

# ¡BIENVENIDOS A BOLIVIA! WELCOME TO BOLIVIA!



## INFORMATION FOR ARRIVING PARTICIPANTS



*Conectando Vidas, Compartiendo Culturas*

## FOREWARD

Dear AFS participants,

Soon you will start your intercultural experience in Bolivia. This guide shall provide you with useful information about the Bolivian lifestyle and culture as well as help you with your adjustment progress once you arrive. Please read everything carefully and if you want to, print this document and bring it with you. **Also remember to bring the \$us 550 for your visa extension process!**

**You will be arriving at El Alto International Airport. This is located close to La Paz City. No matter what time you arrive, please make sure that you have warm clothes on you -especially if you arrive early in the morning or at night- because the climate is quite cold around the airport area.**

We are looking forward meeting you!

Sincerely yours,

*YOUR HOSTING TEAM*

## 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many people who have visited Bolivia have a favorable impression of its customs and diverse geography but this impression is only superficial. As an AFS participant you have a unique opportunity to experience our culture directly through daily interaction with our people.

This experience will require much effort on your part to make it a satisfying one. As a stranger in our land, you must be willing to accept (what will seem to you) unusual social situations. You will be able to observe closely the customs of the Bolivian people. You will profit most from the experience if you come with an open mind, good will, and a minimum of preconceived ideas.

A positive attitude is particularly important and speaking openly will always help. If you try to avoid bringing a problem out into the open, it may well become more serious than it actually is. Do not feel discouraged if the response to your openness is not immediate, in the long run, you will find that it is the best approach. When you make mistakes, as you are bound to do because of language problems and cultural differences, you will win a lot of hearts by apologizing sincerely (if necessary) and reverting to good humor.



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There may be many difficult and tiring times ahead of you and during these times your stay may seem very long, however, these difficult times will soon be overshadowed by the countless wonderful experiences you will have.

It is important to share your own personal viewpoints; it is this exchange of ideas and opinions that greatly benefits both the AFS participant and the hosting community. Always keep in mind that during your stay abroad you will not live in a dream world. You will be leading your own

life abroad and will encounter the typical daily problems one always encounters in life. *Do not expect your experience to consist of sight-seeing trips and relaxation*, but be ready to enjoy the normal, daily life, which your host family lives. From everyday life comes the greatest experience.

Do not forget that Bolivia is a very different country than that you may be accustomed to and that consequently many things will be new and different. Don't forget that the reason for your coming to Bolivia is to see what life is like in other places and to get to know it and understand it.

Remember everywhere you go you will go as a representative of your home country and AFS. People you meet will form an opinion about your country and our organization from how you behave. Due to this you should be tactful and diplomatic. Try not to judge things according to your first impression or without analyzing the reasons for the difference.

With patience, understanding and an open mind you will learn a great deal about Bolivia, yourself, and most important, about humanity.

## 2. ABOUT AN AFS PARTICIPANT

### 2.1 PREPARING FOR YOUR EXPERIENCE

From the time you learn that you have received a placement in Bolivia until you leave, you should spend as much time as possible preparing for your experience by learning more about your own country and yourself first.

Do you really know your own country? Are you able to express your opinions clearly? And do you base your reasoning on facts or beliefs? It would be unfortunate for you to discover once you are in Bolivia that your opinions are not your own but rather those of your family, friends or teachers. So, before you start to research Bolivia and South America, take the time to evaluate your own beliefs. Try to create a solid basis for your present ideas. After you have done some thinking about this, then try to learn as much as you can about Bolivia.



Write to your host family as soon as you can. Don't be shy! They will be very anxious to learn more about you.

Knowing about AFS will also help. Get to know AFS in your own country as we share the same ideals everywhere, the only difference is that each country has its own unique customs.

It is convenient that you bring with you some material about your country and your customs because you will probably be asked to make a few presentations to your host community.

## 2.2 PARTICIPANT ADJUSTMENT

Most of the adaptation effort must be made by *you*. The family, the school, the university, the project, even AFS are only supporters in this learning experience.

At first, you will feel like a new born baby. You will need to learn all over again, how to act and even how to talk. *Don't panic! Don't get upset!* Take your time, ask for help and soon you will feel yourself growing sure of yourself in your new surroundings.

You should show yourself as you really are, have an open mind, and show your feelings and affection openly. Expressing who you are and how you feel is an important part of your adaptation process.

One significant adjustment all participants must make is that of the family unit life style. This includes such aspects as:

*The Bolivian family has lunch and/or dinner together  
Bolivian parents want to know where and with whom their children are at all times  
Parents are very protective and will most likely impose curfews  
For most Bolivian families the Sunday is preserved for the family as a family day,  
The "día de la familia", where time is spent together*

In some countries a person who is 18 years old is considered, accepted or treated as an adult. However, in Bolivia a person who is 18 years old is considered, treated and accepted only as a young-adult with all the regulations and limitations that this implies. Some AFS participants have felt their host families to be too protective and most have had more independence at a younger age in their home countries.

These feelings are attributable to "culture-bound" concepts of independence. In some cultures the word "independence" means doing things without the parents. Bolivian parents, however, like to be involved in their children's activities, and some participants therefore, feel that they are not permitted their independence. This situation is sometimes mistakenly interpreted as a



lack of trust on the part of the parents towards the participant, and he/she may find it difficult to adjust to a family-oriented and stricter social lifestyle. This all depends on your general attitude and willingness to become part of the host family and community.

Bolivian youth is used to and expect to have controlled independence, which means asking for permission from parents when going out of the house, telling them whom they will be with, at what time should they expect them to be home, accepting and obeying house/family rules and curfews. More than an imposed obligation, it is a way of sharing their lives with the rest of the family, and it also shows that the others worry and care for them.

All youngsters are expected to have good manners. Affection is shown when coming or going, with a greeting and a kiss, you will be expected to show the same kind of behavior. If a young adult invites a friend over to the house, the whole family may entertain him/her. Friends are shared, as well as many material possessions. Closed doors may be considered impolite or may suggest that one is angry or depressed.

Surely you will find a great leap from the standard of life of the poor to that of the affluent, and because they live near one another it is something impossible to ignore. It is a fact of life that is not hidden or disguised, so one must be prepared for it.

The AFSer coming to Bolivia should be prepared to live under different conditions to what they are possibly used to, sometimes the host family will not have the modern facilities and comforts to which you might be accustomed. There is no central heating or air conditioning in most houses, most homes do not have electric dishwashers, etc., but there is love, communication and hospitality.

The students will not receive any kind of allowance while on the program. The AFS National Office in your country will advise you about the appropriate amount of money you should bring along; however, we must strongly recommend you to be sensitive to the economic situation of your future host community and the spending habits that your host family and community may have.

Our food might be quite different from yours; a bit spicy, and very tasty. Sometimes the change in food and climate affects the newcomer. After a while you will love it!

## 2.3 AT THE BEGINING

We would like to give you some phrases and thoughts to think and meditate about, some questions to answer for yourself. We hope that they will help you think about some different issues that will leave you better prepared for this coming year or semester:



*“Will I have to be patient with my host family and host community or will they have to be patient with me?”*

*“To what extent are independence and individuality important to me? To what extent will these aspects affect my experience, positively or negatively?”*

*“I am not used to be demanding and selfish, am I?”*

*“From what I read of my host family’s application, what do they expect from me? What do I expect from them? What are my fears, questions and doubts?”*

*“What should I be prepared for in order to make this experience a great one for me and my new family?”*

For AFS there is no “perfect/ideal participant”, neither is there a “perfect/ideal host family”. However, when selecting participants and families we do look for people who are adaptable, patient, open to new things and, most importantly, who are willing and eager to learn by sharing the lives of others, joining together to demonstrate and observe the purpose of AFS:

### **“Peace and Understanding through Intercultural Learning Experiences”**

Finally, as your friends and relatives will probably want to communicate with you. However, if they wish to call you, we advise that they call once a month and on important occasions (e.g. birthdays, Christmas). Too frequent phone calls/Skype calls during the first few months always create difficulties in the adaptation process. Also you should only talk at fixed times of the week (e.g. every first Sunday of the month).

## 3. GENERAL ASPECTS OF BOLIVIA

### 3.1 GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Bolivia, located in the heart of South America, is a land of contrasts. Its privileged position allows for sharing borders with five Latin American countries. Thus, Bolivia is a natural “bridge”, connecting the Andean regions with the Amazon and the Rio de la Plata basins.

Bolivia also constitutes a geographic synthesis of the continent itself. It boasts a variety of climates and landscapes: the majestic snow-covered peaks of the Andes; cold high plateaus



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dotted with beautiful lakes and vast salt marshes; picturesque and fertile valleys skirted by mountains; arid plains; and exuberant Amazon jungles fed by navigable rivers.

The beauty and diversity of this country's landscapes are further enhanced by the marked contrasts found among its different people. Heirs to glorious and ancient cultures, many of these groups are still steeped in centuries-old traditions – as is made evident by their diverse languages, their uniquely colorful fashion, their dances and music, and a veritable treasure of native folklore. More than any other Latin American country, Bolivia has managed to preserve the purity of its ancestral roots – making a visit to this enchanted land a retrospective adventure in time and space.

## 3.2 DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED CITIES IN BOLIVIA

### *The Highlands*

#### La Paz

Residence of the Bolivian government and center of the Aymara world. The city of La Paz is located at an altitude of 3,600 meters above sea level in a natural basin surrounded by mountains. The average temperature is 12° C.

It is the country's largest city having a population of 2.5 million; it is considered the center of industry, commerce, culture and politics. It is completely different from any city in the world. La Paz has a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, due to the many country folk who come to this city to work in factories. La Paz is a truly picturesque city, with deeply rooted traditions that date back to its Aymara and Inca past. The city's diverse cultural influences are reflected in its many gorgeous old homes, impressive churches, charming markets and modern buildings. The indigenous population still wears the colorful traditional dressing that was customary during the colonial era which contrasts with the sober dressing of the business men and women.

#### Oruro

Located in the center of the Bolivian *Altiplano*, beneath the slopes of a hill at an altitude of 3700 meters above sea level, it has always been a mining center for tin, silver and wolfram. A town with a population of 190,000, Oruro has a University of several departments with a particularly strong engineering program. People are very friendly and conservative and the weather is usually cold and dry, with average temperatures of 10°C. This city is rich in cultural history and is called Bolivia's folklore capital because of the carnival festival, known throughout the world as one of the most colorful and traditional in South America. The main dances in this celebration are the "Diablada ", the "Morenada" and the "Caporales" that fascinate tourists not only with their dance, but also with their elaborate costumes.

#### Potosí

The highest city in the world at 4100 meters above sea level, with 150,000 inhabitants, Potosí represents a monument of two cultures; Spanish and Incas who clashed for three centuries. It



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is a charming city located in the cold southern *Altiplano*. Potosí maintains some curved cobblestone streets and a very rich culture referring to the colonial days. Thirty temples in the complicated Aymara-baroque style, with their gold covered altars show the mixture of foreign and native art during the 16th century. In small plazas you can still see the original fountains that delivered water to the City. People are proud of their ancestors and a bit reserved at first, but very friendly and warm. Due to tradition they are very conservative. Built along the side of a mountain (Sumaj Orcko or Silver Mountain), Potosí was a privileged part of the Inca Empire. Later, when the Europeans arrived, it became the most coveted mining center in the Spanish Empire and the economic miracle of that period. It is said that from the amount of silver extracted during colonial times, a bridge of pure silver could have been built from Bolivia to Spain.

### ***The Valleys***

#### Cochabamba

This city, located in a nice fertile valley at the foot hills of the Andes is partly surrounded by a branch of mountains, at an altitude of 2550 meters above sea level. This city resembles many of Spain's small cities. It is mostly flat, and has a rather nice climate all year round. It has a population of approximate 700,000 inhabitants. Because of its location in the agricultural belt of Bolivia, it is considered the "bread basket" of the country. Cochabamba's inhabitants are well known for their fondness of folkloric music and poetry. Cochabamba is a city with many attractions and its cultural activities are mostly guided towards the folkloric traditions. Here good local dishes are at their best because all the food is grown locally, vegetables as well as meat of all kinds are the freshest of anywhere. Cochabamba boasts a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds though their common characteristic is their conservative nature.

#### Tarija

A small city of about 90,000 people with a very attractive colonial architectural style. It is located at an altitude of 1850 meters above the sea level on a valley surrounded by mountains, near the Guadalquivir River. Warm temperature averaging 25°C.

Tarija is often referred to as the red city because of the terra-cotta tiles on the roofs of the houses in a Spanish style. Its main source of income is agriculture with different fruits and vegetables growing abundantly due to the warm temperatures. There is also a vast wine production. People are friendly and outgoing with a good sense of humor. They are true lovers of music. The people in this city are very conservative.

#### Sucre

It is Bolivia's official capital and seat of the Supreme Court of Justice. For centuries it has been considered one of South America's centers of learning and is still the home of the second oldest university in America: *San Francisco Xavier* (founded in 1624). It is located in a lovely valley with mountains enclosing it. This city of 150,000 inhabitants situated at an altitude of 2900 meters above sea level. Sucre is known as the "white city" because of the colonial style in which most of the houses were built; with heavy wooden doors and balconies, old churches



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and beautiful gardens not touched by progress. People are friendly and gentle. Sucre is a very conservative, quiet and peaceful city. Temperatures average 22° C.

### *The Lowlands*

#### Santa Cruz

Located on the Bolivian low plains at an altitude of 418 meters above sea level, this tropical city shares hot tropical weather and the coolness of the savannas. Temperatures average around 25°C.

It is the second largest city in Bolivia with a population of over a 1,000,000 and boasts many industries and attractions. Due to the proximity of the Pirai River, the city is located in a sand area. It maintains its colonial tropical charm with covered elevated sidewalks. People are open, warm, friendly and talkative. Santa Cruz is a mixture of colonial heritage and a large complex modern city that is rapidly growing because of agriculture and oil industries. It has many cultural activities.

#### Pando

Cobija is the capital of the youngest department in Bolivia, Pando. A small, beautiful city with abundant natural resources. It has approximately 56,000 inhabitants. It can also be characterized as a tropical zone with average temperatures of 28 Celsius. Cobija lies at an elevation of 280 meters above sea level and has a tropical and rainy climate. Because it sits on a curve of the Acre River, Cobija affords visitors opportunities to enjoy the natural attractions as well as several areas for fishing, relaxation and adventure tourism. The town rambles over a series of hills, giving it a certain charm. The city offers virgin forests to bird-watching and large rivers for fishing.

#### Beni

The city of Trinidad (its full name being La Santísima Trinidad) is the capital city of the Department of Beni. The city is located at an altitude of 237 meters above sea level. It has a tropical and humid climate, regularly hot all year-round. Its temperature ranges between 22 and 28 Celsius. Most of the rain falls during the summer, however winter also has a good measure of precipitation. Trinidad was originally a small Jesuit town but is now a large city with over 100,000 inhabitants. The country's region is forested heavily and many of the large rivers, which are all tributaries of the Amazon River, run through Beni.

## 3.3 GOVERNMENT

After almost 300 hundred years of submission and slavery under the Spanish colonizers the independent country of Bolivia was founded on the 6th of August, 1825. It has had 200 governments in 183 years of independence. Bolivia has been under the democratic system for several years now and the current government is a strong and solid democracy. Elections were held in December 2005, were Evo Morales Ayma the first indigenous president of world's history was democratically elected with an outstanding majority. In 2009 he was reelected.

However many upper-class people, especially in the east of the country are against him. To the date, Evo Morales is still the President of Bolivia.

Unfortunately, Bolivia has become known to foreigners as one of the centers of production of cocaine. In order to clarify any misunderstanding and respond clearly to any fears that participants or their parents might have about our country because of this situation, we would like to mention the following facts:

- ❖ Drug production and trafficking is the result of bad economic situation that forces some people to work in such an illegal trade; “not everybody is involved in it”.
- ❖ The production only occurs hidden and in non-populated areas.
- ❖ In Bolivia there is no risk that drug dealers will harm any citizen or destroy private property as they do it in other countries.
- ❖ Many years ago the government formed a special police/army corps responsible for fighting against illegal drug production and trafficking.
- ❖ Trafficking is usually done to outside countries not locally.

### 3.4 RELIGION

Roman Catholic	80 %
Protestant	15 %
Others: Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Jews,...	5%

### 3.5 ECONOMY

Traditionally mining has been the major economic activity of Bolivia. The agro-industrial sector and the petroleum industry, principally in Santa Cruz, have experienced a substantially high growth and non-traditional exports have been increasing.

## 4. CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Bolivia’s culture is based on a mixture of Spanish and Indigenous heritage. The blend of the two ethnic groups and cultures maintains traces of both, resulting in a unique and rich mixture of beliefs, customs, and values.



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The population is comprised of 60% Bolivian Indigenous, 40% Mixed (Mestizos). Some people live in the conditions similar to their indigenous ancestors (especially in the rural areas), reflecting their ancient traditions and styles of dressing, while others have a more modern style of life. The Indigenous and Mestizos are of the Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní ancestry.

Although the Spanish tried to impose their values, culture and costumes, as well as their language and religion, native traditions have been preserved, and even now they remain strong and show the richness of their own cultural values.

While the primary language in Bolivia is Spanish, most of the rural locals speak their native tongues Quechua, Aymara or Guaraní and are most bilingual, as they speak Spanish as well.

Anyway there are a lot of Bolivian slang words with native language origin.

While authentic music created with the native flute, pipes and small guitar-like instruments (charangos) is enjoyed by many on holidays and special occasions, classical and contemporary (latin) music is also common in daily life.

The majority of people belong to the middle-low socio-economic level. Economic class differences exist. When discrimination occurs it is determined by class differences rather than by race.

Still it could happen that indigenous with strong traditional roots might appear rude or disrespectful against white(r) foreigners. It might be explained through the history of Bolivia under the authority of the Spanish colonizers. When you experience this situation you will have to remind yourself that their behavior is not directed against you as an individual but a symbolic way to express their dislike against the former history and the unjust they experienced e.g. through the Spanish colonizers. (In generally this does not happen often, so do not be worried.)

The people in the highlands are typically considered more introverted, serious, hardworking and less talkative than those who live in the lowlands, who are often seen as more open, relaxed, and carefree people. Most Bolivians have a very relaxed attitude about everything, especially time and punctuality.

Bolivia is ideal for those students interested in knowing and sharing indigenous culture, their traditions, folklore and ethnicity. Bolivia offers incredible cultural diversity.

## 5. COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LIFE

It is difficult to describe the different communities in Bolivia because they are all so diverse. For example, daily life in La Paz contrasts greatly with that of smaller cities. A fast pace (at least for Bolivians) and congestion characterize this large city. A slower pace characterizes life in the smaller cities. However, the openness of the people and closeness of families is typical of any part of Bolivia.



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This open expression of affection may make some people feel uncomfortable at first, but it automatically helps to break down the barriers that people tend to build around themselves. In all areas it is important to share in the customs of the country in order to avoid offending anyone. Good manners are highly valued and elder people are treated with respect. People are very polite and may accept an uneasy situation rather than openly criticize it.

Shaking hands, embracing and kissing on the cheek are often expected when meeting a friend; as well as saying “Buenos Días” upon entering a store, taxi or the home.

It should be mentioned that most Bolivian families and communities are characterized by a strong sense of religious and moral values, thus being considered by many as conservative or traditionalist.

Family life is the backbone of our society. Most families include extended relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and others (brother/sister in law). A large extended family provides protection, emotional security, guidance, mutual support, and financial assistance for its members.

Parents generally join together in making decisions concerning important family matters, and the mother is often more influential in family matters. Parents are rather strict and feel very responsible for the well-being of their children and are supportive about their children’s studies. Although children’s opinions are listened to, the parents always make final decisions about important matters, and what they say is respected and followed.

Most families are still patriarchal, but, in part because of the economic situation, more and more women are working and there are more single parent households than there have been traditionally.

As in most Latin American countries, family life is very important. Bolivian families are very close-knit and it is uncommon for children to move away from home before they get married (or even after marriage). It is rare for children and teenagers who are legally under-age (under 21 years old) to work outside their home, or live on their own, but once they are grown up they often support their parents financially.

Meal times are a very important part of the family sharing life-style too, thus usually the whole family has lunch and/or dinner together. Both are rather long meals and give the family the opportunity to talk about everyone’s activities and share the events of the day.

Most social events rotate around the family and extended relatives. Teenagers and younger children enjoy doing things with their parents and participate in all family activities. Children do not see this as an obligation but rather a part of the family lifestyle. Weekends are usually spent together with the family.



As the children depend so much on their parents, their independence is somewhat limited. When they do go out, it is normal to inform their parents where they are going, with whom and when they will be back. Going to discos, parties, movies and playing sports (Soccer, Basketball, and Volleyball) are all popular.

Participants should observe local community standards. Due to the conservative nature of Bolivian families and communities, sexual contact with boy/girlfriends is not a usual practice and is definitely not encouraged.

## 5.1 YOUR NEW FAMILY

By the time you meet your new family, you will know something about them, even if only a little. You will have seen their application, and if your placement was made early enough, you will have had time to exchange some letters with the family.

Whatever impressions you may have gathered about your host family and their community before your arrival will probably be different from the reality that greets you.

When you meet your new family, don't feel like a guest. The first important step you will have to take is that of becoming a member of the family, with all the responsibilities involved. We will ask your family to tell you about special "house rules" which they will want you to follow, such as night-hours, making your own bed, washing your clothes and keeping your room tidy all the time. We think you will appreciate knowing these from the beginning rather than finding out later.

If you are placed with a host family where there are sisters and brothers, you may find that a great deal of maturity is required on your part. Be patient if they sometimes are not able to fulfill their part of this unique social situation. Above all, behave yourself in a brotherly or sisterly fashion towards them and set an appropriate example. Sentimental relationships are absolutely prohibited with host brothers or sisters.

Should misunderstandings arise, try to clear them up at once by talking about them. An open, respectful conversation will help a lot. Never hesitate to ask your family, whatever the question may be.

Remember that *you have not come to Bolivia as a tourist. Sightseeing is not the purpose of you being in our country.* So if your family takes you on trips, be grateful for it. But if they do not, do not ask for it. You will have the opportunity to come back in the future to see what you didn't see during your stay, but the opportunity to live the experience with a host family for a year will not likely be yours again.

## 5.2 BEHAVIOR AND LOCAL CUSTOMS

It will not take you very long to notice that the Latin temperament is somewhat different from that of other countries. It is not difficult for a foreigner to unintentionally offend someone, most likely by ignoring the courtesies and customs of the country.

Bolivians never fail to shake hands and in certain cases embrace when meeting someone or when seeing an acquaintance on the street. This includes women and children. It is also considered polite to say “*Buenos días*”, “*Buenas tardes*” or “*Buenas noches*” whenever you go into a store, taxi, or generally before beginning to deal with people. You will be received much more warm-hearted and you will feel much less as a stranger if you do as we Bolivians do.

Do not forget the hellos “*Hola*” and good-byes “*Chau*” (Ciao) and the how-are-you “*¿Cómo estas?*”. Bolivians say “*Gracias*” after a meal, after a visit to another home, etc. in general more often than you may be accustomed to. When asking for something always say please “*Por favor*”. Bolivians are not clock-watchers. Do not expect punctuality and the efficiency you may be used to. The relaxed atmosphere is actually quite enjoyable.

Use discretion when taking photographs. Some people are very shy about it, and in some parts of the country (especially in the country-side), you may find people who are superstitious about it or simply dislike it. It is always better to ask for permission.

Social life will depend on your hosting region. Get-togethers among friends are common. You will enjoy the everyday life in your community. Keep your eyes open and do not miss any opportunities being offered to you.

## 6. SCHOOL PROGRAM

The education in Bolivia consists of 12 years of schooling (primary and secondary), after this time the student (17 years old) graduates from high school and is entitled to attend university.

The school year starts around the first week of February and ends around the middle of November (depending on the region). There are 15 days in June/July for winter vacation. The end-of-year vacation lasts until February.

Students attend school from Monday to Friday (very few will have classes on Saturdays). Each school will have different schedules, but generally the school day lasts from 08:00 to 13:00 with one or two recesses. Therefore, students do not have lunch at school.



Most schools require all students to take 12 to 14 mandatory subjects in a rotating schedule. The subjects that are mandatory in every school under the current education system are math, physics, natural science, literature, art, religion, computing, chemistry, social studies, philosophy, languages, physical education and music.

Teachers change classrooms for virtually all classes, with students remaining in the same classroom and students generally have the same classmates throughout the year.

The student-teacher relationship is generally very formal, calling for a great deal of respect. Not many schools have psychologists as counselors; however a teacher can also fulfill this role.

### **Uniforms**

Most schools require uniforms to be worn and in some cases a physical education uniform is required as well. The cost of the uniform should not be more than US\$ 40-60. You will need to purchase your school uniform upon arrival in Bolivia, if needed.

### **Graduation Uniform**

Several classes buy a special uniform which is worn in special occasions during the graduation year. This may cost up to US\$ 100. You will also need to be prepared to make this payment if you are in graduation class.

### **Field Trips**

Often an end-of-the-year class trip is planned and several classes travel to different cities, inside or outside of Bolivia. These trips are chaperoned by parents and school teachers and vary in duration (1-3 weeks). Participation is optional. AFS students are expected to pay for this trip if they want to participate. The cost depends of the trip arrangements.

Some schools offer after-school activities such a choirs, band, music, dance, and sports. It should be noted that P.E. is practiced by all students as part of physical education classes (gym). Being part of a school team (soccer, volleyball, etc) will demand extra-time and after school practices.

### **Grading System**

The grading system goes from 10 to 100 which means,

100	excellent	A+
85	very good	A
75	good	B
60	average-grade	C
51	passing grade	D
Under 51	failing	F

### **Diplomas and grade certificate**



Depending on the school, the student's performance, and whether he/she has completed all the schools requirements, he/she might receive a certificate of grades at the end of her school year in Bolivia.

### **You and your host School**

First of all we want to remind you that you will have to attend your host school as a normal student. You will be expected to attend regularly and to work very hard.

The first few months will be difficult while you are learning Spanish, but you will discover that school is a perfect environment for learning about our culture and people. It is there where you will make most of your friends.

After the first few months you will be required to fulfill the academic requirements that the school demands of you, including examinations and homework.

Although the educational system here will undoubtedly be different to that of your own country, we ask you to try not to compare the two systems.

## 7. COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS

For participants of community service in Bolivia for a semester or a year program, there are various projects around Bolivia of which they can decide to participate. Every city or local chapter works with several institutions or NGO's that do some kind of community service. Our local volunteers have contact with these places and will accommodate the participants according to previous experience or personal interest. For example there is a fairly big NGO called Alalay that works with children who live on the street. Like this, there are several options for the volunteer who is interested in working in our community.

For an AFS volunteer, socializing will be more difficult in the sense that they will go to work and have colleagues rather than classmates. It depends very much on the volunteer to participate and get involved in the society through family or the project in order to meet new people and understand Bolivian society.

Projects will take up a lot of time from the volunteer leaving few time for relaxation or pleasure, take in mind that coming to Bolivia as a volunteer, means working very hard in order to help people.

You will benefit tremendously from the experience of working with the less economically advantaged as well as getting to know in depth our society. It is important to mention that volunteers have to put in a lot of their own ideas and imagination to help the projects. Usually



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the basic needs are fulfilled but with some imagination great changes and innovations can be achieved.

Volunteers will also stay with host families. This will be somewhat more difficult for you since you are probably older in age, nevertheless, in order to have a complete Bolivian experience you need to live with a host family.

Keep in mind that projects are usually located in the outskirts, because that's where their beneficiaries are located. It's quite common to take a 30-45 minute bus to get there.

The objectives of the program include the following:

- Gain an overview of Bolivian development
- Participate in cultural/educational/social activities
- Learn about Bolivian cultural through home stay
- Develop skills and expertise
- Apply theoretical and practical knowledge
- Learn a new and useful language

Some language training will be provided; nevertheless participants should have at least a basic working knowledge of Spanish prior to departure. This will allow smoother adaptation in the first few weeks and months. The language classes will be held in small groups with other AFS participants in the host communities.

Volunteers usually begin their work at the project one to two weeks after arrival, generally when they feel comfortable and when they are able to communicate in Spanish.

### Projects that AFS Bolivia offers

AFS Bolivia has a large pool of potential projects where volunteers can choose from by indicating their working area preference. We can offer a high number of projects in the area of Social Structures, in the area of Health, the area of Environment, Art and Culture and Community Development. The areas are often somehow connected with each other. In every area we cover special aspects which are:

- ❖ *Social structure:* street population, handicapped children, human rights. (The projects are connected with the areas of Education / teaching assistance and Health).
- ❖ *Health:* Health- education and -sensitization (Connected with the area of Environment).
- ❖ *Environment:* Recycling, Education, Preservation of National Parks, Climate Change.
- ❖ *Art and Culture:* Organization of events, Education and sensitization of poor population in the area of bolivian art and culture, Architecture.



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### **Your workplace**

In your project, we advise you to do the following:

- Don't be late for work or meetings, you may be asked to participate.
- Talk to your supervisor –and AFS- if you have any problems and cannot attend work one day (including health problems)
- Avoid too long coffee/tea breaks.
- Try to talk in Spanish as much as you can.

### **Work Procedures**

As a new member of the project, it is important that you, yourself try to make the best and most out of this opportunity. The more you involve yourself, the more the project will recognize your skills, abilities, experience and professional knowledge, and the more you will be appreciated. Therefore:

- Show an interest and appreciation by involving yourself in various assignments, either independently or as part of a team.
- Ask questions, come with suggestions and ideas.
- Socialize with your colleagues. A great opportunity to experience Bolivian people.
- Try to adapt to an outgoing personality. Be positive and open-minded.

## 8. UNIVERSITY PROGRAM

Participants of this program, which is a year program, will attend Bolivian schools just like a school program participant for the first five months of their stay in order to improve their Spanish (Please check point 6. SCHOOL PROGRAM).

The same rules and policies as school program participants apply to university program participants. You may choose your courses at the university freely and within many different areas. Our universities are very traditional, so, for example if a participant is interested in biology, he or she will go to the faculty of medicine of the local university. It is more difficult for a participant to take several courses in different areas rather than in a specific area because our universities are divided into different faculties which usually are not located on one single campus.

As a participant of the university program you are expected to do the examinations and projects the university demands.

AFS Bolivia works with the main Public University in each city, thus, you will be enrolled in those universities. If you wish to attend another university, AFS Bolivia can give you a hand, but it's not guaranteed that you will be accepted. Furthermore, if you wish to go to a Private University, you will have to cover the cost, since we work only with Public Universities.



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University Program participants will have long vacations between the end of the School Year and the start of the University Semester. You can plan your independent trips during this time (within the travel policies on point 10).

University Program participants are encouraged to use this free time helping their community. Once School is finished, please ask your Local Chapter to help you find a Community Service project where you can volunteer a couple of times a week. It will be a great way to get to know the “other side” of your city, plus it will be fun!

## 9. AFS BOLIVIA

AFS has been conducting its programs in Bolivia since 1957 and holds an established volunteer network throughout the country. The volunteers are composed of adults, former host parents, returnees and actual parents.

Every two years these volunteers elect a five member National Board of Directors and a Vigilance Council to lead the organization. There are numerous national meetings for the volunteers each year for training and coordination.

The National Office in La Paz has the responsibility of coordinating all AFS activities in Bolivia. The staff members work diligently to ensure that you will have a successful experience. The national office stays in touch with all Local Chapters continuously, and through this contact hosted participants receive all attention necessary. It also has an emergency phone line, fax, mobile phone and several e-mail addresses.

Keep in mind that your Local Chapter will be completely formed by volunteers.

### 9.1 YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER

AFS Bolivia consists of 9 Local Chapters: Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Santa Cruz, Sucre, Tarija, Trinidad and Cobija. The Chapters vary in size and structure; however, they all have a president, a hosting coordinator, sending coordinator and counselors.

A member of a Local Chapter has the responsibility of keeping in touch with you and your host family. Although you will also have the constant support of the Hosting Coordinator at the AFS national office in La Paz, it is important that you first speak about any problems or concerns you may have with your local chapter counselor and then your local chapter hosting coordinator before speaking to the National Office.



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## 9.2 ORIENTATIONS

AFS Bolivia will provide you with three orientations. At these orientations it is very important that you speak frankly with us. We have a lot of experience and can make suggestions that might not have occurred to you. Nothing makes us more upset than to discover at the end of your stay that some of you have been unhappy or struggling with a difficult problem and never let us know. We hope you will trust us. We will respect your confidence and be honest in our advice to you!

### **Arrival Orientation**

Upon arrival at La Paz Airport (LPB) you will be taken directly to the orientation site. You will spend the first day there with the other AFS participants before leaving to meet your host family. During this time we intend to help you to:

- Become aware of and understand the goals that AFS has set for an intercultural learning experience such as this.
- Learn about different ways to adapt to a new culture.
- Learn intercultural skills helpful during adaptation.

The Orientation will be held in English. You will also receive an introduction to Bolivian family life, friendships and the school system. AFS staff members will also explain to you all the rules and regulations which you will need to follow during your stay in Bolivia.

From the orientation site, all participants will travel to host communities by either bus or plane. Usually participants are not accompanied, unless a volunteer or staff member is also going to the same city. However, volunteers are always at the arrival areas receiving the participants.

**KEEP IN MIND THE 20 KILOGRAM WEIGHT LIMIT FOR YOUR BAGGAGE!** Students who arrive with overweight may have to pay for excess luggage when traveling to their local chapter (around US\$ 3 per kilo approx.).

### **Mid-Stay Orientation**

After you have completed approximately five months of your exchange experience you will participate in this second orientation. Mid-Stay Orientations are held in several chapters for one to two days. There you will have the opportunity to talk about your experience and ask any questions you may have. We will get to know each other better and you will receive personalized directions on how to better manage the culture shock. You will leave with more confidence to meet the challenges of the rest of your experience. This orientation is mandatory.

### **Pre-Departure Orientation (End of Stay Camp)**

After completing your experience, just before your departure from Bolivia, you will share a day or two with the same group you arrived with. This is the last get-together of your group. At this Pre-Departure Orientation we will do an evaluation of your exchange year and talk about some issues relevant to the re-adaptation in your original culture.

## 9.3 NATIONAL ACTIVITY

Besides the three orientations organized by the local chapters, you will have the opportunity to participate in at least one national activity which is organized by the national office but paid by the participants. For this reason, this is not a mandatory trip and it's up to the participants to decide if they go or not.. This activity gives you the chance of experiencing one of the most beautiful places in South America, the famous Salt Lakes in Uyuni (Salar de Uyuni).

Participation cost is usually higher than an independent trip with tourism operators. This is because AFS Bolivia arranges all the logistics for a larger group, hires professional medical staff and takes all the safety measures to ensure that participants will be safe. This trip is also a custom-made trip just for our AFS participants.

AFS Bolivia also provides a number of meetings/activities/trips in your Local Chapter. These will be organized by your Local Chapter and will give you the opportunity to visit places of interest in and around your host city.

## 10. TRAVELLING

AFS provides intercultural learning opportunities in the hosting country. AFS is not a travel agency. Therefore participants are expected to remain in their hosting chapters, and adjust to their communities during the program. For security reasons, it is necessary for us to know where to reach you at all times. That is why we urge you to comply with our policies and guidelines for travelling:

### 10.1 POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR TRAVELLING DURING THE PROGRAM

You will not be able to make independent travel arrangements during the first 3 months of your experience in Bolivia. This is because we need to make sure that you are used to how things are done in Bolivia, security issues and overall adaptation in general.

You can't travel outside the country until your full visa is done.

AFS compulsory events and school/project/university attendance must not be interrupted by the following activities:

1. TRAVELLING WITH HOSTFAMILY

If a participant is traveling with members of the host family, even if it is between cities, they should inform the local chapter. There is no need for a Travel Waiver.

2. VISITS TO OTHER LOCAL CHAPTERS

Participants from a Local Chapter may visit another Local Chapter if the participant has permission from the host family, the host Local Chapter, and an invitation from the host family in the Local Chapter he/she plans to visit. Both Local Chapters must agree to the visit and share all logistic information.

3. SCHOOL/FIELD TRIPS

Permission from host parents and the Local Chapter is required for travel activities within Bolivia that are approved school/field trips. If this trip is outside the country a natural parent's authorization (Travel Waiver) is required. The student must provide AFS Bolivia, through the Local Chapter, with information regarding dates, itinerary, accommodation, and emergency telephone numbers.

4. TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF BOLIVIA

Travelling outside of Bolivia for underage participants is only permitted with members of the host family. Participants of Legal Age can travel outside Bolivia, provided the trip is accepted by the Host Family, the Local Chapter and only if it's not going to interfere with school/university/project. A Travel Waiver from your country of origin is requested.

All participants will have the chance to spend a total of 20 days on independent travels. Once that limit has been reached, no more independent travel permissions will be granted. Please plan your trips accordingly.

### **INFORMATION TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF AFS BOLIVIA**

The information about all journeys by participants during the program must be given firstly to your Local Chapter, they will forward the information to the National Office. The information requested is: duration and reason for the trip, travel arrangements, addresses and phone numbers, contact persons in the city being visited. Same thing applies for trips outside Bolivia

## 11. AFS RULES

This is a list of rules that must be strictly followed by all participants. If any of these rules are broken AFS Bolivia reserves the right to take the appropriate action such as sending the participant home.

- **ABSOLUTELY ALL NON-MEDICAL DRUG USE OR POSSESSION IS PROHIBITED.**  
The use or possession of drugs is not allowed by AFS, unless medically prescribed. The possession or use of drugs is illegal, and it must be understood that AFS and its participants have no immunity from the laws regarding drugs. Any AFS participant found to be involved in drug use will be immediately returned to his/her home country.
- **YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO HITCH-HIKE.**  
Hitch-hiking is potentially very dangerous and is not permitted for AFS participants under any circumstances.
- **NO DRIVING.**  
You must not drive a car, motorcycle, scooter or any other motorized vehicle while you are in Bolivia, regardless of the fact that you may have a license at home.
- **NO EXCESSIVE CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL**  
Underage participants are not allowed to consume alcohol. Participants of Legal Age abusing alcohol consumption will risk their stay in the country.

## 12. MEDICAL MATTERS AND LIABILITY

Although the Bolivian Government only requires yellow fever immunization, it is strongly recommended that you receive measles, mumps, rubella, poliomyelitis, pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, BCG and Hepatitis B vaccinations before coming to Bolivia. You should remember to bring your international vaccination certificate with you.

As a participant of an AFS program you are covered by medical insurance which assumes the cost of all your medical expenses incurred during your stay in Bolivia (except for pre-existing conditions, dental care, eye glasses, vaccinations or routine medical check-ups, and those others specified in the "Participation Agreement").

We are responsible to your natural parents for handling any legal matters in which you might be involved. If you are involved in any automobile or other accident where there is a chance of somebody being injured or legally responsible, please do not sign anything until you have spoken with us.

### 12.1 HOW DO I GET MY MEDICAL EXPENSES REIMBURSED?

During your Arrival Orientation, you will get an AFS folder with some documents. One of this document is the medical one. There you will be able to find the Medical Centre AFS Bolivia works with in your host city.



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If you do not feel well, and you need to see a doctor you should go to the Medical Centre on the Medical Document.

You will not need to pay for this treatment

If you need to buy medicine as a result of your visit to the doctor, you will need to cover the expenses, but AFS Bolivia will reimburse you the cost. To do that, please keep all the medical receipts from the doctor and the bills from the pharmacy. You need to give these papers to your Local Chapter volunteers who will send them to the National Office to process the refund for you. These procedures will also be explained to you upon your arrival in Bolivia.

All receipts need to be named on "AFS Bolivia". When asked about AFS' Bolivia NIT number, please use the one indicated on your AFS ID card (you will get this during the first couple of weeks from your arrival)

If you have an emergency and can't reach your Local Chapter's preferred Medical Centre, you can go to the closest Medical Centre and ask to be treated there. You will have to pay for the treatment and the medicines, but you will get reimbursed by AFS afterwards (provided that you comply with your medical receipts and bills)

## 13. WHAT TO BRING?

### 13.1 CLOTHING

Since Bolivia has many different climatic zones, the clothing required depends a lot on where the participant is placed.

Participants going to the tropical areas (Santa Cruz, Trinidad, Cobija) might not need as much clothing for cold weather, but instead more light clothing for a warm and humid climate. On the other hand, participants going to the cold areas (Potosí, Oruro, La Paz) might not need clothing for warm weather but instead will need extra clothing for wintry climates. For the lowland areas, lightweight sport clothes (long sleeve shirts and light slacks) are recommended.

You should have a pair of comfortable walking shoes for use in any part of Bolivia. Walking in the cities can be difficult in a pair of high-heeled or dress shoes, since the streets and sidewalks are often slippery cobblestones. You will probably want a pair of sandals for use in the lowlands.

Formal clothing should be brought as there will always be an opportunity to attend some special occasion. For men, this would mean a pair of dress trousers and shirt, a jacket, a tie and



dress shoes. For women, a long skirt with a blouse or a nice, formal dress, and formal shoes are recommended.

If you intend to participate in all activities, bring clothes appropriate for all regions and remember that warm clothing is necessary at some point in every location. Also bring a raincoat, a bathing suit and if you want a typical dress from your country.

Be advised that you should not bring your entire wardrobe to Bolivia as you will find clothes very inexpensive here. Still, many students bring just spare items of everything or one of each item, which is not enough. We have compiled a list of the most important clothing that the student should bring along. This is the very minimum:

**MEN:**

- 1 pairs of pants
- 2 shirts
- 1 suit/formal dress and tie

**GIRLS:**

- 2 dresses/skirts/pants
- 2 blouses
- 1 formal dress

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**BOTH:**

- |                      |                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 pair of shoes      | 3 jeans                            |
| 1 pair of sneakers   | 4 t-shirts                         |
| 7 pairs of socks     | 3 sweaters                         |
| 7 pairs of underwear | 1 overcoat/raincoat/quilted jacket |

## 13.2 RECIPES

If you like to cook, bring some of your home recipes and try them in your new home. Your host family will love it. You may also want to bring some small gifts to your host family; this is always a nice gesture.

## 15. VISA

Please ask AFS in your country of origin about the documents you will need once you arrive in Bolivia, for your visa process. Failing to bring the needed documents, will delay your visa process and you will need to pay Immigration Authorities some fees for that. Furthermore, you might be requested to have the missing documents sent to you from your country of origin.

The visa process will have the help of AFS volunteers. For most of the paperwork, you will also need to be present, so it's important that you take the process seriously, be on time and don't miss the meetings. Some documents from your host family might also be needed.





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Tennis Shoes

US\$ 35.00

ENTERTAINMENT:

Cinema	US\$ 5.50
DVD Movies	US\$ 0.50
Music CDs	US\$ 0.50

*These prices may differ from place to place in Bolivia. Also, if you do not necessarily want brand clothing, you can find many cheap stores or markets, where a pair of pants will be around 15\$. For the beginning it is advisable that you take a Bolivian with you. Otherwise you might have to pay more for a product being offered in the street.*

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Now that you have read this handbook, we would ask you to think about all the points that were presented to you. Perhaps you could read it one more time. You will probably have many questions. Bring the questions with you for us to answer at the arrival orientation.

We hope that your experience in Bolivia will prove to be both exciting and deeply rewarding for you and for those sharing your experience with you.

We are looking forward to meeting you! In the meantime, write to your new family, and if you have any questions regarding your stay here, feel free to contact us!

**Just send an e-mail either in English, Spanish or German to or  
[guido.jines@afs.org](mailto:guido.jines@afs.org)  
or call us at +591-2-2415000.**

