

ADVANTAGE

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EMBRAER QUARTERLY
VOL 15 ➤ 2022

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An interview with Finnish explorer Patrick Degerman

RARE AIR

Bolivia is a land for explorers who appreciate raw beauty, untrodden landscapes and culinary exploits in a destination on the rise

On the South American travel circuit, Bolivia is often eclipsed by its glossier neighbors—but for those seeking under-the-radar adventure, the country is a proverbial gold mine minus the mad rush of crowds. Roughly two-thirds the size of Alaska, Bolivia knits together a varied topography of tropical rainforests, Andean highlands and the planet’s largest salt flats. Exotic birds, multi-hued lagoons, windswept plateaus, and domineering volcanoes spark excitement at every turn.

With a predominantly indigenous population, the country also offers a culture rich with tradition, color and warmth. Curious aesthetes are descending from around the world to experience the artistic and gastronomic revolution that’s happening in the capital and beyond. One could easily linger here for months without losing interest. Mariano Ugalde, gallery Owner and Founder of the luxury travel company Salar Art + Travel, recommends at least 10 days to explore just some of the country’s distinctive regions.

For guests flying directly into La Paz, the world’s highest city located at a lung-busting altitude of 11,500 feet above sea level, Ugalde first whisks them off to the jungle in Yungas to acclimatize. The two-hour drive is an adventure in itself, skirting treacherous roads where snow-capped mountains give way to humid forests buzzing with life. Rest and relaxation await in a secluded riverside villa with a private in-house chef, outdoor dining area, swimming pool, steam room, and spa services.



WORDS Nora Walsh, IMAGE © Catalina Ugalde

Found in the north of the Salar of Uyuni, Fish Island is covered by giant cacti and boasts sweeping views across the salt flats



A City in the Clouds

La Paz, cradled in a high valley on the Bolivian plateau, bustles with life. Busy streets whirl with a cacophony of pedestrians, public minibuses, markets, and street stalls manned by local Aymara or Quechua women traditionally dressed in lengthy braids and bowler hats, embroidered shawls and voluminous skirts. Overhead, an aerial network of mass transit cable cars crisscrosses residents around the city with swift efficiency. (It’s worth a ride just for the bird’s-eye view).

Check yourself into the slick new MET Hotel in the residential neighborhood of Calacoto. Ugalde hand-selected all the art for the contemporary 76-room property, including the works of his father, Gastón Ugalde—an innovative artist often referred to as the Andy Warhol of Latin America. The penthouse offers panoramic views of Devil’s Tooth Mountain, as does the open-air rooftop bar (La Paz’s first) serving local wines and the world’s largest collection of singani, Bolivia’s national liquor distilled from Muscat of Alexandria grapes.

MET Hotel’s award-winning sister property, Atix Hotel, was the city’s first designer outpost. Interiors are a window into the country’s culture with alpaca textiles, artisan-made furniture and local artwork that highlights the best of Bolivia’s talent and landscapes. Art connoisseurs should be sure to visit Mariano Ugalde’s three galleries to peruse emerging talents and partake in unique concept events where collectors meet the artists.

While La Paz’s art scene burgeons, it’s the cosmopolitan capital’s culinary prowess that’s garnering worldwide acclaim. Nearly a decade ago, Noma Co-founder Claus Meyer opened Gustu—equal parts avant-garde restaurant and mission-driven cooking school to uplift the community through food. Head Chef Marsia Taha makes use of native ingredients sourced from the Andes to the Amazon to cook out-of-this-world tasting menus featuring staples like chunyo (dried potato), llama meat and choclo (Andean corn). Thousands of students have graduated from the Gustu’s program, with a handful of kitchen alums opening their own lauded establishments. Don’t miss Chef

Above: The new MET Hotel in La Paz combines a unique design experience with conscious hospitality

Right page (top): Guests traveling with adventure company Explora can connect with indigenous quinoa farmers

Right page (bottom): A permanent art piece by Gastón Ugalde in the Uyuni Salt Flats, “Stairway” comprises 12,000 salt bricks

Sebastián Quiroga’s plant-based Ali Pacha restaurant (named one of the best in Latin America); Ancestral from Mauricio López, former Head Chef of Gustu; and the no-reservation Popular Cocina Boliviana helmed by Chef Juan Pablo Reyes, which is committed to making elevated Bolivian cuisine affordable for locals.

Otherworldly Lands

The Uyuni Salt Flats are undoubtedly the country’s star attraction, as well as Gastón Ugalde’s greatest muse. “The salt desert is like going to another planet,” he said. “It continues to be my main source of inspiration for its temperature of color and otherworldly light that’s found only here. I keep coming back and it’s never the same, and it never gets old.” (Be on the lookout for his eponymous hotel when it launches at the end of the year). Stretching nearly 5,000 square miles, the shock-white expanse is a surreal sight in both dry and rainy seasons. When wet, the surface reflects the boundless sky creating a mirror effect of seemingly infinite proportions.

This spring, luxury adventure company Explora is opening a clutch of mountain lodges in the region, offering private explorations and nomadic journeys from Bolivia to Chile (and vice versa), complete with 4x4 Toyota Land Cruisers, private drivers and highly trained, bilingual guides. The route traces an ancient Inca trail through the unearthly Altiplano studded with volcanoes, flamingo-flecked lagoons, spouting geysers, and monumental rock formations. Intrepid travelers can scale the face of Tunupa volcano, scramble rocky piles home to enormous cacti, and hike silent trails dotted with llamas and vicuñas. For cultural insights, guests can connect with indigenous quinoa farmers and visit archeological sites.



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IMAGES (left page) © Valeria Dorado, (right page, top) © Explora, (right page, bottom) © Catalina Ugalde

Native Grapes

After reveling in the magnificence of Mother Nature, enjoy her luscious fruits in Bolivia’s high-altitude terroir sitting at 5,200 feet. Here, Salar Art + Travel crafts bespoke itineraries along a budding wine and spirits route in the Valley of Cintis and Tarija. Guests enjoy tastings with winemakers at noteworthy cellars and overnight stays in private bodegas and haciendas of prominent locals.

“Among the top wineries we visit are San Francisco de la Horca, San Pedro and Bodega Sausini,” noted Ugalde. “All three are full of history and make some of the best limited-production wines and singanis in the country.” The experience is one-of-a-kind in the sense that clients are learning about the wineries’ rich history by the owners themselves, who are in some instances fourth-generation winemakers with a true passion for their product and region, he explained.

While the full-bodied varietal Tannat has been garnering accolades at internationally judged blind tastings, Ugalde likes to spotlight the lesser-known native grape: Vischoqueña. “Vintners in the region are focused on producing premium organic wine from this light and extremely aromatic grape,” said Ugalde, who pairs the wine with his private-chef tasting menus served in sun-dappled vineyards edged by scenery that rivals the Grand Canyon.

While many global oenophiles can stock up on *vino* from Argentina and Chile at their local wine shop, Bolivia’s small-batch wines are still hard to come by. You have to be there to experience them, much like the rest of the country’s singular treasures. ◀



Left: Salar Art + Travel crafts bespoke itineraries and offers private-chef tasting menus in scenic locations

Above: Visitors may observe flamingos drawn to Bolivian lakes, thanks to its abundant supply of plankton

Right: Bolivian highland animal life is distinguished by the presence of llamas, alpacas, guanacos, and vicuñas



IMAGES (left) © Salar Art+Travel, (above and right) © Explora

SALAR ART + TRAVEL’S
LA PAZ CHECKLIST

- Visit the ateliers of House of BCP and Liliana Castellanos for custom-made alpaca clothing.
- Get front row seats to a cholita wrestling match performed by empowered indigenous women.
- Forage with Gustu’s Head Chef Marsia Taha, who was recently named best female chef in Latin America.
- Picnic on a cliffside in the Valley of the Souls enveloped by dramatic jagged spires and art installations from Gastón Ugalde.
- Shop colorful textiles and other souvenirs at Mistura, a pioneering concept store in La Paz.
- Bring home a bag of Bolivian coffee from Hb Bronze Coffeebar.

For more information, visit: salartravel.com



EMBRAER TIP

Fly non-stop from Bolivia to Miami in exceptional comfort thanks to active turbulence reduction and best-in-class cabin altitude onboard the **Praetor 600**.

