

Good News and Bad News

Good News: You don't really have to remove the **catalytic converter** on your car before shipping it to Bolivia. The gas here is no-lead or very low lead and will work just fine. If you insist, you can also remove it after your arrival for a lot less money. Labor is very cheap and good mechanics are not hard to find.

Bad News: Automobile parts are ridiculously expensive. You should anticipate, plan ahead and bring with you (or shop during your home leave) for those parts likely to need replacing. Consider shock absorbers, brake pads, extra filters, batteries, fuses, tires, etc. You can get name-brand tires here marked up about 30% over U.S. tires.

Good News: While you can't always find the brand name or the broad selection you want, you do have access to almost anything you need to stock your kitchen. We have several very modern **grocery stores** and wonderful fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meats and poultry are readily available and inexpensive. We do recommend that you not use your shipping allowance until you come here and see what there is. If you find something you need is not available, then use your shipping allowance.

Bad News: Anything **imported** from the States or elsewhere is very expensive. American brand names are often 2 to 3 times the price. That includes cereals, diapers, seafood, some paper products, etc. Substitutes for nearly every product are available here. The biggest complaint seems to be about clothes detergent.

Good News: As many of the Bolivian doctors received training in the States, our available **medical care** is of a much higher quality than you might imagine. Only the most serious of conditions require evacuations. Some of our people have had an appendix removed, root canals performed, exploratory surgeries, broken bones set, X-rays taken, electrocardiograms performed, and much more. All of this was done in a professional manner at very reasonable costs. Eye doctors and lenses are inexpensive as well – interestingly, frames cost a lot.

Bad News: As you would imagine, the **extreme altitudes** here may make the need for medical care a more common occurrence. Migraines, high blood pressure, vision problems, insomnia, indigestion and diarrhea are very common.

Good News: Cellular phone service here is pretty good. There are several cellular companies and reception is good in most parts of the country. You can call from many other cities in Bolivia on your cell phone without long distance charges. Monthly charges are reasonable and there are used phones available to purchase most of the time.

Good News: We do get **cable TV** here including movie channels and news. CNN international is great and so is BBC News. Prices are about the same as state side, and service is pretty good. They actually come to your house each month to collect or you can get a discount if you pay by the year. A good idea is to have a TV with the SAP (Secondary Audio Program) feature so you can switch some of the channels to English.

DirectTV is also available with a feed from Puerto Rico that features approximately 60 channels including all the major networks out of New York, several children's channels and sports channels with U.S. sports (ESPN and ESPN 2). NFL, MLB and NBA packages are available for an extra charge. You need to buy a satellite dish and decoder once you get to post, which are yours to keep forever or to sell when you PCS, plus pay a year's service in advance. DirecTV is available only to U.S. Mission members as part of a Department of State effort to keep morale high.

Good News: The **shopping** here is actually reasonable if you are willing to spend a little time and search things out. There is a large selection of fabrics for suits, dresses, curtains, upholstery, and everything in between at incredibly low prices. You can also choose from a large group of skilled and talented tailors. Labor is very cheap. The same applies to furniture, iron works, ceramics, jewelry, pewter, leather, woodworking and carpentry, etc. All craftsmen here can work from photos, drawings, or catalogue pictures, so start collecting now.

Bad News: **Time** means nothing here, so expect to wait awhile, and expect to wait beyond the date you are initially given. Even so, it is usually worth expending a little patience. It is also common for Americans, Europeans, and anyone who appears to have money to be charged more than Bolivians. Good Spanish helps, or sometimes someone from your office can be the front person. You can also just get used to it and realize that even at the higher prices, you are still getting a major bargain and helping the people in the poorest country in South America as well. It does pay to shop around and you need to be prepared to haggle over prices on almost everything.