

# Bolivia

## GEOGRAPHY

Bolivia is a land-locked country straddling the Andes Mountains in the centre of South America and it's slightly larger than NSW. It shares borders with Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile and Peru. The western part of Bolivia consists of rugged mountains and a highland plateau, while the eastern half is dominated by bio-diverse Amazonian rainforest. The climate varies from cold and dry in the highland plateau, to Mediterranean around Lake Titicaca, to tropical near the border with Brazil.

## PEOPLE

Over two-thirds of Bolivia's 10 million people identify as indigenous, predominantly Quechua and Aymara, but including smaller ethnic groups as well. The main religions are Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but Incan and animist spirituality remain strong.

The main cities are La Paz (the highest capital in the world), El Alto, Santa Cruz, Oruro, Sucre and Cochabamba. The official languages are Spanish, Quechua and Aymara.

## HISTORY

Bolivia has a rich history that extends prior to the Spanish invasion of the 16th century. The first significant populations in the area were associated with the Tiwanaku civilisation that reigned from the 5th to the 11th century. The Inca's dominated western Bolivia after the decline of the Tiwanaku to the early 16th century.

The Spanish ruled the territory then known as Upper-Peru from 1524 and it was controlled from Lima. Numerous indigenous sieges and revolts in the late 18th century culminated in independence in 1825. The country was named after the revolutionary Simon Bolivar.

Wars with neighbouring countries and internal power struggles meant the country was unstable for much of the 19th century and well into the 20th century.



We aim to promote children's rights and ensure they have a voice in decisions affecting their lives.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

The unpopularity of liberal economic policies established since 1982 resulted in mass protests and demonstrations, some turning violent. The infamous Cochabamba Water War of 2000 was a direct result of these policies and helped sweep Evo Morales to power in 2006. Since then the country has been focused on indigenous rights and improving the population's living conditions.

## ECONOMY

Bolivia is one of the poorest and least developed countries in Latin America. The economic liberalism of the 1980s left the country in crisis that lasted until the mid-90s. Since 2006, some industries have been re-nationalised, yet the economy continues to grow at the highest rate of Latin American economies.

It has large mineral and natural gas reserves, including the world's largest lithium deposits. Agriculture employs nearly half the workforce, although most of this is on small-scale plots of land. Large soy plantations have largely covered the grasslands of the southeast.

The illegal refining of the coca leaf into cocaine is a large industry in Bolivia (second only to Colombia) and contributes to many socio-political problems in the east of the country.

Despite rapid growth in recent years, nearly 60 percent of the population live in poverty. Bolivia has the world's seventh-most unequal distribution of wealth.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

It's estimated that over half of Bolivians live in overcrowded housing that does not meet minimum living standards. Traditional Bolivian homes are built with adobe (clay and straw) and have dirt floors. But these houses are prone to pest infestation, including the bug that transmits the Chagas disease, which can be fatal.

Home for urban Bolivians is often a small, plain brick house surrounded by poorly maintained roads. Electricity reaches most households, but water and gas do not. Many people have to buy water from privately-run water trucks. As people continue to migrate to the cities, already-stressed urban infrastructure is increasingly unable to cope.

Supermarkets are rare outside La Paz and Santa Cruz and most food is purchased from the local market. Almost a quarter of the population is malnourished, including seven percent of children under five years old, and childhood anaemia is common.

Less than half of Bolivia's families have adequate sanitation. Diseases such as dysentery, malaria and tuberculosis are common, and the country now has one of the highest infant mortality rates in South America. During the winter, children are prone to severe respiratory infections, and many families have no money for medical treatment. Bolivia is reforming its health system (with the help of international aid) to help lower infant mortality and raise the population's access to health services.

Awareness of child rights is low, especially in rural areas, where it is common for children to be viewed as the property of their parents.



WorldVision is working to improve learning outcomes for Bolivian children from disadvantaged communities.

## Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	BOLIVIA	AUSTRALIA
Population	10 million	21.5 million
Urban population	66.6%	89.1 %
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$4,357	\$38,692
Population with an improved water source	86%	100%
Adult literacy rate	90.7%	99%
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	11.7%	0
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	54	6
Life expectancy at birth	66.3 years	81.9 years

Source: United Nations Development Programme  
Human Development Report 2010

## EDUCATION

Primary school is compulsory in Bolivia and attendance rates are very high. However, many children drop out towards the end of primary school and only half of eligible children enrol in secondary school. Many Bolivian children are often sent out to work to generate income for their families where they often face exploitation. UNICEF estimates that only 39 percent of working children continue their schooling. Illiteracy rates, especially among indigenous women, continue to be high.

The government spends a high percentage of its budget on education but much of this is eaten up by inefficient bureaucracy. Bolivia has many public and private universities, but the costs involved are out of reach for many of the country's poor.

## WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN BOLIVIA

- works to improve education quality and learning outcomes through teacher training, learning support study groups and by strengthening school parent committees;
- works with families, children and community protection networks to reduce incidences of violence in the household, as well as school- and gang-related violence;
- creates networks of youth and children and builds their capacity to voice their concerns in their neighbourhoods and to influence public policy by negotiating with municipal authorities;
- works with partners to provide vocational training and entrepreneurship activities for youth and family members to increase their employment and income generating opportunities;
- increases the resilience and preparedness of communities to face natural disasters and to reduce vulnerabilities.

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