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Hartsdale Pet Cemetery has been named as one of the "Top 10 Places of Rest" by Lonely Planet. The Westchester County, NY, cemetery ranked alongside the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramids of Giza. (Pet Pulse Photo by Dan Wiener)

A pet cemetery near New York City is getting international attention after being ranked alongside the Taj Mahal in India and the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt as one of the world's "Top 10 Places to Rest." Hartsdale Pet Cemetery is also the oldest continuously operating pet cemetery in the world.

HARTSDALE, NY -- A pet cemetery near New York City is receiving international attention after being ranked as one of the world's best places to rest alongside the Taj Mahal in India and the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt.

Hartsdale Pet Cemetery sits perched on a hill about 20 miles north of the Big Apple in Westchester County, NY. It's a place that, to some, has long seemed like an unofficial "wonder of the world," because of its size and significance.

Now the Lonely Planet guidebook company included it in its "2009 Best of Travel" book, one of the "Top 10 Places of Rest" around the world.

On a bright, cold day in January right after the first big snowstorm of the year, Hartsdale Pet Cemetery's vice president, Edward C. Martin III, explained, "it's overwhelming!

"It was completely unexpected, and we're obviously thrilled and very excited and very honored," Martin continued.

Since 1896, animal lovers have come to Hartsdale to lay their pets to rest.

"It's really as simple as they have had a loss and this is what they want to do to make them feel better," said Edward C. Martin Jr., who has served as the director and president of the cemetery since 1974.

With 70,000 animals buried on the grassy hill, in about 35,000 grave-sites, the father-son team have known for a long time their place-of-work was indeed quite special.

"The business is really not digging a hole in the ground and putting a pet in a casket," Martin Jr. said. "Really what you're in the business of is making people feel better. That's the goal."

"It's more about them [the plot-holders] than it is about us. Whatever they want to do, they can do. Because this is all about making them feel better in a time of grief," echoed his son.

The Martins feel that the group of pet owners who choose to give their loved ones a burial similar to something a human would have are part of a unique, intimate community.

Among the plot-holders at Hartsdale are celebrities like Mariah Carey, Broadway stars, sports heroes, and even an Austrian Princess who laid to rest a beloved pet tiger in 1912.

“Very caring people ... Otherwise they just wouldn’t come here, they would dispose of their pet in another manner,” Martin Jr. postulated.

The Lonely Planet guidebook editors sensed that quality, too.

"We wanted to give readers a variety of 'Places of Rest' from around the world," said Brice Gosnell, the regional publishing manager for Lonely Planet Americas.

"Of course, the Taj Mahal and Pyramids of Giza would be on our list. But we know travelers like to see and experience unique places, so we wanted to include some of the lesser-known burial grounds.

"Hartsdale is the oldest pet cemetery in the United States and is unique as it pays tribute to Americans' love of their pets ... from famous war dogs to celebrities' pets, the headstones make for some interesting reading," Gosnell explained.

In reaction to being selected for the Lonely Planet "Best of 2009" book, Martin III, excitedly said, "It just came as a complete surprise to us, and to be among the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramids of Egypt -- it’s just overwhelming!"

From a private viewing to the selection of a casket to a graveside service, a funeral at Hartsdale has all the trappings of a cemetery for people. The Martins also operate a crematory on the premises for those clients who prefer that option.

The entire burial process costs between \$1,500 and \$2,000, depending on the size of the animal that has passed away.

The Martins have met people who come to Hartsdale with their dearly departed pets from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds and religions.

But, in their experience, most clients walk away from Hartsdale Pet Cemetery with a similar feeling.

As Martin III describes it, "a lot of people tell us they're glad that they did it ... That there was nothing gory or bad about it.

"A lot of people tell us their pet looked just like it was sleeping."

The Martins added that, while they are very flattered to see Hartsdale Pet Cemetery included on the Lonely Planet's "Top 10 Places of Rest" list, they would remind the public that Hartsdale is, first and foremost, a sacred place -- not just some wacky tourist destination for curious travelers to score a once-in-a-lifetime visit.

They view the pet cemetery as a display of love and respect, as well as a place to honor the four-footed friends who have gone before us.

Tell us what you think about “Pet Cemetery Tops Travel Guide's List” below. Share your favorite videos by clicking on the ZootooTV tab. Send us your story ideas by e-mailing us at news@zootoo.com or by calling us at 877-777-4204.