

Being here in Bolivia for several weeks now has definitely been a learning experience. My first tip for someone also traveling to Bolivia or doing a CFHI health rotations program is to get to know yourself a little first. The biggest thing I have learned here is that Bolivians are not used to people of color who are not Latino appearing. As an Asian woman, I cannot go anywhere without being stared at. People who look like me don't usually travel here. Your identity and outward appearance can impact your safety. This is something to be very mindful of, because honestly, at times I do not feel safe because I could be targeted based on my race. And when I say I feel unsafe, I mean in a way of feeling deeply uncomfortable and unsure if I will be harassed as I walk down the street. This has happened before. One time, before 10 am, I was just doing my usual walk to the gym. I was just minding my own business, and some man in a car yelled out "Chinita" at me as it was passing by. Less than five minutes later, it happened again. This word is very much a slur, because it's a word used that's purely based on race and only for the purpose of degrading someone. And this is not the first time it has happened. So, I would say do your research before choosing a location, and come up with strategies to make yourself feel protected and safe. And obviously don't walk alone, especially at night.

Another tip is to bring lots of cash in either hundreds or fifties. I spent about a hundred per week, including weekend trips. Cash is the best way to go because changing your money into Bolivianos in cash will get you almost double the exchange rate, depending on the rate because it changes every day. Another tip concerning money is to bring far more than you think. I thought I brought enough for ten weeks, but was definitely wrong. You'll have to eat out for dinner every night, and may even need to supplement your breakfast depending on your dietary needs. You'll buy souvenirs, gifts, and end up needing to pay for more activities than you anticipate. Safe to say, it's definitely better to bring more USD than too little, because you can always take the extra back home with you.

Another tip is to bring clothing for all weathers. If you do the same 5 weeks in La Paz and 5 weeks in Tarija as I am, then you'll definitely want clothing for all kinds of weather. La Paz is freezing, and Tarija is hot. I came prepared for all different kinds of terrain and weather which has really come in handy for my weekend trips as well. Bolivia has six out of the seven possible types of climate zones, so if you're an adventurer, you're gonna want to be prepared. Also with footwear, bring good casual walking shoes, hiking boots, sandals like Tevas, and shoes for clinic. I was the only one who brought all necessary footwear for weekend excursions, whereas some other students had to buy hiking boots while here, and it was a pain to break in. To give you an idea of what I did: one weekend I was 20,000 feet in the air on a mountain, one weekend I was in a canyon and in the deepest cave in South America, one weekend I was at the salt flats, one weekend I was in the rainforest. Bolivia is great because there are so many things to do, so don't limit yourself and pack accordingly!