The Day of the Dead (known as Día de los Muertos in Spanish) is a holiday celebrated throughout Latin America where people honor their dead ancestors and celebrate the cycle of life. While the meaning of the holiday is the same across countries, it is celebrated differently in different countries.

Bolivia is a country in the middle of South America. For the Day of the Dead, the traditional offerings such as coca leaves, llama meat, and the fermented corn drink called chicha are placed on altars honoring the dead in Bolivia. Early November marks the beginning of the rainy season when recently planted seeds are germinating. To attract the rain, farmers play music on flutes called pinkullus, filling the cemetery with melancholic music that beckons returning spirits.

As in other areas of Latin America, Bolivians construct household altars to honor their deceased loved ones with photographs and personal belongings of the deceased, as well as candles, flowers, sweets, sugarcane, and meat dishes served with spicy satja sauce. More elaborate altars reflect the different planes that are so important in the
Andes Mountains that run through Bolivia: llama meat, fish, and baskets of flowers are placed beneath the table to represent *Uma Pacha* (the underworld); the base of the altar is adorned with lowland products such as coca leaves, bananas, and chicha; chuño (dried potatoes), beer, and ocas from the highlands cover the table; and above this a cross made of sugar cane is hung to represent the heavens.

On November 2, the altar is moved to the cemetery where the celebration continues. Bolivians place special importance on receiving and pleasing their ancestors during the first three years after death as the spirit of the deceased is still tightly connected to the living.

In both Bolivia and Peru, small sweet yeast breads called *t’anta wawas* flavored with cinnamon and sprinkled with sugar are made at this time of year. In the most traditional form they are shaped like babies (*wawas*), and may be decorated with a plastic babydoll mask; newer variations include pets, houses, and flowers. T’anta wawas are placed as offerings to the dead on house altars and at the head of the grave of loved ones.

A tradition unique to Bolivia is the veneration of human skulls called *ñatitas*, or “little souls.” Owners of ñatitas keep them in their homes and communicate with them through dreams, asking the ñatita for favors such as prosperity, safety, and health. In early November in the city of La Paz, believers take their ñatitas to the cemetery for a celebratory mass in which they are crowned and covered with flower petals, given cigarettes, and splashed with alcohol. Owners and other celebrants eat, chew coca, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol alongside the ñatitas.