

BOLIVIA

BENI DEPARTMENT

GENERAL DATA - HISTORY - GEOGRAPHY - CLIMATE - ECONOMY – GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION - CITY OF TRINIDAD - CITIES AND VILLAGES.

GENERAL DATA OF BENI DEPARTMENT

Capital: City of Trinidad (Cercado province), founded in 1686 by Jesuit priest - Barace Cipriano. Height: 236 meters above sea level.

Area: 213,564 km² (19.44% the total territory of Bolivia).

Population: 421,196 inhabitants (Census 2012).

Population density (inhabitants / km²): 1.97 (Census 2012).

Average annual growth rate of population (2001-2012): 1.34% (Census 2012).

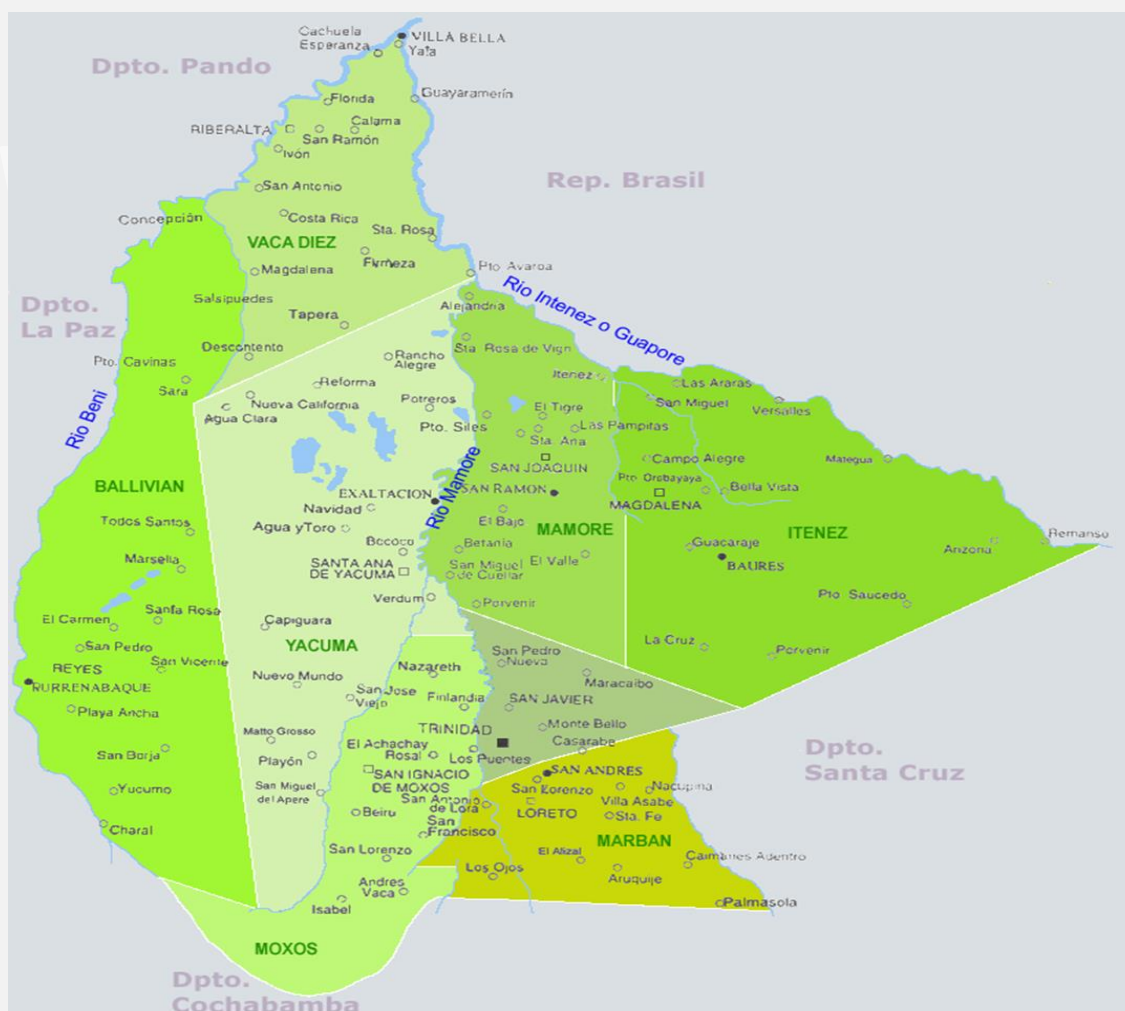
Geographical coordinates: 14° 51' S - 64° 57' O.

Languages: Spanish, Moxeño.



BENI DEPARTMENT IS DIVIDED INTO 8 PROVINCES

Nº	Province	Capital	Area	Population
1	Cercado	Trinidad	12,276 km ² (5.75%)	27.53%
2	Antonio Vaca Díez	Riberalta	22,434 km ² (10.50%)	39.74%
3	General José Ballivián	Santos Reyes	40,444 km ² (18.94%)	2.38%
4	Yacuma	Santa Ana de Yacuma	34,686 km ² (16.24%)	8.68%
5	Moxos	San Ignacio de Moxos	33,316 km ² (15.60%)	7.03%
6	Marbán	Loreto	15,126 km ² (7.08%)	4.65%
7	Mamoré	San Joaquín	18,706 km ² (8.76%)	4.03%
8	Iténez	Magdalena	36,576 km ² (17.13%)	5.96%



HISTORY OF BENI DEPARTMENT

Beni was a very important center of pre-Colombian civilization known as the hydraulic culture of Las Lomas (the hills), a culture that constructed over 20,000 man-made artificial hills, all interconnected by thousands of square kilometers of aqueducts, channels, embankments, artificial lakes and lagoons, and terraces. Between about 4000 BC (and probably earlier as this date is taken from ceramics that have been carbon dated) and the 13th Century AD this region was settled by important and organized groups of human societies. Their civil structures were based, both environmentally and economically, on the use of specific environmental characteristics (such as the use of aquatic plants as fertilizer, and enormous fishing systems they constructed). You can still see miles and miles of these channels and man-made hills if you fly low over Beni.

When the Spanish arrived, the region had already been in decline for about three hundred years. However, this is where many products that are now used worldwide have their origin, among them tobacco, peanuts, cotton, cassava (manioc), vanilla and sweet potatoes. The Spanish initially were intensely interested in this area. During the first century of colonization, they believed the mythical city of El Dorado (also known as Paititi) could be found in this region. However, they never found this legendary city of gold and they soon lost interest in the area, which would remain marginalized for several centuries after.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, northern Beni became Bolivia's rubber capital. The abundance of rubber trees attracted many people to the region, many of them adventurers and others workers (many of whom were indigenous) to work in the huge rubber plantations that arose. For decades, it was one of the most active, dynamic regions of Bolivia. Cachuela Esperanza was an important center for rubber exports as it is located along the shores of the Beni River. It had one of the best-equipped hospitals in Bolivia at the end of the 19th Century. But these enormous rubber plantations all but disappeared by the end of the Second World War and today many of them are cattle ranches. There are only some small rubber producers who still use the river to transport their production.

GEOGRAPHY OF BENI DEPARTMENT

Beni borders upon Brazil to the northeast, and the departments of Santa Cruz to the southeast, La Paz to the west, Pando to the northwest, and Cochabamba to the south. Beni s territory is mainly covered by rainforest (particularly the northern and eastern portions of the department) and pampa (notably the grassland Moxos Plain to the south, closer to the Andean reaches). Much of Beni is at about 155 meters above sea level. Although most of the department is flat, along the border with La Paz there are two sierra chains called Eva Eva and Pelado. Beni is crisscrossed by numerous Rivers, all of which are Amazon tributaries. The largest of these are the Iténez (also known as Guaporé), Mamoré, Madre de Dios, Madera, Yata, Ivón, Machupo, Itonama, Baures, San Martín, San Miguel, San Simón, Negro, Sécuré, Yacuma, Maniquí, Ibare and Apere, all of which are navegable. Beni also has numerous lakes and lagoons. The most important of these are: Laguna Suárez, Rogagua, Rogaguado, San Luis, San Pablo, Huachi, Huatunas, Yusala, Huachuna, Agua Clara, Ginebra, La Dichosa, Bolivia, Navidad, Las Abras, Larga, and Maracaibo.

CLIMATE IN BENI DEPARTMENT

Beni is hot and humid during most of the year with an annual rainfall average between 1000 millimeters and 4000 millimeters. It is one of the wettest regions in Bolivia, with more wetlands than the better-known Pantanal. During the winter (June and July), the weather can be cool and winds blowing northward from the South Pole and Argentina s Patagonia region can cause temperatures to drop quite drastically very quickly. Humid tropical climate develops the widest range of species of flora and fauna in Beni Department.

ECONOMY OF BENI DEPARTMENT

Because of its climate and rich soils, this department is Bolivia s second largest agricultural center after Santa Cruz. Here you can see extensive fields of corn, yuca (manioc), sunflowers, rice, and many tropical fruits such as cacao (from which chocolate is made), Brazil nuts (one of the region s main crops and exports), soybeans, bananas, maracuya, guayaba, papaya, and many other citric fruits. Coffee is also grown extensively.

Beni is also Bolivia's largest cattle-ranching region. Official estimates calculate there are anywhere between 2 and 2.5 million heads of cattle throughout the year. Most of these are turned out to pasture and thus are naturally fed.

In the region's many rivers over 400 species of fish have been found (Trinidad has dedicated an entire museum to Beni's fish fauna and it is the third largest of its type in South America) called the Museo Ictícola. The most commonly fished and consumed species are pacú, tambaquí, surubí, palometa (a type of piranha), sábalo, bagre (catfish), and blanquillo.

Alligators are also hunted for their leather and meat, which is considered a delicacy and is a common part of meals in Beni.

Beni now also exports huge amounts of lumber, although over the past 20 years the government of Bolivia has worked with numerous international entities and NGOs to certify its lumber concessions and all lumber exported must be accompanied by certificates of origin.

Although we have established the presence of various minerals such as tin, manganese, lead, platinum, gold, beryllium, and columbite, especially in the western area of Beni department, only gold mining is important in the mining sector (Serranía de San Simon.)

BENI DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENTS

According to current Constitution, the highest authority in the department lies with the prefect (prefecto, similar to a governor but with restricted powers). The prefect was appointed by the President of the Republic till 2005, since then it has been elected by popular vote to serve for a five-year term.

CITY OF TRINIDAD

Trinidad, officially La Santísima Trinidad (Spanish: The Most Holy Trinity), is a city in Bolivia, capital of the department of Beni.

The city was founded in 1686 by Padre Cipriano Barace. In 1769, the town moved to its current location, 9 miles away due to flooding. The original city was on the Mamoré River, but flooding and disease forced a move on the location of the city. It is located in the province of Cercado, one of 8 provinces of Beni department.

Sited on the Southern edge of the Amazon basin on the Llanos de Moxos/Mojos, the climate is hot and humid at all times.

One of the more notable features of the city are the open drains that surrounds every block of buildings. These are linked together by lidded ditches and thence to the local river. These are necessary due to the heavy rainfall that occurs between December and May.

Trinidad, located in the Bolivian tropics, is hot and humid most of the year. This region of the country is heavily forested and many large rivers (all tributaries of the Amazon River) run through Beni. Like most cities in Bolivia, it is built around a central plaza with a large Catholic Cathedral as its centerpiece. Trinidad was originally a small Jesuit town but is now a large city with over 100,000 inhabitants. Its mission-style church was demolished and rebuilt in 1923. Despite these changes, many of the original religious relics, paintings and statues are still housed in the Cathedral, which faces the Main Plaza.

Trinidad is known as the city of motorcycles, this being the preferred mode of transportation. Throughout the day and evening, the roar of motorcycles is everywhere. At night, cycling around the central plaza is a pastime. The plaza (Plaza Mariscal José Ballivián) is where townsfolk congregate at night and on weekends. Numerous stores and restaurants, internet cafés, banks and local government buildings surround it.

Trinidad is surrounded by rivers, lakes and lagoons. There are many interesting river tours and beautiful restaurants and resorts around the city's main lagoons. Trinidad is also one of the first five Jesuit mission towns established and these are now part of the Misiones tour includes visits to San Javier, Loreto, San Pedro and San Ignacio de Moxos as well. Trinidad and San Ignacio de Moxos both take part in the International Baroque Music Festival every two years in Bolivia.

Trinidad boasts two singular museums. The Museo Itícola (Fish Fauna Museum) is the third largest of its kind in South America and houses over 400 specimens of fish species found in the region's lakes and lagoons. It is located on the UAB University campus and is truly interesting. Here you can see tiny fish, piranhas, and a preserved pink river dolphin (full sized floating in formaldehyde). The Kenneth Lee Ethno-Archeological Museum is also a great place to visit. Here you can see exhibits of pottery, utensils and tools, textiles and other implements used by the Moxos culture.

CITIES AND VILLAGES OF BENI DEPARTMENT

GUAYARAMERÍN. It is a city within the Bolivian Beni Department, capital of the Guayaramerín Municipality in the Vaca Díez Province. Guayaramerín is located 93 km to the east of the city of Riberalta, next to the riverbank of the Mamoré River, and in front of the Brazilian population of Guajará Miríms. It is a port in which there is a permanent port of the Bolivian Navy. The city has a small airport, served by three local airlines. The progressive spirit of its residents and their love to their land has produced a vertiginous growth of the population in the last years. They are emulating their Brazilian neighbors; in consequence, Guayaramerín possesses different characteristics from other eastern Bolivian populations. Guayaramerín has modern houses, all the basic services and many other facilities. The population is composed by Bolivian and some foreign people.

REYES. This population descends from a hunter s culture. It is constituted by the Maropa, Cavineño, Tacana and Chamanes ethnic groups. Ecologically, this is a zone of great importance because of the ecological development and the adventure tourism. Castaña, Palmito and Timbering woods sustain the economic activity. At the present time, a project for building an oceanic road is under way. It is recommendable to navigate through the precious rivers of Beni, Yata, Negro, Santa María and Yacuma.

RIBERALTA. It is a town in the Beni Department in northern Bolivia, situated where the Madre de Dios River joins the Beni River, at an altitude of 172 meters above the sea level. The town of Riberalta is the capital of the Vaca Díez Province and Riberalta Municipality. It has a warm weather with a standard temperature of 26° C. The area is in the Amazon Basin. It possesses abundant natural resources due to the diversity of the vegetable and animal species. Riberalta is very popular thanks to the typical arts and crafts showed in the elaboration of wicker knitting, woodcarving, varied leather products and cold porcelain.

RURRENABAQUE. Rurrenabaque is a tourist center. It is one of the most beautiful natural reserves in the world. This wonderful place is situated 229 meters above the sea level. In this place, many ethnic groups such as Chimanes, Chamas and Tacanas live. The antique Tacana language is still preserved and spoke. Rurrenabaque, in Tacana, means “lagoon of the ducks”. The weather is humid and hot with a standard temperature of 27° C. This is a tropical zone. The raining season begins in October and finishes in April. Diverse ethnic groups coexist in the zone. Mosevenes, tacanas, tsimanes and esse-ejja, native of the Amazonian zone, next to aymaras and quechuas, originating of the highest regions. The

economic activities are liderizadas by the tourism that benefits to 75% of the population, followed by agriculture and the commerce. Madidi Park it is one of the most important natural reserves in the world. There, more than 1,000 kinds of birds and 300 kinds of mammals and reptiles live. The hectares are covered by an immense diversity of plants. You can also visit “The Reserve of the Biosphere”, “The Indigenous Territory Pilón Lajas” and “The Beni River” where you can appreciate beautiful landscapes and forests. Every year, 37,000 foreign tourists visit Rurrenabaque. They enjoy the people s kindness. This is the perfect place to practice ecological tourism, adventure tourism and extreme sports. Its habitants call it "The tourist pearl of Beni"

SAN IGNACIO. This town is inhabited by ancient populations as Yuracarés, Chimanes and Mosevenes. It is considered the Folkloric Capital of Beni due to its cultural richness. The standard temperature is 25° C. It contains a diversity of ecosystems, flora, fauna and precious indigenous territories. It is interesting to visit here the artificial hills. Templates, ceramic remains and pre Columbian constructions are expressions of the missioner epoch of Moxos. The Isirere Lagoon and The Isiboro Secure National Park are two special natural attractions.

SAN JOAQUÍN. The ethnic identity of this region is placed on the denomination "Joaquino". San Joaquin contains a strong indigenous population. It possesses a natural, historical and cultural diversity; besides, it presents facilities in order to access to the Brazilian market (because of the proximity to the Brazilian territory). It is recommendable to visit here: the Mapucho, Mamoré and Matacura rivers, as well as the innumerable beautiful lagoons.

SANTA ANA. Santa Ana del Yacuma is a town in the Beni Department in northeastern Bolivia. Santa Ana is the capital of the Yacuma Province and the Santa Ana del Yacuma Municipality, located at an elevation of 144 m above sea level, where the Yacuma River meets the Mamoré River. A town whose origins are related to the Movima, Cayubaba, Trinitario and Yucaré cultures. It is located in the center of Beni. It presents different geomorphologic formations situated in plains, woods and hills. It has innumerable navigable rivers like Yacuma, Apere, Rapulo and Cavitú. The Biosphere Reserve, managed by the Beni Biological Bio Station, is situated here too. In the zone, there are abundant medicinal plants that have been calling the attention of important transnational laboratories.

SAN BORJA. It was founded by Francisco Borja and Ignacio de Sotomayor, two Jesuit Missioners, on October 10th, 1693, close to the banks of the Maniqui River. It has a hot weather with a standard temperature of 28° C. The population is constituted by the Chimanes, Mojeños and Mosevenes ethnic groups. The Indigenous Territory of Chimanes is situated in the zone. Woods cover 538,590 hectares; they are part of the Biosphere Reserve called The Beni Bio - Station. San Borja presents innumerable tourist attractions. Its cultural expressions combine the Spanish heritage and the Amazon traditions. It is an ideal area for adventure tourism and scientific research.

SAN JAVIER. It is located near the city of Trinidad. It is constituted by the indigenous populations of Canichana and Sirionó. It contains a great variety of vegetable and animal resources. Its rivers, lagoons, brooks and woods represent a great potential for the development of eco and adventure tourism. Moreover, it presents natural prairies that keep a great variety of oriental fauna such as alligators, lizards, urines, tigers and monkeys. Fish species like surubí, piraña, pacú, gold and many others can be found. San Javier possesses a rich cultural heritage expressed in its religious festivities and in its folkloric dancers such as the Macheteros, the Toritos, the Piyu and the Mamas.

[MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BENI DEPARTMENT.](#)