



PERU

**AMERICA'S BIGGEST
NATIVE PILGRIMAGE**

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Pilgrims wearing the Chunchus costumes – forest indios wearing macaw feathers – are praying at dawn in front of the Lord of Tayancani statue.

The Ocongate district of Cusco, Peru, is home of the Señor Qoyllur Riti ritual, a religious festival held annually, during the first week of June, in honor of the Señor Qoyllur Riti (a Quechua word for "Star of the snow" or "shining snow"). This is one of the most complex festivals in the world, both because of its syncretism - where the Andean tradition and the Catholic one intermingle - and due to the strong resemblance with the fertility rituals practiced by the Andean people.

The feast consists of an 8-km procession from the Mahuayani village to the Sinakara glacier - where the Señor de Qoyllur Riti shrine lies - and ends with the homage to the image of Christ painted over a boulder. On the second day a group of Ukukus (the offspring of an Inca princess and a llama and seen as mountain spirits guardians of men and animals) is allowed to climb till the top of the glacier (over 5,000 meters in height) to seek the so-called Star of the snow, which is hidden in its cracks. They will eventually come back carrying out blocks of ice which will be used to water their village with the holy flow of the Ausangate mountain as a sign of prosperity for the forthcoming harvest.

Now this practice has been banned but the syncretism between Andean and Catholic traditions remains, with the procession of the pilgrims following the cross and the adoration of the rising sun at dawn when Viracocha (the Inca divinity of light) melts with the image of the Catholic Christ. The pilgrimage to the Señor de Qoyllur Riti shrine has been recently included among the Unesco Cultural and Natural Heritage list.



Pilgrims climbing to the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i mountain (4600m in height). On the right, a series of crosses mark the path.



Pilgrims climbing to the Mahucruz Calvary following the cross of the Lord of Tayancani which will reach the sanctuary in a couple of days.



Pilgrims following night and day the cross of the Lord of Tyancani.



A group of Ukukus (the offspring of an Inca princess and a llama and seen as mountain spirits guardians of men and animals) in a pilgrimage to the holy glacier of Sinkara (5000m in height).



Two women resting during a snow storm while they're climbing to the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i sanctuary (4600m in height).



Pilgrims lighting candles on the rocks at the bottom of the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i sanctuary (4600m in height).



A group of Ukukus (the offspring of an Inca princess and a llama and seen as mountain spirits guardians of men and animals) in a pilgrimage to the holy glacier of Sinkara (5000m in height).



The adoration of the Sun by pilgrims wearing the Chunchus costumes – forest indios wearing macaw feathers – and bearing the Lord of Tayancani crosses to the Tayancani sanctuary is part of the syncretism between the Andean tradition and the Catholic one.



An Ukuku (the offspring of an Inca princess and a llama and seen as mountain spirits guardians of men and animals) during a night dance in the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i sanctuary (4600m in height). On the right, a series of crosses mark the path.



A group of Ukukus (the offspring of an Inca princess and a llama and seen as mountain spirits guardians of men and animals) bearing crosses to the holy glacier of Sinkara (5000m in height).



Pilgrims wearing the Chunchus costumes – forest indios wearing macaw feathers – following the Lord of Tayancani cross to the sanctuary.



Young boys with the flags of the various Inca nations following the procession to the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i sanctuary (4600m in height).



One of the priests celebrating the mass at the Señor Qoyllur Rit'i sanctuary, casting holy water over the crowd at the end of the mass.



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