By Martin Zoller

Bolivia Tourism Goes Green

Since it's independence from Spain, Bolivia became famous for it's almost uncountable numbers of coups d'état. Political and economical stability was as unfruitful as growing papaya in the highlands of the Bolivian Altiplano. These facts made it very hard for both local and international investors, entrepreneurs and startups to even think of alternative technologies, infrastructure or tourism as an opportunity in Bolivia.

Altiplano

Many local and national governments are supporting green development. Like other countries, Bolivia's tourism is still growing, but the country is going in a very positive direction. It's natural and cultural heritage offers a great ground for further (green) explorations.

However, since Evo Morales came to power in 2005, things have changed in many aspects for the country. Whether you agree with his politics or not, there has been much progress especially in ecological tourism. Eco-Lodges, boutique travel agencies, organic food and holistic health centers are popping up like mushrooms all around the country.
I have been living and traveling through Bolivia for over 20 years. In all my travels, I have never seen such quick progress in such a small time. Within the last four to five years, a new vision has come to Bolivia. Without any doubt, Evo Morales, the first Indigenous President of Bolivia, helped to create this mentality. When he came into power, he celebrated with traditional indigenous rituals instead of the postcolonial tradition. He speaks a lot of PACHAMAMA or mother earth and respects the power of nature and its energies.
Over the last couple of weeks, my wife and I guided a group of 16 tourists from Switzerland and Germany through the highlands of Bolivia and Peru. Our goal was to allow our "guests" to discover Bolivia's old and new magic. We traveled on a "green" path, respecting not only traditions but also ecological rules.
One of the highlights was a bike tour of the world famous "Death Road" or Camino de las Yungas. Starting from almost 4700 meters above sea level, we biked down to 1200 meters. The trip began in the cold, snow peaked mountains and ended in the tropical jungle. Besides the pumping adrenaline you get from the ride, you cannot help but feel the connection to and devotion towards nature and all its power.
After finishing the trip down "Death Road," (don't worry, it is not as bad as it sounds. The road is now closed for public transport since a new, modern road was opened some years ago) we got our first sighting of the largest lung of the world, the Amazonas. We did not have to wait long before being introduced to the next ecological surprise. Our guides brought us for lunch and a tour at "Senda Verde".
Senda Verde is a private foundation, supported by volunteers from all around the world. The foundation takes care of wild animals that were injured by humans or little puppies and cubs whose parents were killed by hunters or in accidents. ›

Crocodiles, monkeys, snakes and all kind of birds are living in this paradise and receive a second chance in life.
In the restaurant there, you will find two kinds of menus:
One lists food options and the other shows how much money it takes to feed the animals for 3 days or more. The first menu serves for your own stomach; the second gives you the chance to donate money that will be used to fill the animal's stomach.
Back on the Altiplano, you feel like you are on a different planet but with the same magic that radiates from the Amazon. There you will find a very well taken care of cultural heritage, located at 4000 meters above sea level, the world famous city of Tiwanaku. Pre-Incan ›

ruins with two nice museums and several shops that sell indigenous handmade crafts make this trip a unique experience. Each year, on the solstice on June 21st, Shamans, Indians from tribes all around the world, and tourists from all cultures come to take part in the festivities. On that special night, people sleep in tents, cook on open fires and celebrate in music and dances from many different cultural backgrounds.

Tiwanaku can be reached from Bolivia's "capital," La Paz, by car in less than three hours.
Bolivia actually has two capitals: Sucre, the historical capital and La Paz, the political capital. At the beginning of his first legislative, Evo Morales made some efforts to bring full power back to Sucre.
Not far away from Tiwanaku, we find Lake Titicaca (Spanish: Lago Titicaca). The lake has borders with ›

Bolivia and Peru. By volume of water, it is the largest lake in South America. For Mysticals, the lake is a very special place. Its energy attracts people from all around the world who come to meditate and connect to the magical energy of this unique spot.

Not more than 10 years ago, the Bolivian side of the lake was still very poorly developed. Comfortable hotels were very rare and the

infrastructure was almost nonexistent. Today, things are completely different. Copacabana, the main town on the Bolivian side of the lake, became a tourist friendly place.
The indigenous people around the lake and on the islands close to the main island organized themselves in little cooperation's, offering healthy and ecological services.
Upon visiting Moon Island (Isla de la ›

Luna) and Sun Island (Isla del Sol), you may be surprised by the Eco-Lodges found there. Their hosts, friendly indigenous locals, offer excellent services, clean rooms and very good traditional food. One of these is the “Inca Sama Eco Lodge” on Sun Island. This is a hidden gem in the middle of nowhere. Once you are there you will not want to leave.

Close to Copacabana, we visited artificial floating islands. Again, local families built them, sharing work and income from tourism. They quickly learned that taking care of mother earth not only gives them a better future, but also creates an income by attracting tourists looking for healthy and ecological tourism. ■