language of the Inca empire. Estimates vary, but the number of speakers is thought to be over 8 million – more than Danish, Finnish or Slovak.

Quechua is not a language for the faint-hearted. Like such notorious tongues as Hungarian and Finnish, it is agglutinative – grammatical information, such as tense and possession, is stuck onto nouns and verbs to form colossal monster words that translate into half a sentence of English. The well-respected Jesús Lara Quechua-Spanish dictionary gives the example of **janpunkipuni**, which translates as 'You'll come anyway.'

As we hike, David tells me how to say 'Hurry up' in Quechua, grinning at my clumsy attempts. Although he repeats the phrase several times, I can't make the long words and guttural sounds stick in my head, and I wonder whether Quechua speakers find it equally hard to learn Spanish. Its vocabulary has little in common with Indo-European languages, making memorising vocabulary a tall order – although many Spanish words have been incorporated over time. It is also just one of over 30 indigenous languages recognised in Bolivia's 2009 constitution.

> He switches into a swift, lilting chat punctuated by explosive little sounds, entirely unintelligible to us.

Back in Cochabamba, however, the bars and restaurants of the city centre may as well be a different country. High-rise offices and sleek restaurants jostle with grand colonial buildings. There is not a block of adobe in sight. Here, Spanish dominates once again. It is the international language spoken throughout Bolivia. It is the common tongue, used in national papers and television. Not everybody speaks it, though. While Quechua prevails in communities such as Torotoro, up on the **altiplano** that surrounds La Paz, indigenous communities are more likely to speak Aymara. And around the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, you might encounter Chiquitano or Guaraní.

When Basilia arrived in Cochabamba at the age of 15, Quechua was the only language she knew. Back home in northern Potosí, she lived in a village of 200 families who spoke Quechua and Aymara. There was no electric lighting, water came from the river, and to this day the roads are not paved. Here, her family's plot of land was small, so when the potato harvest was bad there was no food. In search of a change, they migrated to the city. 'I couldn't speak one word of Spanish,' Basilia says. 'Not even a little bit. It was difficult.'

Basilia moved to Cochabamba in 1995. 'When I arrived, I worked in a guesthouse,' she explains. 'Sometimes they would send me out to buy meat, but I would come back with nothing because the shopkeepers and I couldn't understand each other.'

But now she is completely fluent in Spanish. She's lucky, though, because many who speak an indigenous language as a mother tongue don't learn Spanish. In Cochabamba's city fringes and surrounding towns, it is not uncommon to meet people who can only speak Quechua, especially women and older people.

Being immersed in a new language is a full-spectrum challenge. Even people who are fluent in their second language sometimes struggle to be themselves in that language. If they can't find the words to express ideas quickly enough in a conversation, they might just say nothing, even if in their first language they are naturally garrulous. Communicating complicated ideas can suddenly become a process of crude approximations, making them seem ineloquent.

Moreover, when the speaker is fluent, other speakers might not realise they are struggling to convey the finer points of the conversation, leading them to believe the person they are speaking to is less intelligent or observant than they really are.

This raises the question of whether language barriers exacerbate prejudice against indigenous people in Bolivia. Before the 1952 Revolution, voting was subject to literacy requirements, which excluded many indigenous people.

> 'Some Quechuistas will die Quechuistas.'

Inequality in Bolivia is still very high – according to World Bank figures, the country had a Gini coefficient of 48.1% in 2013, making it the 23rd most unequal in the world. The stark divide is clearly visible: while some Bolivians live in spacious houses with private swimming pools, others live in single-room adobe houses with no access to running water or sewage.

Census data show that people who only speak an indigenous language live mostly in rural areas, which tend to be poorer than cities. Historian Herbert S. Klein notes that among literate speakers of native languages, there has been a shift from monolingualism towards bilingualism, and from there towards monolingualism in Spanish.

In December of last year, the construction of a Quechua research institute in Cliza, Cochabamba, was announced. Built over a 13-hectare site, the facility will cultivate knowledge of the Quechua language and culture. Responsible for the project is the Instituto de Lengua y Cultura de la Nación Quechua, which was inaugurated in 2013 to recover ancient Quechua practices and promote Quechua culture. Perhaps spaces such as this will help speakers of Bolivia's native languages to discover more about their linguistic and social heritage.

Splashing his face in a mountain stream or chatting about how to climb the steeply slanted tectonic plates that form Torotoro's striking scenery, David appears content in his beautiful, remote place.

As for Basilia, she has not returned to her hometown in 10 years. Her family is in Cochabamba now. Her children's first language is Spanish, although they understand Quechua and are learning to speak it. But be it through choice or necessity, some speakers will never learn Spanish.

'Some **Quechuistas** will die *Quechuistas*,' Basilia says.

Benita Mollisaca is a farmer in Carmen Pampa, Nor Yungas. She grows coca, coffee and a variety of fruits. She lives with her husband and her adult son, who help her with the work.

PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

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PHOTO: ANNA GRACE

GLOSSARY

AL PATERO: The method of crushing grapes by foot

ALTIPLANO: A high plateau situated in the Andes of Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Argentina

API: A typical Bolivian Altiplano drink made from purple corn and usually served warm; tastes like Christmas

AYAHUASCA: A medicinal, hallucinogenic drink brewed from several plants native to the Amazon region

BUÑUELO: A sweet fried ball of dough

CACHAÇA: A distilled spirit made from sugarcane juice

CAFETALES: Coffee plantations

CAIPIRINHA: A cocktail made from *cachaça*, sugar and lime; Brazil's national drink

CAMPESINA: 'Peasant'

CAMPO: 'Countryside'

CEVICHE: A popular South American seafood dish containing chunks of raw fish marinated in citrus juice, chilli and onions

CHULLPAS: Ancient funerary towers belonging to the Aymara people

COCALES: Plantations for growing coca leaves

COCINA DE AUTOR: Signature cuisine; an imaginative and creative style of cooking

CORDILLERA: 'Mountain range'

COTAÑAS: Artificial ponds constructed for the collection of rainwater

EL NIÑO: A repeated environmental phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean that causes abnormal weather patterns

GRINGO: The word used to refer mostly to those from the United States but also for any western-looking foreigner in Latin American countries

GRINGUITO: Diminutive of *gringo*

HUASCA: Diminutive of *ayahuasca*

JALLALLA: An exclamation found in Quechua and Aymara languages expressing hope and a sense of adventure

JANPUNKIPUNI: Quechua for 'You'll come anyway'

MOLIENDA: A machine that grinds grapes

PALO SANTO: A wild tree native to South America often used as a sacred incense

PISCO: A spirit made from distilled grapes

POSTA DE SALUD: Health post or centre

POSTAS SANITARIAS: Sanitary or health centres

QUECHUISTA: A speaker of Quechua

QUINTAL: 100 kilograms

SAN PEDRO: A medicinal, hallucinogenic drink made from the San Pedro cactus

SECO: 'Dry'; equivalent of 'down it!'

SÍ HAY PAN: 'We have bread'

SINGANI: A clear Bolivian spirit made from Alexandria grapes

THOLAS: Shrubs native to Bolivia

TOSTADORA: Machine that roasts coffee beans

TRAGO: Alcoholic drink

USOS Y COSTUMBRES: Customary uses and technology

UVAS: Grapes

VICUÑA: A camelid of South America related to the llama, known for it's long skinny neck, big round eyes and very fine wool

YATIRI: Aymara medical practitioner and healer

Carmen Mamani Zeballos grows coffee and coca in Carmen Pampa, Nor Yungas. A widow for many years, her two children have moved away to work in the city. She works her land alone.

PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

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