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Academy



B2B TRAINING KIT

COURSE **3**

SALAR DE UYUNI

20 FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS

Bolivia: The Largest Salt Flat in the World

Content

20 questions and answers about the salt desert of Bolivia, which every travel agency and every traveler should know

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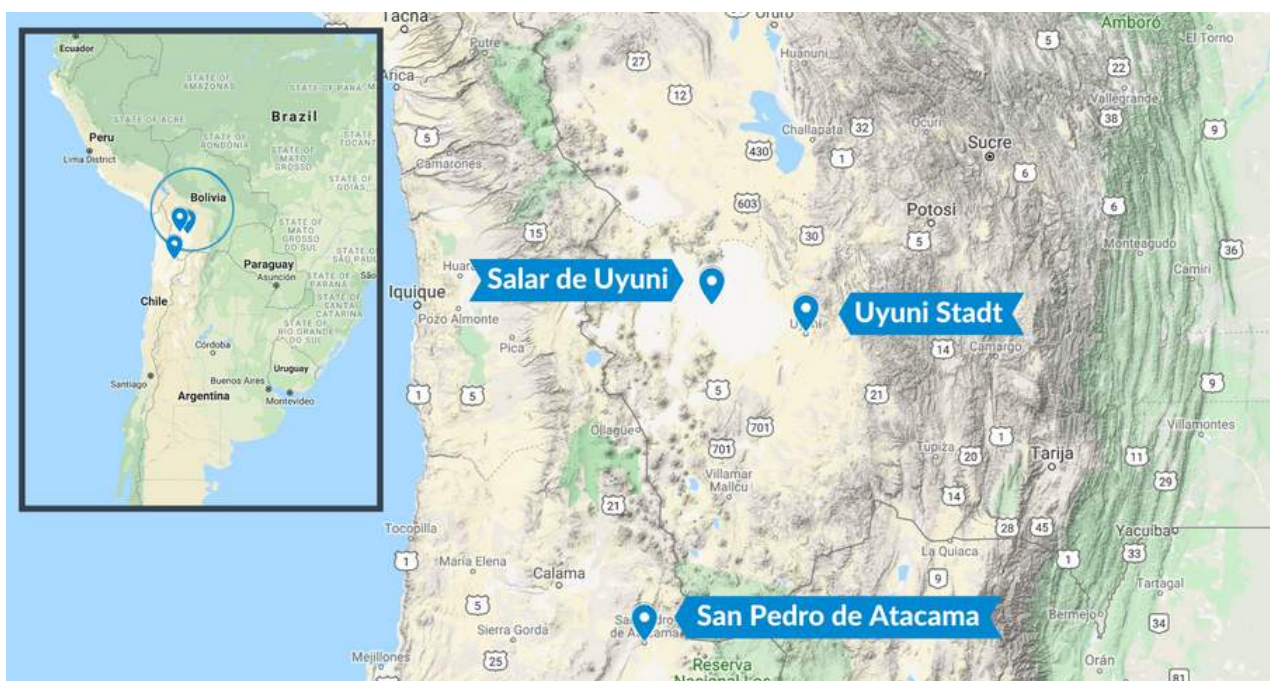
Introduction

This is the third part of our training kit about El Salar de Uyuni, also known as the salt desert of Bolivia. In this course 3 you will find the 20 most frequently asked questions that everyone deals with when planning their trip to El Salar de Uyuni. This course is structured in a way that it serves as an essential guide for anyone interested in tourism in the region.

If you have not yet read [course 1 \(Overview of the Salar de Uyuni\)](#), we recommend that you take a look at it. In Course 1 we will talk about the destination itself: The origin, historical data, demography, biodiversity, and everything you need to know about the world's largest salt desert.

Please also read [course 2 \(Travel planning Salar de Uyuni\)](#). In this course we will talk about all the important information needed to plan and carry out the trip and to sell this destination (arrival in Uyuni, places of interest, types of excursions, challenges in the region).

We hope you enjoy this third course of our training material, which our Logistur team has created with great commitment for you and your agency.





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20 Frequently Asked Questions About Uyuni

General Information

1. How was the Salar de Uyuni created?

The area of the Salar de Uyuni was twice drenched in brackish water (water with a salt content of 0.1% to 1%) thousands of years ago: the first time was about 40,000 years ago, when the area was covered by Lake Minchin of about 36,000 km² (8,896,000 acre). The second time about 12,000 years ago, when Lake Tauca formed. Each time the water of the lakes evaporated due to the lack of tributaries and the heat caused by volcanic activity. Over time, the lakes dried up, leaving only the salt behind. The area took the shape of the salt desert we know today. ([National Geographic en español, 2017](#))

2. How big is the Salar de Uyuni?

The area of the Salar de Uyuni is 10,582 km² (2,615,000 acre) at an altitude of 3,660 metres above sea level (12,024 feet above sea level). These dimensions make the desert the only bright natural place that can be seen from space.

3. How many people live in Uyuni?

Uyuni, the city where the salar with the same name is found, has about 20,000 inhabitants. It belongs to the province Antonio Quijarro in the region of Potosi.

4. Which language is spoken in the Uyuni region?

Since 2009, the Constitution recognizes 37 official languages in Bolivia, the majority of which are indigenous languages. However, the most commonly used are: Spanish (throughout the country), Aymara, Quechua and Guarani.

5. In which currency can I pay in the Uyuni region and where can I change money?

The official currency of the country is the Boliviano (BOB). Changing money in Bolivia is no problem, as you can find an exchange office in every city. Also many hotels offer this service. Before exchanging money, travelers should always check the value of the currency to be able to negotiate a favorable exchange rate. In addition, money should only be changed at official and trusted places.

6. What animals and plants can I see in the Uyuni region?

One of the big attractions of the Salar de Uyuni is the diversity of species, which is one of the main attractions of the country. As in every desert there are only a few different species, but they are very interesting: When summer arrives at the beginning of December, the salar is home to the pink flamingos of South America. These beautiful birds migrate to the region at this time, as the rain slowly starts and the glaciers thaw. Shallow waters are created, in which the flamingos can be found. In summer it is also possible to observe another 80 bird species, including Cornuta, Nandus and the Andean Goose.

These birds also attract the beautiful Andean fox, the region's predator. In addition, travelers to the South LÍpez region may encounter the rodent Viscacha or the alpaca-like vicuña.

The salt desert of Uyuni is also home to huge cacti that grow about 1 centimeter (*0.4 inches*) per year. Many are over 10 meters (*32 feet*) high: so you can imagine how long they have been growing there. In addition, there are other bushes like Pilaya and Thola, which are used as fuel by the people of the region.

Documents, Visa & Vaccinations

7. Do I need a visa to travel to Bolivia and which documents do I need to bring with me?

EU citizens and North American citizens entering Bolivia as tourists do not need a visa for a stay of up to 90 days per calendar year. A passport is required for entry into Bolivia, which must be valid for at least another 6 months. The tourist permit is initially issued for 30 days and can be extended twice free of charge at the migration authorities for a further 30 days each time until 90 days are reached.

8 Which vaccinations do I need for a trip to Bolivia?

No compulsory vaccinations are required for direct entry from European or North American countries. However, upon arrival to Bolivia, Bolivian authorities will require proof of yellow fever vaccination to all travelers coming from a yellow fever area and all travelers who are visiting areas of high risk for yellow fever in the departments of Chuquisaca, La Paz, Cochabamba, Tarija, Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.

For the latest information on vaccinations and documents, always check the official websites.

Climate in the Region

9. When is the best time to travel to the Salar de Uyuni?

In fact, there is no "better" or "worse" time to visit the Salar de Uyuni and the Lipez region. The temperatures between rain and drought vary greatly, as do the impressions of the region, but every moment has its own special beauty.

The high season at Salar de Uyuni starts at the beginning of each year and lasts until the end of March. It is the rainy season - large areas are covered with a thin layer of water that reflects the light and creates incredible optical effects: the salt pan transforms into a huge water mirror.

During this time, earth and sky merge in a unique way like nowhere else in the world, creating a true paradise for photography lovers, and this phenomenon depends solely on the weather (rain), so its appearance can never be fully guaranteed.

In the remaining months, you can marvel at the dry, boundless salt desert: infinite white salt as far as the eye can see.

10. What climate should I expect in the Salar de Uyuni?

The climate in Salar de Uyuni is always cold at the end of the day and especially at night due to the altitude in the Andes, but be careful: at certain times of the day you can get sunburned very quickly. It is important to inform your clients in advance so that they are prepared for the trip. See below what the temperatures are like all year round:

June, July and August are the coldest months in the Salar de Uyuni. Temperatures can reach -15°C (5°F), with average temperatures ranging between 3°C and 4°C (37°F and 40°F). During this time rain is rather rare.

December, January, February and March are the months with the mildest temperatures. The lowest temperatures are between 5°C and 6°C (41°F and 43°F) and the highest can reach 21°C (70°F) between 12:00 and 16:00 o'clock. During these months is rainy season.

April, May, September, October and November are the months in the off-season when the minimum temperatures vary between 0°C and 4°C (32°F and 40°F) and the maximum temperatures between 18°C and 20°C (64°F and 68°F). During this period, rain is rare, although it can occur occasionally.

Trips in the Region

11. How do you get to the Salar de Uyuni?

Arrival from Bolivia: Your customers can take the opportunity to explore the capital La Paz or other nearby cities. It is possible to travel to Uyuni by plane with a duration of about one hour, because Uyuni airport is served by two commercial airlines (Amazzonas and Boliviana de Aviacion) in addition to military air traffic. It is also possible to take the bus from La Paz to Uyuni. This is a cheaper alternative, but it takes much longer: the journey takes approximately 10 hours.

Arrival from Chile: Starting from this neighboring country of Bolivia, your customers will have the opportunity to get to know the city of San Pedro de Atacama and the famous Atacama desert, considered the driest in the world, as well as other attractions in the north of Chile. The region is so diverse that no one will ever be bored there. Uyuni can be reached from Chile by land through the LÍpez region. You should plan at least 8 hours for the drive. From Chile you can also start jeep tours through the Salar, which usually take three days.

Arrival from Argentina: When arriving this way, your customers can take the opportunity to visit beautiful Argentinean cities like Salta and Jujuy. A trip to those cities can be perfectly combined with this itinerary to Uyuni. The route leads from the north of Argentina (Jujuy) to Bolivia and the southern region of Lipez. It goes along new roads, passing interesting landscapes with rivers and red mountains, until the Salar de Uyuni is reached. The advantage is that this route is still relatively unknown and therefore has its very own charm.

12. What are the most beautiful sights in the region?

Places of interest in the Salar de Uyuni:

- *The City of Uyuni:* A city that lives from tourism in the region. You can find the museum "Museo Arqueológico y Antropológico de los Andes Meridionales" there.
- *Railway Cemetery:* The railway cemetery of Uyuni is considered the largest in the world and houses locomotives left behind in the desert.
- *Colchani, the "Gate to Salt":* Colchani is a village in the department of Potosí and a typical town in the region, where workers extract salt from the Salar de Uyuni.
- *Excursions through the Salar:* Jeep excursions through the salt desert. These can be done as a regular tour (6 people per vehicle) or as a private tour.
- *Isla Incahuasi:* Famous "salt island" with centuries-old cacti and a viewpoint from which you can observe the entire Salar de Uyuni 360 °.
- *Ascent of the Tunupa volcano:* For adventurers it is possible to make the ascent to the 1st viewpoint of the volcano (about 4700m / 15,420 ft) to enjoy a spectacular view of the Salar.

Sights in the Lipez Region:

- *Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa:* This is the most visited national park in Bolivia and serves as a protected area of lakes, volcanoes, geysers and much more.
- *Laguna Colorada:* An incredibly red lagoon. The color is caused by the predominant algae species and the high mineral content of the water.
- *Laguna Verde:* Depending on the strength of the wind and the sediments that are stirred up by it, the color of this lake changes between light turquoise and dark green.
- *Salvador Dalí Desert:* A stone desert whose landscape reminds of the work of the Spanish surrealist painter Dalí.

- *Geysers and Hot Springs:* The volcanic activity in El Salar de Uyuni forms warm thermal springs, which are ideal for revitalizing baths.

13. How is a group tour through the Salar de Uyuni like?

Group tours are conducted in four-wheel drive jeeps and in groups of up to 6 people. The group members may therefore not know each other and may be of different ages or nationalities. The 3-day tour (2 nights) starts in Uyuni and leads to San Pedro de Atacama in Chile: A destination also very popular within tourists.

Pros: This tour is especially recommended for people travelling alone or in small groups. By sharing the jeeps it is possible to keep the costs of the tour low, as they are shared among the group members. In addition, one gets to know new people from different countries, which offers interesting topics of conversation: You can exchange experiences, get to know new cultures and make friends. The trip will therefore be an unforgettable experience.

Cons: During a group tour, you will stay in accommodation in the local communities, some of which have a limited standard of service. In addition, in most cases you will share rooms with the group members. This is a disadvantage for travelers who are looking for more comfort and privacy. If you wish to stay in a higher hotel category, a private tour is an alternative.

14. How is a private tour through the Salar de Uyuni like?

The private tour ultimately has the same elements as the group tour: it is conducted with the same vehicles and local drivers, the same sights are visited and the duration is 2 nights / 3 days. The private tour also ends near San Pedro de Atacama. Unlike the regular tour, the travelers usually already know each other and have a certain social relationship, e.g. friends, family, work colleagues, etc.

Pros: As a private group it is possible to adapt certain elements of the trip. This gives your clients more flexibility with special requests and allows them to negotiate these directly with their driver or tour operator, for example a special lunch in the middle of the salar. The big difference is in the accommodation. Accommodation is not in shared accommodation, but in hotels that offer more comfort in terms of services, rooms and meals. It should be noted however, that the comfort is always relative to the region - in general, the standard of accommodation in Bolivia is not comparable to that in the European or North American countries.

Cons: The biggest disadvantage is the price. Since it is a tour with better comfort, the price is much higher compared to the group tour. Especially for those who travel in small groups, the price difference is a considerable amount. Another disadvantage for some travelers is also the low social interaction when travelling alone or in pairs. Usually the drivers only speak Spanish and during the tour there are also only few places where it is possible to meet other people outside the group. Keeping this in mind we can say that a private tour is ideal for larger groups who like to travel at a higher standard.

15. What will be the Itinerary on a tour through El Salar de Uyuni?

Both during the group tour and the private tour, the itinerary is as follows:

Day 1:

The expedition into the salt desert begins with a visit of the railway cemetery, before it leads into the Salar de Uyuni. On the way the community of Colchani is visited. Lunch is served in a restaurant built entirely of salt stones. Afterwards your customers will have enough time to take breathtaking and creative photos in the salar. The tour continues to Incahuasi Island, where your clients will have time to explore the island and the many cacti. At the end of the afternoon, they will reach the traditional community of San Juan, where dinner and overnight stay will take place.

Included: Lunch and dinner

Day 2:

Today everyone has to get up early: After breakfast your customers will head to the Eduardo Avaroa National Wildlife Reserve. The national park is well hidden in the Andes and on the way your customers will see the volcano Ollague and the Canapa lagoon. The trail passes several smaller lagoons where birds and flamingos can be observed. At noon they will arrive in the Siloli Desert, where they will have lunch and enjoy the exotic landscape. In the afternoon the impressive Laguna Colorada awaits your clients. Here one can take impressive pictures and enjoy the beauty of the landscape. Tonight will be spent in the Huayllajara community, where dinner is served as well.

Included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Tag 3:

The last and final day of the group tour starts in the early morning hours. Before daybreak your clients will set off to the famous geysers "Sol de Mañana" (morning sun). They will find the impressive towers of hot water and steam that rise from the ground and can reach an incredible height of up to 50 meters (*164 ft*). This natural spectacle is most beautiful when the first rays of sunshine appear. Shortly after, the group visits the famous thermal water lagoons, which are well known for therapeutic and relaxing effects. The perfect place to take an revitalizing bath. Finally, the trip continues to the Dalí Desert and the Laguna Verde, located just in front of the Licancabur volcano, which is one of the most beautiful places of the whole trip. The last part of the tour leads to the border to Chile, very close to San Pedro de Atacama, where your clients can continue their adventure by getting to know the driest desert in the world and its charms.

Accommodation in Uyuni

16. How are the accommodations on the group tour like?

Accommodation on the group tour is characterized by the following features:

- 1. Shared bedrooms and bathrooms::** These are usually shared with the same people travelling together in the same jeep.
- 2. Managed by local families:** Accommodation in the salt hotels is regulated by law by the local communities.

Thus, the income from tourism really reaches the people living in the region. In the accommodations you get to know the locals and learn more about their culture.

3. Limited services: The services and comfort of these accommodations are simple and limited. Travelers who want a higher level of comfort and are willing to pay a higher price will at best choose a private tour. This includes hotels of a better category.

It is not possible to stay in other hotels on the group tour, even if your customers absolutely want to. Accommodation in the salt hotels is regulated by law by the local communities.

17. How are the accommodations on the private tour like?

Only during the private tour it is possible to guarantee hotels with double/single rooms and private bathroom. These hotels offer a higher level of comfort and services. It should be noted that comfort is always relative to the region - in general, the standard of accommodation in Bolivia is not comparable to that in the European or North American countries. Moreover, Uyuni is a remote region: Wifi for example cannot always be guaranteed.

- The most famous hotels in the region are:
- Jardines de Uyuni
- Hotel Boutique Atipax
- La Petite
- Porte
- Tambo Aymara

Further Concerns

18. What problems I might have to face travelling in the Uyuni region?

Accommodation During a Group Tour

As already explained, the services and comfort of the accommodation on the group tour through the Salar are limited. They may also differ in the quality of various aspects such as hygiene, food, heating, etc.

Our advice: Your partner DMC should be familiar with the conditions in South America by being directly on site. This DMC has the knowledge to identify and offer the best accommodations in the region for your customers and thus facilitates your efforts. The DMC will inform you about the condition of the accommodations and emphasize the value of the unique experience, which makes up for the lack of service.

Taxis at the Airport or Bus Station

In the region of Uyuni the departures from the airport and bus station are a bit chaotic. Taxi drivers do not work with a taximeter, which makes it difficult to recognize their prices. As in other parts of the world, your customers might fall into the hands of "fake taxi drivers" who take advantage of tourists, especially foreigners. The most common problems are overpriced charges, theft of luggage and money change in the form of counterfeit money.

Our advice: Your DMC partner should offer its travel packages including transport to and from the airport/bus station. It is a big advantage if the drivers at least speak English in order to communicate with your customers. Your customers will appreciate this little detail.

Language Barrier

The official language in Bolivia is Spanish and only few people speak English. If your clients do not speak Spanish, this fact may cause them stress and uncertainty. The language barrier also leads to misunderstandings, which can cause serious problems in a region like Uyuni.

Our advice: Your DMC partner should be able to guarantee the presence of a person on the trip who speaks both English and Spanish. This person can translate in all eventualities. At Logistur, for example, this role is performed by a tour guide, a local expert who is always available to help your customers.

Poor Quality of Local Service Providers

Some agencies and local people in Uyuni try to sell excursions through the Salar de Uyuni at suspiciously low prices. But especially in such a remote destination, safety and good quality are very important. Cheap offers could, at worst, cost your customers their lives.

Our advice: A professional DMC can prove and guarantee the quality, punctuality and sense of responsibility of its local service providers. In addition, they are in constant contact with the service providers to ensure customer satisfaction. Make sure that you know the references of your DMC partner.

Altitude Sickness

Uyuni is located in the Andes region far above sea level. The extreme height can surprise some tourists, especially in the first days. However, every body reacts differently: there are people who have no problems at all with altitude. Others feel nausea, dizziness and headaches. It is always good to be aware of this and be prepared for it.

Our advice: In the first days of the journey, your customers should take it easy, without physical exertion, so that their body can get used to the altitude: Proper acclimatization is very important. They should drink enough water (at least 3 litres / 100 ounces, better more) and avoid alcohol. In Bolivia, coca tea is a true miracle cure for altitude sickness (note: the import of coca leaves into Europe or North America is prohibited).

If you work with a DMC, they should have this knowledge and the necessary local contacts to be able to react in time in case of a health emergency. At best, your DMC partner will plan the trip with enough time for relaxation and acclimatization at the beginning of the trip.

Strikes and Demonstrations in the Region

In Bolivia, especially in the Uyuni region, strikes and demonstrations are not uncommon. Although they will rarely endanger the safety of your customers, they can lead to changes in the planned itinerary. Understandably, such circumstances dampen the enthusiasm of the travelers.

Our advice: A professional DMC will always make sure that your clients have a great trip despite the events. They have the necessary local knowledge to react quickly, provide answers and put together alternative plans.

Unreliable Service Providers

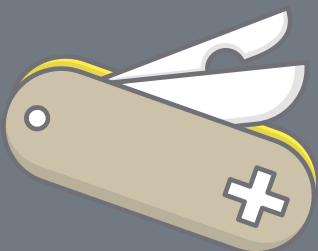
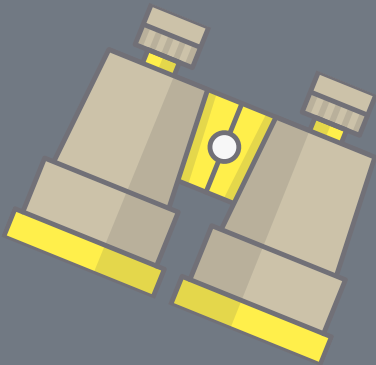
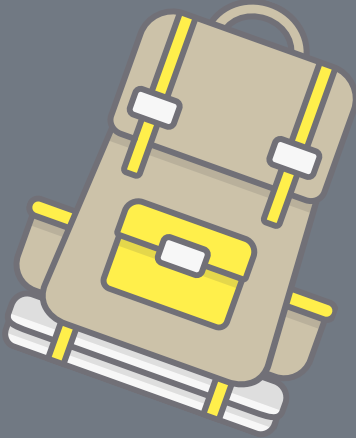
A multi-destination trip through South America and especially through the Uyuni region requires organized planning. Your customers should always feel well cared for and in safe hands, so that they can enjoy their adventure to the fullest without stress. Unreliable and unpunctual service providers threaten this smooth process.

Our advice: Compare local service providers, look for experiences that other travelers have already had and read reviews. If you work with a DMC, make sure you know their references. Find out which local service providers the DMC works with. Make sure you know that your customers are in good hands.

19. What should I pack for my trip to Uyuni?

Important for the trip to Uyuni are good and comfortable shoes. Although your customers will spend a lot of time of the journey in a jeep, it is still an adventure trip and they will also be walking from time to time. The temperatures in the salt desert change, as it can cool down a lot, so a jacket for the low temperatures, preferably a windbreaker, should also be part of your luggage. In contrast, the sun shines very strong, so sunscreen and a sun hat should be in one's backpack, as well as moisturizing cream for skin and lips to protect against dry weather. We have summarized a small overview of the most important things on the packing list for you here:

UYUNI ESSENTIALS



- COMFORTABLE SHOES
- LIGHT CLOTHING, BUT ALSO WARM CLOTHING FOR LOW TEMPERATURES
- SMALL DAYPACK FOR WALKS WITH SPACE FOR CAMERA AND DRINKS
- SUNGLASSES, SUN HAT, SUN CREAM AND LIP BALM
- CASH
- TOILET PAPER
- WATER (ONE LITER OR MORE PER PERSON FOR THE FIRST DAY, THEN ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE GUIDE / DRIVER)
- INSECT REPELLENT
- PERSONAL TRAVEL FIRST-AID KIT
- FLASHLIGHT / HEADLAMP
- POWERBANK

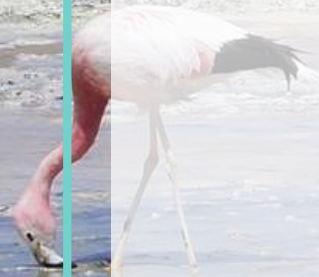
20. Are there any restrictions to keep in mind?

- Not recommended for people with high blood pressure, heart failure, asthma or similar, because places with more than 4000 meters (*13,124 feet*) altitude are visited, which might be a health risk
- Travelers over 65 years of age are advised to consult their doctor for a recommendation for travel at altitudes above 4,000 meters (*13,124 feet*)
- Pregnant women should always consult their doctor in advance
- Attention: some tour operators set a minimum and/or maximum age restriction and some might not allow travel for pregnant women



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Summary



If your customers have questions to ask you about the Salar de Uyuni, we hope that our small guide will help you. For such an adventurous destination, your customers need to feel that they are in safe hands when it comes to advice, in order to book a travel package. We hope that with our 3 courses we could give you some suggestions and hints for planning a trip to the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia.



→ In our [course 1 "Overview of Salar de Uyuni"](#) we show you everything you need to know about the Salar de Uyuni. The content is divided into several chapters dealing with history, economy, demography, geographical location, places of interest in the region and much more.

→ You are also welcome to have a look at our [course 2 "Travel planning Salar de Uyuni"](#). In this course we will show you everything you need to know to be able to offer this destination to your customers: Details of the main attractions, available services, accommodations, possible problems, ideas for tours and much more.

→ Did you find this e-book interesting? Then you might also be interested in our [other courses](#).



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About Logistur DMC



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Logistur plans, implements and carries out journeys to various destinations throughout South America, according to the specific requirements of each of our partner agencies.

We have a team of experts and the necessary technology to facilitate the operational work of your agency. Put everything in our hands and you will be able to focus on the most important thing: the satisfaction of your customers and your sales.

Do you know someone for whom this e-book might be useful?

We invite you to recommend the Logistur Academy to others and to [share this link](#).