Bolivian Clothing:  
It’ll knock your socks off!

Written By Mikayla Bowen

Comparing Australian clothing with Bolivian clothing is like comparing men and women – they are very different, but at the same time, they are unbelievably similar! Most cultures nowadays like to wear anything they want. But in Bolivia, it’s different. Both men and women have different types of clothing. Unlike us Aussies, we just wear whatever the ‘ell’ we want!

When it comes to the men of Bolivia, they would wear light cotton trousers, (which are more often than not homemade), brightly coloured ponchos, and to top it off, nice warm woolen caps called ‘chullas’ – shown in figure 1.1.

As you can clearly see in the image above, us Aussies would clearly look at that and go, “Oooh pretty beanie!” But it is actually a huge part of their culture!

The Bolivian women dress very differently to many other cultures. Unlike women here in Australia, they dress with respect for themselves. They don’t wear skimpy half-buttock showing shorts, they don’t wear singlets that let the whole world see your colorful new Lorna Jane sports bra, they wear clothing that is respectful to themselves and the rest of their culture. A woman of Bolivia would usually wear an outfit that consists of a blouse, an apron over layered skirts and a multi-purpose shawl. The outfit is then generally topped off with a bowler’s hat called a “Bombin”, usually worn by the British in the past. Refer to figure 1.2 to see what Bolivian Women would wear.

Funnily enough, I think Bolivian clothing is starting to come in fashion in Australia! If you said you didn’t have a beanie like the man in figure 1.1, I would be extremely surprised. I have to admit, even I have one. It is the warmest, most wooly, piece of clothing I have. I love it!
Shoes! Shoes! Shoes! Getting a new pair of shoes is like having a baby – you’d do anything to keep them safe & clean! Unlike the men and women in Bolivia, we wear socks! Socks in Bolivia are often not worn because for the shoes that Bolivians wear, socks are not needed. In Bolivia men and women typically wear sandals. These are usually made from either leather or rubber.

As you can see in the image above (figure 1.3), the sandals actually look familiar here in Australia! These are actually in fashion in WA! There are websites where you can buy “Bolivian Sandals” and apparently they are quite comfortable!

When it comes to clothing, Bolivia is usually divided into two regions; Highlands & Valleys, and Lowlands & Chaco. In the next couple paragraphs I will be discussing the differences of clothing in the different regions. Yes, the **highs**, and the **lows**.

First of all, the lowland. The people in this region tend to dress more nakedly, literally. Some women wear triangular pieces of cloth over their backsides made from feathers and cotton fiber, whilst men wore a sort of sheath or ‘carcaj’ to cover their groin area.

Only Boys over the age of 14 wear them. Both men & women wear their hair loosely and cover themselves in necklaces made out of seeds, feathers, animal teeth, bones or flowers, (for women). Surprisingly, this style of clothing continues until modern day! The only difference was that it all got a bit more colourful.

Now onto the Highlands! In the Highlands, the women used to use a rectangular shaped tunic that was long and hung down to their ankles which they tied up at their waist with a belt. The belt had pointy ends that hung to one side, down the middle of the thigh. Bolivian dress styles back in the olden days are nothing like they are today!

Bolivian underwear! Ew! I wouldn’t look down there! Bolivians wear underwear just like any other country, but just with a meaning to it! Those who want to find love, wear red underwear on the 31st of December. Yellow underwear will bring happiness and money, green is for success, pink is for friendship and white is for hope and peace. Also from one of my references, ‘http://www.boliviabella.com/’, I found out that Bolivian underwear is pretty tight, for extra support! I think all these meanings to underwear are awesome! Tight underwear is like a big smile; it makes your cheeks go up! I think I might have a slight case of Punderwear!

Bolivian Clothing as a whole I think is extremely interesting! From Chullas, to Bombins, to Sandals, and even meaningful underwear! I’m sure by now; we all want to go snug up in our colourful Bolivian beanies! I know I do!

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