

PERUVIAN TREASURES: THE CRADLE OF GOLD



The Peruvians are always proudly presenting their greatest tourist attraction, the mysterious and unbelievably Machu Picchu. Thousands of tourists gather here every year to pay homage to the once greatly admired Inca civilization.

However, Machu Picchu is not the only Inca treasure one can discover in Peru. There is yet another town, Choquequirao, that is deemed to be a sister city to Machu Picchu. The nearest town to Choquequirao is Cachora. There is not direct bus service, so tourists usually rent horses or mules, or if a little bit more adventurous, simply hike the 20 mile distance. However, it is important to note that the terrain is rather difficult.

Similarly significant as Machu Picchu, the city's greatest advantage is the fact it is much less known than its famous counterpart. Tourists traveling here count in thousands per year, thus the place retains its sacred and calm character. Choquequirao (which means 'Cradle of Gold') is about the same size and once served the same religious, political and agricultural functions as Machu Picchu. Its importance was long underestimated by the archeologists, and the first restoration was begun only in 1993. So far, only 30 percent of the whole area is uncovered.

Choquequirao is generally more spread out in comparison to its more popular sister city and is therefore considered less 'photogenic'; it was built at the top of a mountain during the 15th century. The centre temple is surprisingly small and similarly to those at Machu Picchu, it does not possess the architectural splendor of a church or synagogue. Its palaces and temples are built in two levels; there is a system of fountains, canals and aqueducts.

During the days of the Spanish conquest, Choquequirao became the principal religious centre for the last gasp Inca state. Interestingly enough, its name does not appear in any of the chronicles of that age. Apparently, the Incas intended to keep its existence secret; it became the last stronghold of the Inca's resistance.

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