

Peru: How a city has no law.

Beautiful Peru—the land of Machu Picchu, Cusco, and, of course, the colorful Rainbow Mountain. According to numerous travel and tourism sources, it is often regarded as one of the most beautiful countries in South America.

While previous articles have focused on entire countries or regions, today we are taking a closer look at something entirely different: a single city. And not just any city, but one of the most bizarre and extreme places on Earth.

Welcome to La Rinconada—a city where the rule of law is barely enforced and where crime and harsh living conditions are part of everyday life.



Flag Peru. Source: wikipedia.org

History La Rinconada

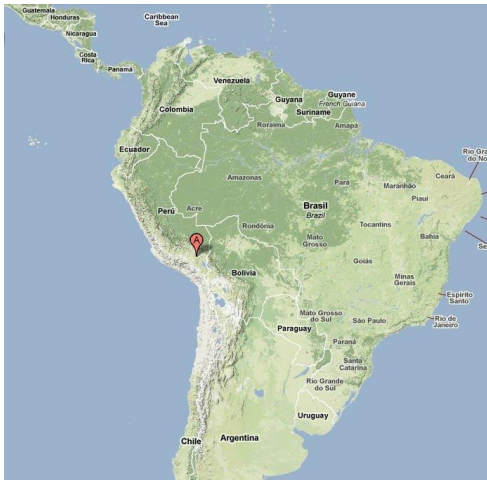
La Rinconada is located in southeastern Peru, near the border with Bolivia, in the Peruvian Andes. With a population of around 50,000 people, the city may not seem particularly remarkable at first glance.

Yet there are two key reasons why this city has become known for its weak law enforcement and limited government oversight.

The first is its extreme altitude. Situated at an astonishing 5.1 kilometers (16,700 feet) above sea level, La Rinconada is the highest permanently inhabited city in the world. The city has grown primarily because of the rich gold mines located in the surrounding mountains.

Those same gold mines also provide the second reason why La Rinconada is notorious for its lack of regulation and effective government control.





La Rinconada on the world map. Source: wikipedia.org

But what exactly do the altitude and the gold mines have to do with the fact that La Rinconada has virtually no functioning rule of law?

The city itself is relatively young. At the beginning of the 21st century, La Rinconada was little more than a gold mining camp. In less than thirty years, it grew into a city of tens of thousands of inhabitants.

The fact that the city began as a gold mining camp says almost everything: the entire local economy revolves around money and, more specifically, gold. While it is relatively easy in most countries to trade with nearby cities or regions, the situation here is very different. Because of its extreme altitude and remote location in the Andes Mountains, La Rinconada is difficult to reach. Getting into the city is not easy, and leaving it is just as difficult.

As a result, residents are highly dependent on one another. At the same time, this has created major inequalities in power. Wealthy gold traders and mine owners hold significant influence, while miners often work under harsh conditions and have few, if any, rights. For many miners, leaving the city is extremely difficult, trapping them in the system.

Power is therefore concentrated in the hands of a small group, leading to widespread illegal activities such as crime and violence. One of the most disturbing examples of this is the so-called cachorro system. Under this system, miners work in the mines for 30 days without pay. On the 31st day, they are allowed to keep all the ore they extract, hoping that it contains gold.

If they fail to find any gold, they have effectively worked an entire month for nothing—without an income and, in some cases, without enough food to survive.





Streets of La Rinconada. Source:

wikipedia.org

The role of the police and government

But what exactly is the role of the Peruvian police and government in a place like this? How can a city exist where national laws are barely enforced, and why is so little being done about it?

Once again, the city's extreme altitude and its gold mining industry play a major role. La Rinconada grew from a small mining camp into a city in a remarkably short period of time, which in theory meant that a police presence should have been established. In practice, however, the situation is very different. Just like the residents, police officers are effectively isolated by the city's remote location and harsh living conditions. This creates fertile ground for corruption.

Bribing police officers is therefore a common occurrence. Officers hold significant power and, in some cases, abuse that authority. Rather than protecting the population, some police officers function more like hired enforcers than guardians of the law.

For the Peruvian government, gaining control over the situation has proven extremely difficult. On paper, introducing laws and enforcing regulations may seem straightforward, but in reality it is anything but. The city is difficult to access, armed groups operate in the area, and even local authorities are often affected by corruption.

As a result, La Rinconada has become a place where the government's authority is extremely limited—a city that has, to a large extent, fallen beyond the reach of the law.





Proactivo.com

Mine workers get exploited, but can not count on any laws. Source:

FrankVD

An important source of inspiration for this article is the Dutch YouTuber Frank van Dijk, better known as FrankVD. He travels to unusual and extreme places around the world, documenting what life is really like there. His videos include visits to Yakutsk in Siberia—one of the coldest inhabited places on Earth—as well as locations in Argentina where Lionel Messi began his football career.

In one of his videos, Frank travels to La Rinconada and provides a rare glimpse into the city's daily reality. He interviews miners and local residents, plays football with locals at an altitude of more than 5,000 meters (16,400 feet), and even explores the city's nightlife. At first glance, this may seem like an ordinary travel adventure, but the reality turns out to be far darker.

His video reveals streets filled with waste due to the lack of proper sanitation and running water. He also shows how he had to bribe police officers to act as his security while filming. During his stay, someone is even murdered only a short distance away from him. The city is, in many ways, pure chaos. Frank describes La Rinconada as an extremely dangerous place, where visitors must be cautious not only because of the people but also because of the extreme altitude.

If you would like to learn more about La Rinconada, his video, "3 Days in a City Without Laws (A Murder Happened During Filming)," is highly recommended.





Thumbnail video FrankVD: 3 dagen in een stad zonder wetten (tijdens opname werd er een moord gepleegd). Source: Youtube.com and youtubekanaal FrankVD

Conclusion

Far away, high in the Peruvian Andes, lies a city that seems almost hidden from the rest of the world: La Rinconada. It is a place where Peru's laws are barely enforced, where violence and crime are part of everyday life, where police corruption is widespread, and where the government has little real authority.

And it all began less than thirty years ago, when a small and simple gold mining camp emerged beside a gold mine and rapidly grew beyond anyone's control.

It is a grim story—but one that deserves to be told. La Rinconada is unique, not because of its beauty, but because of its harsh reality.

And perhaps that is exactly why stories like this continue to fascinate us.

Curious to discover more remarkable stories like this one? Be sure to explore my other articles at www.achterdewereldkaart.com.

