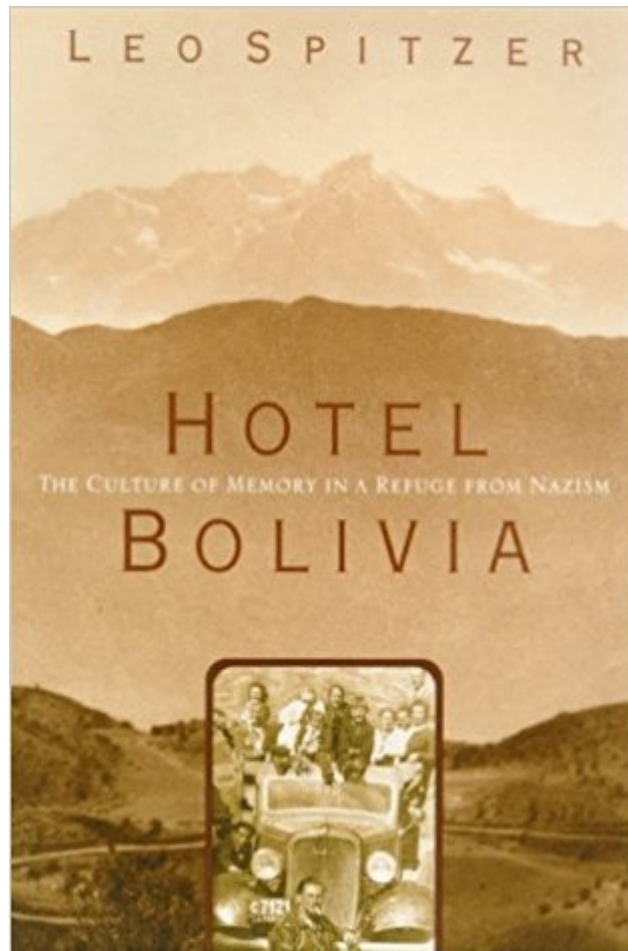




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Hotel Bolivia: The Culture Of Memory In A Refuge From Nazism



Synopsis

In the 1930s, thousands of people fleeing Nazi-dominated Europe found refuge in Latin America. But by late 1938, Bolivia was one of the few places in the entire world that was still accepting Jewish refugees; more than twenty thousand Central Europeans soon remade their lives there. Leo Spitzer examines, with exemplary subtlety and detail, the tension between memory and history that shows in their story: their European culture, their Jewish identities, their sense of displacement, and their experience of Bolivia's politics and society.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Hill and Wang; 1st Edition(PB) edition (May 17, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0809001756

ISBN-13: 978-0809001750

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,068,200 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #54 in [Books > History > Americas > South America > Bolivia](#) #2041 in [Books > History > World > Jewish > Holocaust](#)

Customer Reviews

When, in the mid-1930s, Jews began to leave Europe in flight from Nazi persecution, they found that they were welcome only in a few countries. One of them was Bolivia, which, despite the presence of many pro-Nazi German immigrants, readily accepted 20,000 Jewish refugees. Thousands of miles away from the unfolding Holocaust, these newcomers struggled to rebuild their lives--to find work, to begin families, to make a home among strangers. And they struggled to retain the memory of their now destroyed homelands, to preserve their customs and languages in the shock of displacement. Leo Spitzer, born in La Paz to Austrian Jewish refugees, offers an ethnographic historical account of the world of the Bolivian Jews, an account made richer by his explorations of his family's past. At the heart of his study is a troubling question: should not all the Jews of Europe, well aware of Hitler's intentions, have left their homes and come to places like Bolivia? His consideration of why so many stayed to face death lends philosophical weight to what is already a valuable contribution to Holocaust studies--even if Spitzer modestly closes by suggesting that the story of the Bolivian Jews may well "shrink to a paragraph, a sentence, even to

a footnote within the larger story of Nazi persecution." --Gregory McNamee

Bolivia, a haven to Nazi war criminals including Klaus Barbie, the infamous Gestapo chief of Lyon, France, was also an asylum for tens of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi-occupied Central and Eastern Europe. Dartmouth history professor Spitzer, born in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1939, the son of Austrian-Jewish immigrants who had arrived just three months before his birth, has produced a searing account of the Jewish refugees' checkered experience in "Hotel Bolivia," as they called this mountainous country, which many of them regarded as only a temporary haven. Part memoir, part oral history, Spitzer's eye-opening study uses interviews with surviving refugees (now widely dispersed around the world), plus letters, photographs, family albums and archival documents to explore the trauma of displacement. He acutely describes these refugees' lives in terms of a dynamic of grief, nostalgia, adjustment and mourning for a shattered past, even as they kept up an identification with Austro-German Jewish bourgeois society. Spitzer, who moved to the U.S. with his family in 1950, notes ruefully that Bolivia's welcoming policy toward Jews was short-lived, as anti-Semitic agitation culminated in a right-wing military coup in 1943. Today, just 1500 Jews live in Bolivia. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a book about Jews who fled from the Nazis from 1931--1945...stories about how hard it was to obtain exit visas,,,doing the certification in a specific order and bribing everyone in the line. If you go out of turn or are missing an item you have to get the item and start all over again waiting the bribing. For may, they just ran out of money. It wasn't that they didn't know they would die, they couldn't get out. Many countries cared more about the educated professionals who wanted to leave and would therefore take their livelihood. If you were a carpenter or trades person you were more valuable. The book is carefully researched. It is not easy reading but it is a great way to round out your existing knowledge.

Beautifully written, I learned about a chapter in my country's history that I never knew about. Mr. Spitzer's personal accounts are very touching and sincere. His sensitivity to nature, politics, and underlying feelings of emigrants by force, cultivates a connection between author and reader.

Excellent and probably only source of the history of this migration to Bolivia!

As a grand son of jews that also took Bolivia (1910) as a Refuge from the madness of Pogroms in czarist Russia, I was since long ago interested in the following waves of forced jewish inmigration in this country. A soon as I read "Hotel Bolivia....", I commented it with some Austrian friends that live in Tarija, Bolivia to this very day and that came to Bolivia in 1938 in the same conditions as Spitzer's family. They all tell me that his description of that horrible time is very accurate (especially the Austrian pre-emigration period). Tarija is a small Department in the south of Bolivia which borders with Argentina. Here too, many Jews came in their way to Argentina, they were well treated and some stayed the rest of their lives, all of them respected by this community as hard-working and decent people. Some continued their journey to the USA or Argentina. Today, only 3 Jewish families (survivors) remain from that period and I would like to thank Leo Spitzer for a book that preserves a testimony of their lives in an objective and accurate perspective.

When many think of the land locked country of Bolivia, they think of narcotics, Nazi's and natural resources. Few think of Jews. But to Jews fleeing Europe after the Anschluss of 1938, Bolivia was the place about which to think. Bolivia offered a safe haven in a world of closed doors; at least 20,000 Jews found refuge in La Paz, Sucre, Oruro, Cochabamba during the War. Leo Spitzer, a Professor of History at Dartmouth and specialist in cultural memory and gender studies, was born in La Paz in 1939, his parents having just fled their beloved Vienna. His book, *Hotel Bolivia*, succeeds in providing an enlightening look at the little known story of the Jewish refugee community in Bolivia; and also, for the most part, Spitzer accomplishes his goal to craft a meditation on the nature of individual and collective memories and the ability of people to adapt to their new environment. Through interviews, testimonies, documents, diaries, and recollections, many rendered benign by the passing of time, Spitzer relates to us the stories of the refugees who never felt at home in Bolivia -- people who viewed themselves as refugees and not residents -- perceiving Bolivia as a transit station, a hotel by the name of Hotel Bolivia. In 1938, Bolivia was still recovering from its devastating Chaco War with Paraguay. This Catholic country that was seventy percent Quechua and Aymara-speaking mestizos did know a little about Jews. Its liberator, President Antonio Jose de Sucre, was probably part crypto-Jewish, and Mauricio Hochschild, of German Jewish parentage, was one of Bolivia's wealthiest industrialists. Into this high altitude came over 20,000 Jewish refugees. While most gained entry in order to set up agricultural settlements, just a few hundred ever left the urban center of La Paz for the good earth of cooperative farming. The story of Spitzer's own family's crossing from Genoa to La Paz is engrossing. Although Spitzer's grandfather Leopoldo, for whom he is named, died on the ship en route to Boli! via, the Spitzer family's

shipboard photos and recollections are filled with optimism and are devoid of sorrow. Did the passage of time distort their memories? It was not until Spitzer discovered his father's captions on the obverse sides of the photos that he learned of his father's profound sadness of leaving his homeland (Heimat) and his extreme feelings of loss on losing his beloved father and having to bury him during a port call in Caracas. Spitzer sharply quotes journalist Herb Caen's observation, "Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed." Leo, named for his grandfather who had died just a few weeks prior, became a link to the past in this new and alien land. The other refugees recreated several other links to their pasts, including the Circula Israelita, Austria Club, Juedische Jugendbund, Judische Gemeinde, and Macabi socials and sporting clubs. Spitzer shows how the sinking of the refugee ship "Orazio" took on an amplified importance in the refugee community. Although most of the Orazio's passengers, who were en route to Bolivia, were rescued off the coast of France, the sinking came to represent the collective experience of all the Jewish refugees. The most disconcerting passages in HOTEL BOLIVIA are those attributed to some of Bolivia's "German" Jewish leaders during the War, some of them laced with prejudice against the Ostjuden of Poland. Today, with less than 1,500 Jews residing in Bolivia, and fewer than 100 of the original refugees, Leo Spitzer transmits an important story to us about forgotten refugees, their adaptations, their institutions, and their even leaders' attempts at communal farming.

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