

GLOBE TROTTER

On Bolivian plateau, shivers and wonderment

There were four wool blankets on my bed, two stolen from a nearby unoccupied bunk, with a hot water bottle tucked underneath. For sleep attire I'd paired \$2 Bolivian long underwear with a down coat purchased on Cuzco, Peru's black market.



Claire Bushey

Still, I was colder than I'd ever been in my life, with no hope of heat until hours after sunrise.

For me, "south" used to be synonymous with "hot." "South" meant jungle and the equator.

Just before I left for my trip my mother suggested I take a coat. It was, after all, winter in the southern hemisphere. In my best patronizing manner I informed her it was South America and I would be fine.

Moral of the story: Listen to your mother.

There are hot spots in South America – the Amazon rainforest, the Atacama Desert by day – but so far I've avoided them, preferring to freeze in places like the Bolivian altiplano, where I huddled that night in my coat, praying for morning.

I had rented a sleeping bag from the tour company for \$5, but no one had packed it in the SUV, thanks to what a fellow traveler described as South Americans' "different attitude toward efficiency."

In fact, our entire five-person tour group struggled that night. Sleeplessness plagued us, a side effect of bedding down at 14,000 feet. Once awake, the cold kept us that way.

We'd arrived that afternoon at Laguna Colorado, a lake in the Eduardo Avaroa National Andean Fauna Reserve, in the southwestern corner of Bolivia after traversing a roadless desert in the altiplano's Conestoga wagon, the Toyota Land Cruiser. (Seat belts and working speedometers are for wimps.)

The lake was nestled in barren hills, ringed by a white shore of borax. It crumbled under my boots like pie crust as I walked toward the extraordinary water.

It was late afternoon and a chill

See BOLIVIA — F8



Claire Bushey photo

The barren landscape of the Bolivian altiplano.

