



BOLIVIA

ADVENTURE TOURISM CONCERNS



SAFETY CONCERNS IN ADVENTURE TOURISM

Many of the most popular tourist activities in Bolivia are inherently hazardous; it is prudent to pursue such activities with a professional, vetted tour company. With most cities sitting at an altitude of 10,000 feet or higher and extremely limited access to medical facilities, travelers in Bolivia must take extra precautions when considering adventure tourism.

Climbing & Mountain Trekking

Many popular adventure activities in the Bolivian Andes are at 16,000 feet or higher. Regardless of medical history or physical fitness, you may experience significant health issues due to the high altitude. Exercise extreme caution when trekking or climbing in Bolivia.

Trekkers must have adequate clothing and equipment, not always available locally, and should be experienced mountain travelers. Don't trek alone; join an organized group and/or use a reputable firm to obtain an experienced guide and porter. Be aware that satellite communication and internet connectivity can be limited or non-existent in rural areas throughout Bolivia; trekkers should inform family members of plans and note that they may not be reachable for extended periods.

Altitude Sickness

Altitude sickness (i.e. AMS – Acute Mountain Sickness) usually occurs above altitudes of 8,000 feet, but some may cause light symptoms before reaching that altitude. When reaching altitudes above 12,000 feet, severe symptoms might occur. The de-facto capital, La Paz, lies at 11,942 feet, making it the highest capital in the world. Popular trekking routes may take travelers to altitudes of 15,000 feet or more.

If you develop a severe headache, weakness, vomiting, shortness of breath at rest, cough, chest tightness, or unsteadiness while climbing, descend to a lower altitude immediately, and consider seeking medical attention.

Biking the “Death Road”

Biking Bolivia's “Death Road,” or the North Yungas road from La Paz toward Coroico and Caranavi, is one of the most popular attractions for adventure tourists. It has earned the dubious designation of “The World's Most Dangerous Road,” and has become a hub for thrill-seeking mountain cyclists. Several tour operators lead bike rides along this road, yet weekly media reports describe accidents along the road, usually involving buses and multiple fatalities. In January 2019, an Australian fell off a 100 meter cliff on his bicycle and did not survive. In late 2018, a falling rock severely injured an Israeli cyclist; due to poor weather conditions, the rescue helicopter could not reach their location and she succumbed to her injuries en route to the hospital.

Should you choose to participate in these tours, use a reputable tour company and ensure the bicycles have the proper safety features (e.g. front and back brakes, functioning gears, aligned wheels, and proper tire pressure).

UNDERSTANDING DUTY OF CARE

In addition to passing along safety guidance to travelers, security managers should also set parameters around allowable adventure activities for employees on business travel during their off hours. As adventure activities often fall in the “bleisure” category (business leisure), employers may still have duty of care obligations. According to a recent regional study by International SOS and the Centre for Aviation (CAPA), one in four bleisure trips include an aspect of adventure or exploration, yet one in four organizations has not considered bleisure in their travel policy. Any considerations regarding support, requirements, or limitations for bleisure travelers should account for the higher risks posed by adventure activities involving water, heights, isolation, or other extremes.

FOR THE TRAVELER



Medical care in large Bolivian cities is adequate for most purposes, but of varying quality. Medical facilities, even in La Paz, are not adequate to handle serious medical conditions. There is no reliable ambulance service. Consider purchasing supplemental medical insurance with specific overseas coverage, including a provision for medical evacuation (medevac) before traveling.



Much of Bolivia is 10,000 feet above sea level and higher. Consult your healthcare provider for recommendations concerning medication and high altitude tips.



Observe all local or park regulations and exercise caution in unfamiliar surroundings. Do your part by choosing legitimate operators with the appropriate certifications, liability insurance, good records, and professional guides. Pay attention during the precautionary briefings.



Use caution and common sense when engaging in adventure sports (e.g. bungee jumping, sky diving, hiking, rappelling, climbing, whitewater rafting, kayaking). Do not exceed your physical limitations.

For additional information, please contact OSAC's Latin America Team at OSACWHA@state.gov



@USDOS.Bolivia



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