



# Focus on BOLIVIA

## School Program

*"In life there are things that happen, that you will never forget, seems that my experience in Bolivia is one of them, sometimes I have laughed, sometimes I've cried, I have had fun, I've enjoyed. I've met, yes, I have found friends and a family that loves me and a new world has opened in front of me, but I have also found myself."*

*Katrien Meeuseen, sojourner from Belgium.*

Bolivia was once part of the Inca empire, and even though the nation was later ruled by Spain, today much of the population retains old Indian styles of clothing, music and festivals, speaking both Spanish and either *Quecha*, an Incan language, or *Aymar *, which is even older. The land climbs from low-lying equatorial rainforests in the east to nearly Arctic-cold mountains in the west, where the majority of Bolivians live. In fact, La Paz, two miles above sea level, is the world's highest capital city, and most mountain passes leading to it rise above 15,000 feet. Because of these daunting heights and a relatively undeveloped tourism industry, travelers to Bolivia tend to be adventurous and intrepid.

### ***AFS & Your Experience***

AFS Bolivia has been in existence since 1956. It offers both School-based and Community Service programs and annually hosts more than 100 AFS students and 40 participants in the Community Service program coming from 23 countries such as Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Thailand and the United States. These sojourners are supported by a network of 250 AFS volunteers with chapters covering all major cities.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

### ***Landing in Bolivia***

You will arrive in La Paz, one of the principal cities, where you will be met by either AFS staff or volunteers and be brought to your first orientation in Bolivia.

### ***Arrival Orientation***

This two-day orientation will take place in a relaxing location. There you will have a chance to meet other AFSers from around the world and ask questions while learning basic information about Bolivian life and culture including family life, friends and school.

You will also receive information about Bolivia's regions and food as well as some safety tips.

## ***Living in Bolivia***

### **Lifestyle and Family Living**

Bolivians value courtesy, gentleness and concern for one another's welfare. Social life is family-oriented, and Bolivians view themselves as conservative when it comes to looking after their children.

Supervising the children and managing the household are normally the responsibilities of the wife, although it may be common for your host family to have one or more maids, while the husband is likely to be occupied with work outside the home. Children are expected to show respect for their parents, accept their guidance regarding activities and friends and keep their curfews.

Bolivian host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives. They may not be able to afford big expenses for AFS students, but they are generous in sharing their love, care and support.

Your host family may live in any part of the country; nevertheless students are mostly placed in urban areas (95%).

### **Dress and Appearance**

Bolivians wear various types of clothing depending on where they live and their social class. Generally, western-style clothes are worn in urban areas, and traditional clothes are common elsewhere. AFSers should bring jeans and T-shirts, a sweatshirt, lightweight sweaters, a swimsuit and sneakers. If your host family lives in a high altitude, you will also need a warm jacket. Remember to bring one or two nice outfits (suits for men and dresses for women) for special occasions.

### **Diet and Meals**

Bolivians eat a variety of foods but meat is part of the main course at lunch and dinner (making it sometimes difficult for vegetarians). The main course is usually accompanied by rice or vegetables such as potatoes or shredded lettuce. Milk and cheese are part of a typical diet as well. Many foods are fried and very spicy, especially when they use *ilajhua*, a sauce made of tomatoes and hot peppers.

Families customarily eat the same foods together; it is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods, to prepare separate food for themselves or to raid the refrigerator.

### **School Life**

1 🌟 As in many countries, Bolivian students have 12 years of education before entering university. There are two different types of school: public and private. Private schools are run by different organizations and charge tuition and fees. For this reason, they are attended mostly by upper-class students. You will probably be enrolled in a private school. Bolivian schools normally require their students to take all 12 to 14 mandatory

subjects. You too will be expected to take all the classes, ranging from philosophy to physical education (gym). School and homework take up most free time during the week, but you will have the chance to become close with your classmates as you will share the same classroom throughout the year, having the teachers change rooms for almost all classes. The relationship with teachers is quite formal, and you should show respect at all times. Bolivian teachers care a lot about their students and work also as counselors providing support.

2🌟The school year runs from late February through November, with a 15-day winter vacation in June-July and summer vacations from December to February. Classes normally meet from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. five days a week (rarely also on Saturday). Some schools break at noon for lunch and reopen at 2 p.m., with classes until 5 p.m. You will most likely have lunch at home.

Many schools require a uniform and sometimes also a sport uniform. If you are in the senior class, you will also need a special uniform to wear once a week and on special occasions.

3🌟A certificate of attendance or a high school diploma can be obtained, depending on the school, provided you attend classes regularly, take all the prescribed subjects and earn passing grades. Because getting an official transcript from the Ministry of Education takes a long time, you should begin this process as early as possible.

4🌟After-school activities such as music, chorus, dance or sports are offered by some schools. They may also have sports teams for such games as soccer, volleyball and basketball.

One fun and interesting activity organized by schools is a two- to three-week class trip. Several classes travel to different cities inside or outside Bolivia. As a student of the school, you are invited to participate: it is a great way to both travel and have an enjoyable experience with your classmates. The expenses would be covered by you and can vary from US\$300 to US\$500.

### **Teen Life**

In their free time and on weekends, the open young people in Bolivia get together with friends to watch movies, dance or hang out in the town square or at a local café. Regional *fiestas* (celebrations) are noted for their wonderful music and colorful, striking costumes.

### **Language**

Following your arrival, you will take language lessons for a total of 40 hours. They will be given in your local chapter together with other AFSers. It is an intensive course so that you will be able to speak on a basic level in few weeks. You should still try to arrive with some basic knowledge of Spanish as this will lead to faster progress.

### **AFS Activities**

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Bolivia will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing

participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

In addition to the arrival orientation, organized by the National Office, there will be an orientation in your host community and, after three months, you will travel to Cochabamba for another, lasting three to four days. It will feature evaluation as well as social time, which includes a tour of the city, a visit to a community service project and other activities such as a talent show.

There may be other activities organized by AFS Bolivia volunteers in your chapter including weekend excursions, picnics and informal gatherings. Furthermore, AFS Bolivia organizes two national activities each year so that you and the other hosted students will have the opportunity to experience the richness of Bolivia's cultural heritage. Activities differ from year to year due to the variety of the culture, but during the past few years, they included hiking the Inca Trail and the "Southern Routes" tour (to Potosi and Sucre). The cost of these activities is covered by AFS Bolivia. A trip to the Salt Lakes at Uyuni may also be organized as an addition to the "Southern Routes" tour, but at an additional cost of US\$100 for a five-day trip.

You will get together with other AFSers for the so-called End-of-Stay orientation in La Paz right before your departure. This one-day orientation is a time to evaluate the program, renew friendships, share experiences and prepare for your trip back home.

### **Travel**

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Bolivia, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Bolivia. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

### **Spending Money**

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. But remember that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

AFS suggests that US\$1,000 in traveler's checks or a debit card to cover spending should be sufficient for a year. The cost of schoolbooks will be covered by AFS Bolivia, although you may have to pay for your uniform.

### **Safety and Support**

Bolivia is a relatively safe country, and you should do well if you follow some of the normal precautions as in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Bolivian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Bolivia may have additional rules.

### **Health Precautions**

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Bolivia (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or accident injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

### **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

### **Program Prices**

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

## ***Country Information***

### **Geography and Climate**

Bolivia is a landlocked country roughly twice the size of France. It is bordered on the north and east by Brazil, on the south by Argentina and Paraguay and on the west by Chile and Peru.

There are five geographical regions and, because of the extreme geographical variations, Bolivia has a wide range of climates. In the highly populated *Altiplano* (highlands), a 3500m (11,480 ft.) plateau that stretches from the Peruvian border southwards to the Argentine border, the weather is cool (average 8°C/47°F). In the *Valles* (valleys), south and east of the Altiplano and where most of the agriculture is, the temperatures are milder (17°C/63°F). The *Yungas*, between the Andes and the humid Amazonian forest known as the *Chaco*, a hot, dry, impenetrable and uninhabited plain along the Paraguayan and Argentine borders, and the underdeveloped swamps and savannas of the Amazonian Basin in the northeast of the country constitute the rest of the country's geography.

La Paz, the highest city in the world, often has very cold temperatures and sometimes snow. During the dry winter period, the climate is pleasant, while the rainy summer, from November to April, is the hottest time of the year.

### **Population**

The population of Bolivia numbers 8 million. Metropolitan La Paz has a population slightly less than one million. Fifty-five percent of Bolivians are native Americans, 30% are *mestizos* (people of mixed descent) and 15% are of European descent, mostly Spanish.

### **Language**

Spanish is the official language of Bolivia, yet only 60-70% of the people actually speak it and often only as a second language, since *Quechua* (an Incan language) and *Aymará* (a pre-Inca language) are widely spoken.

### **Government**

Bolivia is a republic with an elected president. The bicameral legislature is composed of the *Congreso Nacional* and the *Camara de Diputados*. La Paz is the seat of government while Sucre is the legal capital and seat of the judiciary.

### **Religion**

The majority of Bolivians profess to be Roman Catholic (95%). However, the lack of a strong clerical structure has led to a blend of Inca and *Aymará* beliefs with Christianity in the rural areas having unique rites and superstitions.

## ***Launching Your AFS Experience***

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Bolivia, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Bolivia and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Bolivia. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Bolivian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Bolivia will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Bolivian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

### Curiously Bolivian

☀ Bolivia is named after the famous revolutionary Simon Bolivar who fought for independence from Spain.

☀ Although Bolivia is not touched by any sea, it features the largest *playa* (beach) in the world: 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4,600 mi<sup>2</sup>). It is the "dry lake" of Salar de Uyuni.

### How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student Age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y 6m	
Country date	Size	1,098,580 km <sup>2</sup> , 428,446 mi <sup>2</sup>
	Population	8,445,134
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Democracy
Currency	Peso Boliviano, divided into 100 centavos	
Useful websites	<a href="http://gorp.com/gorp/location/latamer/bolivia/basic_b.htm">http://gorp.com/gorp/location/latamer/bolivia/basic_b.htm</a> <a href="http://www.Lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_america/Bolivia">http://www.Lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_america/Bolivia</a>	
AFS Bolivia website	<a href="http://afs.org/partners/bolhome.htm">http://afs.org/partners/bolhome.htm</a>	

### Why Bolivia

☀ You will have the chance to travel with your Local Chapter and participate in two wonderful national activities.

☀ Bolivia features many breathtaking views.

☀ Warm Bolivian families are typically large and extended.

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>