Abandoned Chacaltaya Ski Resort
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The world's highest ski resort was deserted after an 18,000-year-old glacier melted away.

The Chacaltaya Ski Resort was once the only ski resort in Bolivia. The popular resort also had the honor of being both the highest ski resort in the world and home to the world's highest restaurant. But when the mountain's glacier melted, it was all but abandoned.

The ski resort was opened in the late-1930s, and soon middle- and upper-class residents of nearby La Paz were flocking to its slopes. For seven or eight months of the year, people came to ski and go sledding down the Chacaltaya Glacier, at least until the cold and extreme altitude made them return to lower ground.

At 17,519 feet above sea level, the Chacaltaya Ski Resort was higher than the North Base Camp of Mount Everest. For decades it held the record as the world's highest ski resort, and the resort's restaurant is still recognized by Guinness as the highest restaurant in the world.

But in the 1990s, scientists at the Mount Chacaltaya Laboratory began to make some stark predictions. By 2015, they warned, the Chacaltaya Glacier would be gone. As it turned out, they were being optimistic. By 2009, the 18,000-year-old glacier was completely gone.

With the ice and snow melted, the skiers naturally stopped coming. The resort was soon shut down and abandoned, and its ski lifts shut down. Since then, the resort has sat like a freezing ghost town on the bare rocky slopes of Chacaltaya.

Today, the only near-permanent residents are two brothers, Adolfo and Samuel Mendoza, who had worked at the resort for decades and who remember when the whole mountain was covered with snow. They look after the refugio (the refuge), a building near the main resort where visitors can still find a hot meal (hence Guinness' continued recognition of Chacaltaya as home to the world's highest restaurant).

Today, only a few tourists visit this now eerily abandoned mountaintop resort. Snow falls occasionally, sometimes enough to ski, but most people come to see the abandoned resort and to take in the views from the top of Chacaltaya, which include impressive vistas of Huayna Potosi, La Paz and El Alto (although the cities are best seen at night).
Know Before You Go
Mount Chacaltaya is about 10 miles north of La Paz, Bolivia. Tour companies in La Paz offer trips to Chacaltaya Ski Resort, which cost about Bs. 150 (about $22 USD). You can also take a taxi from La Paz, which typically costs between Bs. 200 and 240 ($29 to $35), depending on how well you haggle. The drivers will normally wait for

three hours at the ski resort while you look around. The trip from La Paz to the resort takes about 1.5 hours.