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[HOME](#) › [ESSAYS](#) › A TRIP THROUGH BOLIVIA'S WITCHES MARKET BY  
TERRA HALL

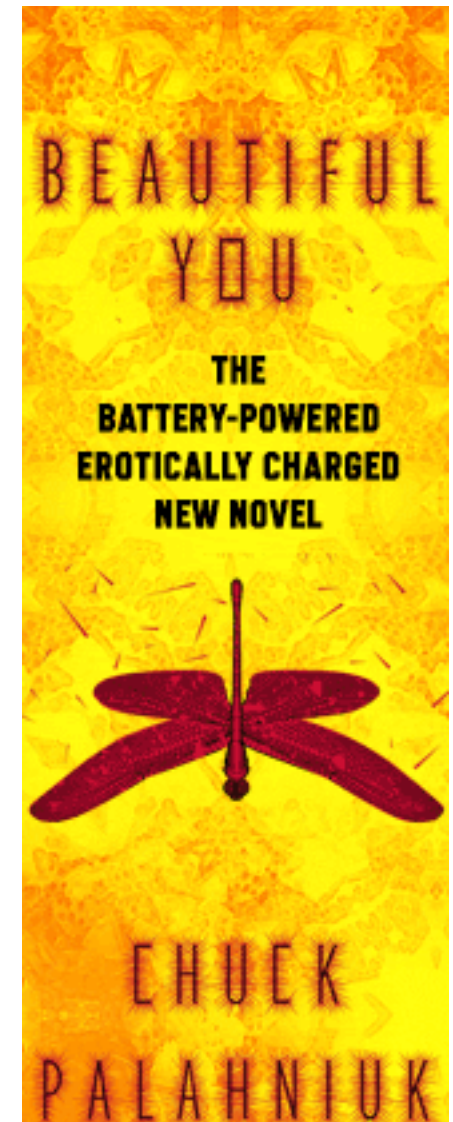
# A Trip through Bolivia's Witches Market by Terra Hall

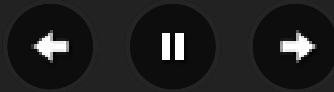
BY [CHICAGO LITERATI](#) on [OCTOBER 22, 2014](#) • [\( 0 \)](#)

## A Trip through Bolivia's Witches Market

By

**Terra Hall**

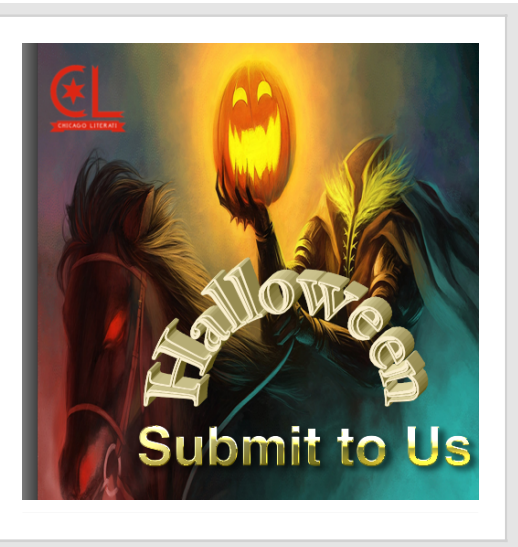




City view of La Paz (image credit: Terra Hall 2014)

From the moment the sun illuminated the sky on my first day in La Paz, the capitol of Bolivia, I could tell this metropolis was a city of contrasts. The rows of high-rise luxury apartments that cast shadows on women clad in brightly colored skirts and bowler hats; the luxury cars imported from Europe parked next to next to donkey-drawn carts, both waiting for a red light to turn green; the staunchly Catholic traditions delicately interwoven with ancient folklore and, yes, witchcraft.

From good luck beads to dried herbs and shamans who peddle potions meant to cure everything from a hangover to a broken heart, few places



embody the juxtaposition of old and new that make up one of the world's highest cities like *El Mercado de las Brujas*, or the Witches' Market.

The market backs up to Iglesia de San Francisco, making it easy for visitors to swing by the the *mercado* for a quick tarot card reading and still make it to 7:00 mass on time.

Lining the zip-zagging cobblestone streets, this market is the one-stop-shop of Bolivian *brujeria*, providing believers everything they need to tell fortunes, cure ailments and cast spells. Astrologers, medicine women, folk doctors and sorcerers stock up on the products they need to practice their craft. Alongside them, mothers look for syrups to bring down their babies' fevers, and old men stop in to get their daily coca leaf tea. Powders ease menstrual cramps or rectify impotence while naked figurines promise to improve fertility. Dried armadillos prevent thieves from entering a home and oils and soaps help the lovelorn find their soul mates.

While different from the markets I frequent in my hometown, nothing really stood out as all that strange with the exception of one thing — the multitude of dried llama fetuses. Everywhere I looked, I made eye contact with the animals that were hanging in dusty store windows and sprawled out on tables and piled into hand-woven baskets. Curious, I popped into one of the stores to ask about the shopkeepers' choice in decor.

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It turns out llama pregnancy is a delicate one and miscarriages frequently occur. When they do, shepherds collect the fetuses, dry them and sell them to shops like the one in which I was standing. Patrons, in need of good luck and prosperity, buy the dried llama bodies and offer them to Pachamama, or Mother Earth. Some will keep the llamas in their home next to herbs and coca leaves, though the more common method is to bury them. The reason: it protects anything built on the property from everything from the evil eye to earthquakes.

Some locals take this ritual so seriously, my guide explained, that they will outright refuse to enter a home without the Pachamama offering. In fact, he said, legend has it that an American company began constructing a new hotel in the heart of downtown. Not knowing about the rule, they broke ground and began construction without burying the llama fetus. When the construction crew found out, they dropped their tools and walked off the property, refusing to return until a shaman could perform a proper ceremony.

I decided to pass on the llama fetus – after all I wasn't planning on buying property or building a house anytime soon (plus I figured it might be a stretch to bring a dead animal through customs). Instead, I opted for an amulet to accompany me on the rest of my journey and a packet of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, my purchase the perfect representation of the ever present old and new living together harmoniously in this city of contrasts.



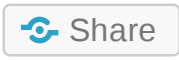
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**Terra Hall** is a multimedia journalist living in Lima, Peru. While she started her reporting career in front of the camera, these days, you're more likely to catch her behind her computer screen pounding away at the keyboard. When Terra isn't writing she's collecting new stamps in her passport. To read more of her work visit [www.TerraHall.com](http://www.TerraHall.com).

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