—La Paz

Nighttime in La Paz, one of Bolivia's two capital cities. Situated at the very edge of the Altiplano, La Paz lies in an urban valley rimmed by steeply sloping cliffs. At 4000 meters above sea level, it's the world's highest metropolitan area. I have arrived here via El Alto, its neighboring city, through an endless knot of dense traffic that took hours. Most residents commute on public minibuses, which clog the streets in uncontrolled numbers. There seem to be no bus stops and people board and disembark wherever they want, which meant that all day, I had to be ready to get cut off at any moment. I don't know of anything more overwhelming than cycling into a major capital for the first time. I recall the breathing monsters of Istanbul, Tehran, Kolkata, Bangkok, Mexico City, Lima, Bogota: each causes a uniquely comprehensive sensory overload, and each requires adjusting differently.

Once I'm settled in a new city, I ground myself for a few days behind my laptop. So far, getting work done on the road has proved largely to be a success, but it comes with challenges. When I think I've scored the perfect café or hotel to do some work, I often need to relocate because of bad Wi-Fi. I always ask about the internet connection up front, but even then, you never know. Outside the cities, especially in developing countries, Wi-Fi and cell phone connections are often unreliable. It teaches you to disconnect from your phone more often, but when it breaks up your workflow, it can be quite frustrating. Also, finding a comfortable chair and table sounds easier than it is. A full day of work often starts with two hours on the bed in my hotel room, an hour or two in a café, then another stint in the hotel room before another hour during lunch or dinner in a restaurant. None of these places are suitable to spend a full day of work. And on a trip like this, these problems have to be navigated on a daily basis. I'm starting to catch myself dreaming of being back in Amsterdam, where I don't have to worry about any of this.