

Travel Picks: World's 10 best places of final rest

Fri Oct 31, 2008 7:00am EDT

SINGAPORE, Oct 31 (Reuters Life!) - Above ground, or six feet under, "Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2009" guide lists the world's top 10 cemeteries, which are prime spots for both the living and the dead. Reuters has not endorsed this list.

1. Taj Mahal, India

The Taj Mahal in Agra is surely the world's most beautiful place in which to push up daisies. The 17th century Mughal emperor Shah Jahan built the mausoleum in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, using white marble from Rajasthan, crystal from China, turquoise from Tibet and sapphire from Sri Lanka.

2. Pyramids of Giza, Egypt

These pyramids on the outskirts of Cairo may date back to around 3,200 B.C. but they're as space age as tombs get. They pierce the sky, unperturbed by crowds of hustlers, camels and camcorder-toting tourists. An estimated 20,000-30,000 workers built the pyramids, the largest of which is constructed from over two million blocks.

3. Dogon Tombs, Mali

A craggy mass rears up from the sun-bleached plain, one of West Africa's most stunning sights. This is where the remote Dogon tribe lives. Most extraordinary in this extraordinary place are the tombs. These are tiny buildings set into cliffs, often halfway up, with no discernible method of approach.

4. The Non-Catholic Cemetery, Italy

This overgrown garden is a surprise in a busy corner of Rome. Romantic poets Keats, who died at the unripe age of 26, and Shelley are buried here. The garden is dominated by a sharp-tipped pyramid: the fanciful tomb of a Roman general with a penchant for Egyptology.

5. Hollywood Forever Cemetery, United States.

These immaculate lawns and stately memorials are the final picture for much of Hollywood royalty. The glamorous graves at the back of Paramount studios are a veritable Milky Way of departed glitterati, including Rudolph Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks and Mel Blancs, the voice of Bugs Bunny whose tombstone reads: "That's all folks".

6. The Catacombs of Rome, Italy

Ancient Roman law forbade burial within Rome city limits. Most Romans were cremated, but early Christians were buried in a series of endless, echoing underground tunnels, out near the old Roman road, the Via Appia. This underground death complex is Rome's most haunting sight - now empty of bodies but retaining early Christian frescoes, altars and icons.

7. Pere Lachaise Cemetery, France

The world's most visited cemetery has a star-studded afterlife gathering, with residents as diverse as Edith Piaf, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Honore de Balzac and Isadora Duncan. It was founded in 1804, but languished until the management had the bright marketing plan of moving here the remains of famous people, such as Moliere, to attract business.

8. Tomb of Pacal, Mexico

In the foothills of the Chiapas mountains, lie the remains of the ancient Mayan city of Palenque, set in a tangle of jungle. It's a place of cinematic splendour, complete with rolling mist and thick undergrowth. The city's most famous monument is the Tomb of Pacal (Pacal was the city's 7th century founder-king), which is located within the glorious Temple of Inscriptions, a steep, stepped pyramid.

9. Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, United States

In 1896, Dr. Samuel Johnson, a vet, offered his apple orchard to a bereaved friend as the burial place for his dog. Today, Hartsdale, in New York, has 70,000 graves, including those of some famous war dogs, and a memorial to the Red Cross dogs that served during World War Two. Famous owners who have interred their pooches include Mariah Carey and Diana Ross.

10. The City of the Dead, Egypt

This is the most curious cemetery in the world: not only a city of the dead, but of the living. Chronic housing shortages in Cairo have driven families to live in tombs in the large cemeteries on the city's outskirts. Traditionally, Egyptians buried their dead surrounded by rooms, so that relatives could live in them during the long mourning period. These are now occupied by squatters who use the gravestones as tables.

(This is an edited extract from Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2009)

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