

Your New Dream Trip: Airstream Camping in Bolivia's Uyuni Salt Flat

by Jenny Adams



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A writer's two-day adventure in Bolivia's most brutally beautiful landscape.

The Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia is one of most intimidating landscapes on Earth—I arrived informed of the statistics. Spanning more than 4,000 square miles at an altitude of 12,000 feet, it's a beautiful moonscape where temperatures can swing 40 degrees in a day. You can fry, and you can freeze. To that point, my bag contained 50 SPF, polarized sunglasses and a 4-layer, Arc'teryx jacket.



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What I wasn't prepared for was the sheer silence. I wasn't ready for the deep emotions sweeping over me at sunset. And I certainly wasn't prepared for feeling so tiny and insignificant, while at the same time like I could stroke the clouds or potentially catch a glimpse of God.

Visitors have a couple of options: You can stay at one of the hotels along the border and drive into this crazy, crusty, saline phenomenon for a day trip. Or you can camp along the mountain ridge and ride motorcycles along it.



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However, to exist for days in the center—without seeing anything save a brilliant blue horizon and empty white Earth—your only choice is an airstream. It's the lone way to immerse oneself in this sacred, brutal place while retaining necessary creature comforts like water, electricity, and premium Scotch.

There's no experience I've ever had that succeeds cocktails at sunset on the Uyuni Salt Flats—except the subsequent mountain bike ride we took in circles around the campfire. Once it was pitch black, the Universe lit up and our guide Gustavo Morales whipped out a laser pointer and gave us an astrology lesson.



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A booking through tour company Cox & Kings is approximately \$3,500 for double occupancy. This includes all transfers, two days exploring the salt flats in Land Cruisers with multi-lingual expert guides, bicycles, haute cuisine, hot showers, and help in creating optical illusion images using an iPhone and a few plastic toys. You hike around the base of the flower-covered Tunupa volcano and climb inside a cave to see thousand-year-old skeletons. You also get to ogle the flamingos and llamas that live as neighbors to the salty plains.

But to visit such a place calls for knowing how it got there. Thanks to radiocarbon dating, they know Uyuni was created 42,000 years ago after the drying of the giant, prehistoric [Lake Minchin](#). It's four times the size of Hong Kong. In the center, with the mountains no longer visible, all directional intuition dissolves. Large cracks rip the perfect salt, like lightening bolts sketched onto the Earth.



“How do you know where to go,” I asked the driver as we sped along at 70mph. “I have a navigation system.” He jabbed a tan, wrinkled finger at the screen that blinked a green SW.

I rolled down the window and donned sunglasses. There is no way to look at the blinding Earth without a filter. “Before GPS, guides knew this place by heart,” he said. “But people who came in here without guides got lost. People have disappeared forever.”



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Thanks to government regulations, the sheer size, and the fact that only a few hotel options exist within an hour's drive, Uyuni remains far less traveled than other world wonders. We saw no more than five other Land Cruisers during our day excursions.

“It won't stay like this forever,” Morales admitted. “More people are coming all the time. But for now, it's so peaceful. It makes me proud to be Bolivian. I actually showed Jude Law the Salt Flats,” his voice morphed from wistful to excited. “He also stayed in the airstream. We made sure we kept him safe. We know how much the American ladies love Jude Law.”



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Back now, I miss Bolivia's Uyuni Salt Flats. I'm admittedly comforted that Jude Law and I share in this longing. Now is the time to pack up and head out—Cox & Kings is adding a [third airstream](#) in February 2016, allowing for six-person trips. Just don't forget the sunblock.