

BOLIVIA & ATACAMA

Key Information

25 March – 6 April 2025

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Summary

Martian like volcanic ridges, flamingos, high altitude lagoons and the infamous salt flats of Bolivia.

Photograph the driest place on Earth by day, with a stronger emphasis on night, with professional landscape and astrophotography tuition throughout this photo tour. We'll explore the serene desert locations by day and night with afternoon wildlife, golden hour, blue hour and astrophotography sessions.

This workshop aims to help photographers at different levels with beginner and intermediate techniques.



Atacama Desert & Bolivia



info@ollitaylorphotography.com



WhatsApp Group 'Bolivia 2025'

Flights & Transfers

**Please email your flight details ASAP
for arrival/ departure to Calama**

info@ollietaylorphotography.com

Arrival Day - 25 March

You will need a flight that lands into Calama by 14:00 on 25 March.

We will be collecting you from Calama airport at 14:00-14:30. There are multiple daily flights from Santiago to Calama with Latam, SKY and Jet Smart.

If you are arriving in Calama before the 25 March please send me your hotel details.

Departure Day - 06 April

You will need the flight that departs Calama at midday or later on 06 April (there is a 12:15 flight).

We shall be leaving San Pedro at 09:00am and driving to Calama airport to make the midday flight. Anyone needing to catch an earlier flight will need to arrange a transfer (Ollie can advise on transfer companies if required, or we can organise it through our hotel).

Again, please send over your departure details.



Santiago

For those overnighing in, or visiting Santiago - There are a few 'airport' hotels, however only one is located on site which is the Holiday Inn. I would recommend this one. It is a 10 min taxi from the terminal.

If visiting Santiago, there are a string of decent hotels such as the Marriot, Sheraton, Mandarin Oriental, W Santiago, AC by Marriot, Solace and many more. All are situated in Barrio de Golf, Las Condes, and Providencia - all considered safe areas and very modern in the central city region.

If you are spending time in Santiago to sightsee, be sure to visit the 'Sky Costanera' (South America's tallest skyscraper) - and go for sunset to enjoy a spectacular 360 pano of the city and the Andes to the east.

There is a huge park (Parque Metropolitano de Santiago) with cable cars and multiple hiking trails alongside incredible views of the city.

As with any large city, petty theft is rife so be very watchful your camera bags - even in hotel foyers! Keep your equipment bags next to you at all times.



Transport

Chile

In Chile we will use 2 vehicles: a 9-seater minivan and a 7-seater with rear seats down 4x4.

Bolivia

Here, our guides will use older easier-to-fix roadside 4x4 Toyota Landcruisers. We will have three of these.

Luggage

In Bolivia, we will be in 4x4s that will be carrying spare fuel, food, water, and camera equipment. We cannot carry excessive luggage. Therefore it is essential we pack light for this section of the trip.

You will only need a change of underlayers, a wash bag and a few other essential items; you will need to pack these into your camera bags, and a smaller bag. Please ensure you bring a smaller rucksack or bag into your main luggage for this part of the trip. We will leave our main luggage behind with the second driver at the Hotel in San Pedro for safekeeping.

Satellite GPS

We will have a Garmin satellite pager, set to drop pins every 20 minutes when we are undertaking long drives, and going through the Bolivian Altiplano. Anyone that wishes to give partners or family etc access to this mapping info near to our dates, please send an email requesting GPS. When switched, on they will always be able to access the map and see our position.

Altitude

Chile

San Pedro is situated at 2400mm, this is considered the threshold at which occasionally people begin to feel the effects of high altitude. San Pedro may cause you to feel a little lightheaded, headachy and hopefully only mild symptoms at worst. These may seem worse within the first 24 hours. Most people feel nothing at 2400mm.

We will adjust slowly, and only after spending two days at this altitude will we venture to higher altitude locations.

Our first higher ground locations sit at 3000/3400/3600m and we will build up slowly going up to 4000/4400m on some of the high roads.

Bolivia

In Chile, as we drop back down to San Pedro every night, we always sleep at 2400mm, 'climbing high and sleeping low' as climbers call it.

In Bolivia, we have no such option - our first night's accommodation will be situated at 4200m, and then our hotel on the Salar de Uyuni is at 3600m so marginally lower.

Unfortunately, anyone who does react to high altitude in Chile, would not be able to travel to Bolivia, and instead would stay with the second driver and source a room in San Pedro. For typical mild symptoms, only you can assess exactly how you feel and notify the tour leaders.

Some people favour taking Diamox or similar altitude tablets, if you were thinking of using these, talk to your health professional as they may recommend otherwise.

In South America they call altitude sickness, Soroche! They will swear by chewing coca leaves or drinking lots of coca tea! The effectiveness of this is anyone's guess.

Season, Climate & Weather

March is the first month of autumn in the Chilean Atacama, and night time temperatures are slightly warmer than those in the winter, making it easier to work.

The dates of this tour have been selected as best possible to also coincide with the lunar phases, alongside wet season ending in Bolivia, whilst retaining some water on the surface of the salt flats.

Trying to determine the best time to undertake astrophotography whilst maximising the possibility of reflections on the Salar with water left on the surface from the wet season is really tricky, and the time of year that has been picked is optimal.

In February and March, it is still wet season in the Bolivian Altiplano and the rain can cause havoc. Lightning storms can be even seen from the Chilean side over the volcanos. The water in the salt flats can be so deep, you may not be able to enter the Salar on occasion at all. Roads can be washed away, and travelling to the highland can be problematic, so you may end up only being able to visit the old trains.

In April, the dry season can often begin 'on the dot' with the start of the month, and the skies become predominantly cloudless, humidity drops by about 40%.

If we are unlucky, dry season may have kicked in early, and we will rely on our guides to know exactly where any water still sits on the surface of the salt plain, if any at all!

Or, wet season can be prolonged, as with 2022 where it continued into mid-April, naturally, night photography can then be impossible along with all the aforementioned issues causing problems.

So, fingers crossed



Weather continued...

Below is a link to a fairly accurate mountain weather forecast for **Licancabur, a Chilean volcano** that sits on the border, above one of the lagunas we visit, Laguna Verde.

When you open these links they will give you weather at the summit, changing the altitude on the left of the webpage to 4000m will give you an accurate idea of temperatures and wind chill.

www.mountain-forecast.com

We also have Escala in Bolivia near Uyuni which can give an indication of the weather on the salt flats.

www.mountain-forecast.com

Note: Please keep in mind, that if you look at these links May to September, this is mid-winter and the shoulder months, so temperatures are at their lowest within this period; however, it will be extremely cold on the high roads in March/April at night.



Wildlife

The native wildlife of the Atacama & Altiplano include:

- Llamas & Vicuña (herds of these, very common)
- Viscacha (small fluffy, like a rabbit with a curly tail)
- Flamingos (very common)
- Ostriches (occasional in Bolivia)
- South American Grey Fox (uncommon hard to spot)
- Lizards
- Scorpions

We will stop off whilst travelling where possible for wildlife pics.

There can be mosquitos this time of year in San Pedro, but not in the Bolivian Altiplano.



Viscacha - part of the rodent family. Looks like a rabbit!

Flamingos are native to this area and we shall see lots.

There are 3 species of Flamingo:

Chilean Flamingo (pale in colour, black & white beak)

Andean Flamingo (bright pink tail feathers)

Puna or James's Flamingo (rarest type, found at high altitudes)

Temperature & Clothing

The desert will bring extremes of hot and cold. You'll need to pack for both ends of the spectrum.

Chile - Expect daytime temperatures of around 24-30°C with nighttime temperatures plummeting to 5°C/ -5°C.

Nights when we venture up the high mountain roads to 4200/4400m altitude can be -10/-15°C

Bolivia - Temperatures depend on the duration of the wet season. Expect daytime temperatures between 15/20°C in the high Altiplano and 22/24°C on the Salar de Uyuni. There is potential for wind that will give a chill factor at this altitude.

Nights in the Altiplano will be very cold if the skies are clear ranging from 0°C/-10°C.

Nights on the Salar de Uyuni average around 8°C/2°C if there is no wind.

Clothing Checklist

- ✓ **Coat** - prepare for very cold temperatures at night down to -10c. You will need waterproof & windproof coats. A thick thermal down jacket is good. In addition, a light windproof jacket is also recommended for the daytime.
- ✓ **Thermal base layers** (pants and tops). These are essential and can be added or remove to suit temperature.
- ✓ **Trousers** - lightweight, waterproof and windproof. Loose fit to allow thermals underneath. Easy dry hiking pants or similar.
- ✓ **Footwear** - 2 types needed:
 - > All terrain hiking boots or trainers (or both)
 - > Wellies/Gumboots - for standing in 3inches of water on the salt flats. If you can't bring these, the guides can provide them for us. If you require these, please let me know your shoe size in advance.
- ✓ **Thermal socks** - several pairs for cold nights
- ✓ **Shades, sunblock, lip balm, moisturiser** - the desert is very drying on your skin. Moisturising products are essential.
- ✓ **Eye drops & nasal spray** - some people suffer from dry eyes on the salt flats (similar to skiing) so eye drops are helpful. Nasal spray is good for the dust on your sinuses.
- ✓ **Hat, Snood, Neckwarmer** - good for both cold and sun protection
- ✓ **Mosquito repellant** - as you require.
- ✓ **Swimming suit** - in case of a hot pools and pool at hotel
- ✓ **Power adapters** - suitable for South America.



The Salar can have 2-3 inches of water, so you need wellies or gumboots. If you can't bring your own then don't worry, the guides can provide for us. Please just let us know your shoe size in advance.

Accommodation

Part 1 - Atacama

For the first section of the trip we will be staying in San Pedro de Atacama. A fairly noisy & active little town in the heart of the desert.

To keep things as quiet as possible, we are using a beautiful Eco-lodge on the edge of town. (This is preferable over a hotel because we can come-and-go between 11pm-3am as we wish and not wake other guests.

Each bedroom has its own bathroom and there is plenty of outdoor space. Those requesting their own single supplement rooms will have the extra included on the invoice.

As this is a traditional ranch in the middle of a remote desert, just be mindful of the following:

- Hot water & electricity is solar.
- Nights are cold. Typically here in the desert there is no central heating or heaters in rooms. They will provide lots of thick warm blankets, so bring warm clothing for sleeping. Then it will get hot early at 9am.
- Wifi & power, may be intermittent (see Mobile & WIFI section)

This accommodation will provide lunch for us daily, provided by an in-house chef. We will prepare sandwiches & snacks to take with us for the evening/nights out. We can make daily visits to the small supermarket in town for supplies & water.

Address: San Juan, San Pedro de Atacama, Antofagasta 1410000, Chile



Atacama Accommodation - San Pedro
A traditional eco-style ranch.

Part 2 - Bolivia

Hostel, Altiplano - 1 night (Shared)

01.04.24 our Bolivian guides will collect us from San Pedro and we will venture into the Bolivian Altiplano using a hostel at some 4200m altitude. It is impossible to obtain enough single rooms in the Altiplano, but we will have a minimum of five rooms, requiring everyone to share for the night.

As with the Atacama, buildings often use solar power for heating water and they do not have central heating. Thick blankets are always provided.

Luna Salada Hotel (Salt Hotel) - 2 nights

After this we move to what is considered one of the best hotels in Bolivia: 'The Lunar Salada Salt Hotel' located in the small village of Colchani, right on the edge of the salt flats (Salar de Uyuni). This hotel has a large price tag and those requesting single supplement rooms will have the additional cost invoiced accordingly.

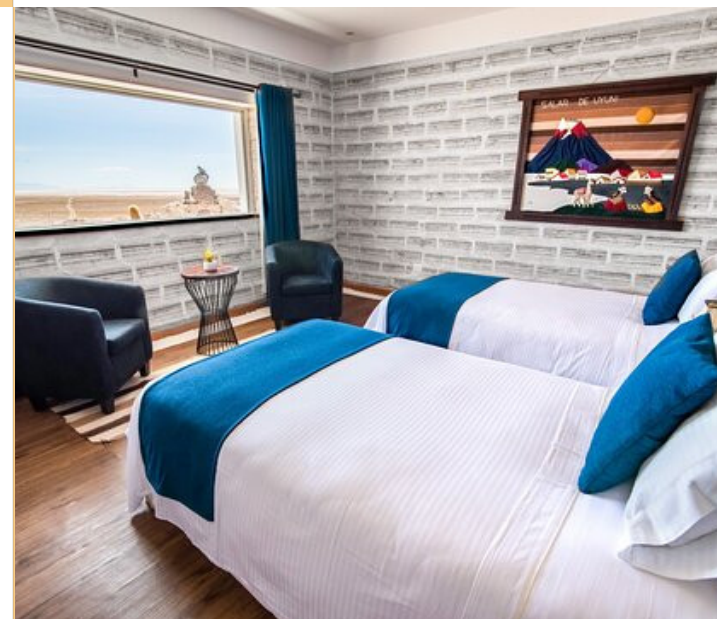
Address: Luna Salada Hotel de Sal, A 25 km de Uyuni, Bolivia

Villa Mar Hostel, Altiplano - 1 night (Shared)

On departure from Colchani, we will make a pitstop at the halfway point en route back to San Pedro. This will be the most basic hostel used for the duration of the tour and again, the only option is shared rooms (though we may be able to obtain any spare rooms on arrival).

Hotel la Casa de don Tomas – 1 Night

Our arrival back at San Pedro will see us use a hotel on the edge of town with individual rooms, where we can rest, and enjoy an evening group meal before our departure to Calama the following morning.



Luna Salada Hotel (Salt Hotel) - Bolivia, Uyuni

Camera Equipment

Ideally, try to pack as minimal as possible.

We will see some native wildlife (vicunas, flamingos etc) so do consider that a long focal length advantageous.

Equipment Checklist

- ✓ **Lenses** - Ideally, focal lengths covering between 14/16mm – 200mm or 400/600mm if you have a converter or can carry longer/bigger lenses etc. A fast wide angle will be highly advantageous for nightscape, along with any other fast focal length lenses.
- ✓ **Filters** - If you don't use filters often then don't bring them and layer blend instead of using graduated filters for sunset work.
- ✓ **A sturdy tripod, remote control** (unless your camera has longer than 30 second shutter speed as with all newer Nikon mirrorless).
- ✓ **A head torch that also has red light** (the red is not for night vision, but it stops us from blinding one another when we talk to each other with them switched on).
- ✓ **Spare Camera Body** - always recommend just in case one fails.
- ✓ **Spare Batteries**

Star Trackers

We will use trackers, but wind may play a part in how much we use them.

If you are unfamiliar with a tracker and feel you would rather stack images to save weight/space and decide not bring a tracker this will be fine. In some locations where we don't get enough time the whole group will most likely just use single or stacked sky frames with a long exposure foreground.

That said, where possible we will work on some night sky elements that can only be shot with a tracker for those bringing them.

Drones - Feel free to bring a drone. If you do, it is your responsibility to check the country regulations and compliance. Please remember Bolivia is at altitude; past experience with DJI mini's has been mixed, with newer ones seeming to cope with altitudes above stated recommendations. Mavic Air's and Pro's have not had issues.

Questions

If you have any specific questions about your equipment please feel free to email or schedule a call prior to the workshop. Or, if you have any questions or tips that could benefit the whole group, please c/c everyone in on the group email or WhatsApp so they may see the question and answer.



Course Structure / Tuition

Fieldwork

Ollie will work with the group where required on landscape and nightscape techniques, setting up of trackers etc with a mix of beginner to advanced techniques as a group and individually.

It is natural for groups to be at different stages with landscape photography, and most definitely astro, and although this workshop will look at some advanced astrophotography, there will always be easier options for beginners to work on whilst on location and the group can be split between different subjects.

Post Production

As we don't have post-production space on this workshop, access to Ollie's downloadable astro course is included. Although this online course is getting old now, and some techniques are dated and need a refresh, there is still much that has not changed and the more you can study, the more advantageous it will be when travelling the Atacama and Altiplano.

Please note these tuition packs are extremely large downloads and will require time to download as they include my RAW files that you can work with to follow the tuition, therefore have been split into parts.

Tutorial Packs - Downloads

Beginners = Part 1 & 2 (depending on skill level)

Intermediate = Part 1 & 2

Please note these tuition packs are extremely large downloads and will require time to download as they include my RAW files that you can work with to follow the tuition, therefore have been split into parts.

Beginner

Password = **BeginnerPack1**

Intro - [link here](#)

Part 1 - [link here](#)

Part 2 - [link here](#)

Part 3 - [link here](#)

Part 4 - [link here](#)

Part 5 - [link here](#)

Part 6 - [link here](#)

Part 7 - [link here](#)

Intermediate

(No password required)

Part 1 - [link here](#)

Part 2 - [link here](#)

Part 3 - [link here](#)

Part 4 - [link here](#)

Part 5 - [link here](#)



The 'RockTree' in Bolivian Altiplano

Food & Meals

Please let us know if you have any allergies or specific dietary requirements to include vegetarian and vegan.

Breakfast

Breakfast is included at all accommodations on this workshop. Ollie works with the property managers and guides to ensure this is at later times in the day due to our astrophotography schedule.

Lunch & Evening Meals

Part 1 - Atacama / San Pedro – Lunch is included for all seven nights at the ranch, provided by our in-house chef.

We will prepare sandwiches or alternatives ourselves to take with us for the evening/night.

Part 2 - Bolivia – All meals are provided during the Bolivia part of the tour.

The only exception will be lunch at the Lunar Salada Hotel (Salt Hotel) - this lunch can be purchased from the restaurant. However, its worth noting that the hotel provides an extensive breakfast served until 10:30 am.

Final Night - Atacama / San Pedro – Evening meal not included (or compulsory), breakfast is included on departure day.

Snacks & Alcohol

Snacks and alcohol are not included and can be purchased from San Pedro and stocked up pre-Bolivia.

Please keep in mind the remoteness of San Pedro, so available snacks other than fruit (which is very limited) are usually empty calories; if you have specific requirements, please bring them with you.

We will also have to keep our bottled water supply well stocked from shops in San Pedro as the Atacama is the only part of Chile where tap water is not safe to drink. The water is not safe to drink through the entire of Bolivia.

Insurance

Please make sure you have adequate travel insurance to cover you at high altitude, South America is easy to get insured for altitude.

World Nomads do travel insurance for most countries, covering most countries, but there are many other reputable ones www.worldnomads.com

Naturally, Ollie Taylor/Ollie Taylor Photography cannot be held responsible for altitude/food/water sickness so a small disclaimer is required which is issued alongside the group introduction email, please sign this ASAP.

Mobile & WIFI

WIFI and phone coverage is scarce in the Atacama. Bolivian Altiplano is very remote and will not have any coverage at all.

WIFI is offered at some of the accommodations.

