

# Here's my Study Abroad Story

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**SIT Bolivia: Multiculturalism, Globalization, and Social Change  
Cochabamba, Bolivia**

**Major:** History

**Program:** With SIT's study abroad program in Cochabamba, Bolivia you'll have the opportunity to spend a week living with an indigenous Quechua-speaking family in the countryside, explore the predominately Aymara city of El Alto, study the cosmivision - or way of seeing the world - of Andean and Amazonian cultures on a guided tour of the Amazon jungle. As you can see, you'll have plenty of opportunity to travel throughout Bolivia and by the time you leave you'll feel like you know the whole country well.

In Cochabamba, the program's base city, you'll take intensive Spanish classes with Bolivian Spanish Professors who are not only incredibly effective, but also very kind. In addition to studying Spanish, you'll also take classes on Bolivian history, politics and culture. The program encourages hands on learning, which means during your classes you will meet prominent Bolivian intellectuals, government officials, artists, filmmakers, union members, miners, feminists, indigenous leaders and more. I especially loved our discussion with members of Mujeres Creando, an anarchist-feminist group based in La Paz that focuses on the empowerment of indigenous women and does a lot of anti-poverty work.

**Typical Day:** When I was feeling ambitious, I would get up at 6:30 to go for a run before class. After breakfast with my homestay brothers and mothers, I would take either a bus or a Trufi (small car with a number on it that functions like a bus) to the city's center to study. From 9:00 - 12:15 my SIT group would study a topic related to our program's focus - Multiculturalism, Globalization and Social Change. I would then go home for almuerzo - and the long lunch quickly became my favorite Bolivian tradition. First we would have soup (my favorite type was quinoa) followed by a meal with an obligatory three different types of starch (eg: rice, baked potatoes, French fries). During our lunch I would catch up with my Bolivian mom and brothers and often times my Bolivian nieces or cousins would come over.

After almuerzo, I would return to SIT for Spanish class from 2:30 – 5:15. These classes were in small groups of 4 or 5, which meant we got a lot of specialized attention and language help. Sometimes after class I would go to a café to do homework with other Americans on my SIT program, or I would take a Trufi back home. In the evenings I relished playing soccer with my homestay brothers who found it hard to believe that a girl could actually play soccer.

**Highlights:** I loved my Independent Study Project (ISP). All SIT programs end in a month long ISP, and I know for a lot of people this is very intimidating. After having experienced it, I also know that for many people this is the best part of their experience!

For my project, I gathered oral histories from female members of Bolivian mining communities about how they came together to protect their children and husbands during the various military dictatorships and neoliberal governments in the late '70s and '80s. I interviewed about a dozen women from various mining towns and I remember feeling humbled by their willingness to share with me. I also lived with a mining family for a week and I am using these oral histories for my thesis. I now think that the ISP is a great reason to choose an SIT Program.



**Challenges:** Almost 2/3 of Bolivians live below the poverty line, which profoundly impacts Bolivian culture and makes living in Bolivia very different from living at CMC. For me, the hardest part was adjusting to security concerns. My homestay family did not let me walk down my street alone after dark (it got dark around 6:30) and I was careful to bring my camera with me only on certain days or trips. After a while I learned what was safe and what was not and began to feel much more comfortable.

**Advice:** 1) Spend as much time as you can with your host family! This will allow you to fully immerse yourself in Bolivian culture and build strong relationships with Bolivians. Traveling to see my host mom's childhood home is one of my favorite memories of Bolivia.

2) Get to know the program's Spanish teachers. They are all lovely and hilarious.

3) One of the program directors Ismael is also one of the most inspirational people I have ever met. If you are a morning person, do Tai Chi with him (he leads classes every morning at 6 am). If you are not, be sure to engage in conversation with him about contemporary and historical Bolivian politics and culture. He has a unique perspective and fascinating insights.