

Miniature Newsletter

Jan. 24 marked the beginning of “Alasitas,” a three-week long Andean festival celebrated by Bolivia’s indigenous Aymara tribe.

The festival centers on the Aymaran god Ekkekko, the god of abundance. Honoring a centuries-old tradition, Aymarans create shrines in their homes to Ekkekko (which means “dwarf” or “midget” in Aymara), and surround him with miniatures of things they wish to acquire in the coming year. In La Paz, where the festival is grandly celebrated, one can buy miniature food and chocolates, tools and kitchen utensils, cars and houses, suitcases, newspapers, visas and passports, lottery tickets and first-class plane tickets, diplomas, and wads of micro-money in all sorts of currencies, especially US dollars (photo above right).



Many of the ceramic Ekkekko statues are made to accommodate a cigarette. While Ekkekko smokes, petitioners pour themselves an alcoholic drink, always observing the tradition of first spilling a few drops for Pachamama, Mother Earth, before they take a sip for themselves.



Alasitas originally took place in September, springtime in Bolivia, when farmers plant and pray for a good crop and a bountiful harvest. People in Santa Cruz, Bolivia’s largest city, still celebrate Alasitas in September. But in the Andes, where La Paz is located, the timing of the festival was changed to begin on Jan. 24 to commemorate an indigenous uprising that occurred in 1781.

Miniature spoof newspaper. The coin in the center is about the size of a quarter. The sub-head on the right side of the right page is titled, “They Will Bless the Planes in Copacabana”. Vehicles are regularly blessed at the Cathedral of Copacabana.

Historically, Alasitas lasted only 10 days. But it's become wildly popular, drawing tourists and vendors from countries throughout South America and beyond, so it's been extended to three weeks, concluding with Carnival, which marks the start of Lent.



If the capitalistic preoccupation with wealth and luxury during Alasitas seems to run counter to the egalitarian Aymaran culture, it's worth noting that Ekkekko is also charged with displaying things that a family can afford to share.



Examples of miniatures for sale. Bottom right is a 6" by 9" kit for those wanting to construct a new house, complete with miniature bag of cement, brick, roofing, wiring, sand and gravel...and a new minibus.

¡Feliz Alasitas!

!Thank you for the bounty of prayers, emails, and gifts you send to us/Misión Fronteras and our Andean neighbors!

!Muchas Gracias!

Deb and Jeff