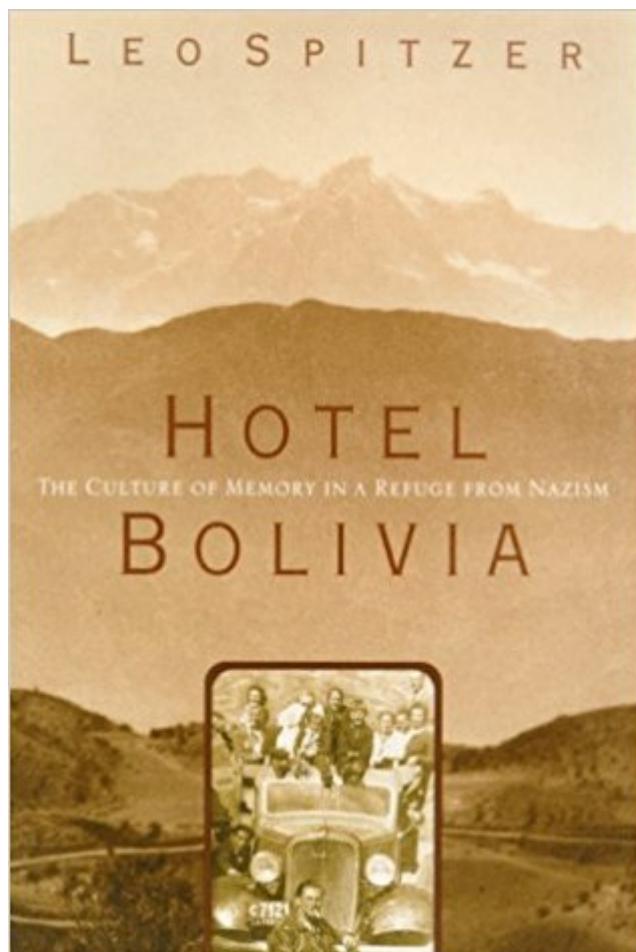


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Hotel Bolivia: The Culture Of Memory In A Refuge From Nazism



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

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Customer Reviews

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.

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