

Aymara

The Aymara of Bolivia and Peru are believed to be descendants of the ancient Tiahuanacun civilization centered near Lake Titicaca in the early centuries A.D. The ruins of the ancient temple of Tiahuanacu in Bolivia are only partially excavated and reveal an advanced civilization. Sophisticated farming techniques that produced an abundance of food enabled the Tiahuanacun civilization to advance in areas of art and stonework.



Location

The majority of Aymara (roughly 2 million) live in western Bolivia, a land of great physical beauty and diversity in the heart of South America. Another million or so live in southern Peru in the area around Lake Titicaca.

Topography

Bordered by Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay, Bolivia is dominated in the west by the Andes Mountains which run from the northern end of the country to Argentina. Numerous rivers drain to the west and east of the Andes range. The eastern portion of the country is tropical, forming the upper reaches of the vast Amazon River drainage system.

The Altiplano, a highland plateau that straddles the Andes mountains, has an average elevation of 13,000 feet and occupies 25 percent of Bolivia's surface. At the northern end of the Altiplano is Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world at 12,500 feet.

Culture

In dress, language, architecture and lifestyle, the Aymara largely follow the ways of their ancestors. Music and dance are contemporary cultural activities. Private rituals and feasts are held to mark important life events such as planting and harvesting, homebuilding, a child's first haircut, marriage, and death. These elaborate fiestas - dedicated to the *Pachamama* (mother-earth goddess) or to particular saints - include drinking, dancing, eating, visiting and marketing. Fiestas are community events, but individuals known as *prestes* sponsor and organize them.

Aymara clothing is colorful and suited to life at high altitude; it brightens the drab landscape. Men often wear striped ponchos over shirt and pants. A knitted wool hat, called a *chullu*, has flaps to keep the ears warm. A felt hat may be worn over the chullu. Women also wear felt bowler hats, and full skirts of brilliant shades of orange, purple, red and blue. They wear a shawl for warmth and use a wool *aguay* for carrying their babies on their backs.

Government

Since the "Popular Participation" law of the 1990s went into effect, tax monies have been diverted to towns and districts based on population, thus slowing some the move from rural areas to the cities. Aymaras form "syndicates" to accomplish their political ends. Community organization and linkages to the national government vary. The extent of government loyalty depends upon where one lives, and the particular political party to which one belongs.

Leadership roles within Aymara communities tend to be based on a complicated system of prestige, attained through community service, sponsorship of fiestas, accumulation of wealth, military service, and an ability to manipulate extra-community ties and organizations.

History

The Incas conquered the Aymara in the fifteenth century, followed by the Spanish *conquistadors* in 1538. Throughout their long history, including times of domination by the Incas and Spanish, the Aymara have retained a strong cultural and linguistic identity.

There are few places on earth where people survive in such a high, cold and barren region as the Altiplano and yet the Aymara of Bolivia and Peru learned to make a living there centuries ago. They domesticated the llama to supply meat, milk, hides and wool. They developed hardy food plants such as the potato, *quinoa* and *aba*. They dug irrigation canals to carry water from the snowy peaks to their fields.

SIM Involvement

Some Aymaran leaders are putting pressure on their communities to reject evangelicals to get back to the ancient Inca religion of animism. Pastors report increasing resistance to evangelism, discipleship, and preaching.

SIM currently works with the Aymara of Bolivia through Theological Education and youth camps. Pray that the Aymara will accept and understand the love God has shown them through Jesus Christ.

Scripture Availability

Portions of the Bible were translated into the Aymara language between 1829-1966, and the New Testament was completed in 1977. In 1986, the complete Bible was printed in Aymara. With a literacy rate of 31% among rural Aymara, a great need exists for creativity in communicating the message of Jesus and discipling believers.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.