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THE ULTIMATE WAKE - TOASTING DARK TOURISM

SO-CALLED morbid or dark tourism is nothing new. In Victorian times entire families visited cemeteries to enjoy the fresh air, peaceful surroundings and the great views so many of the world's most famous graveyards enjoy. They often brought picnics and toasted the spirits of the dearly departed with a glass of ale or a flute of champagne.

Touring cemeteries and graveyards has become more popular than it was in its 19th century heyday when cemeteries were often used as impromptu seance venues and the Twilight/True Blood effect isn't the main reason. The fact that we're all destined to make the same final journey also plays a part in dark tourism's continuing appeal. But I think that one of the major reasons TripAdvisor members and bloggers regularly list the famous gravesites they would most like to visit stems from a sense of respect for lives

For foreigners the most famous grave in the largest cemetery in Paris belongs to Jim Morrison, the live-hard-die-young lead singer of The Doors, who died at the age of 27 in a similar fashion to Whitney Houston - a drug overdose in the bathtub. If you are celebrating his short and dramatic life, only his favourite drink will do - Jack Daniels Black Label.

But it's a real tragedy to see so many tourists walk past the graves of some of the most famous Frenchmen and women of the past 200 years without so much as a second look. The grave of Oscar Wilde is another mega draw for visitors. Wilde had a serious champagne fetish and ordered an 1874 Perrier-Jouet upon his release from Reading prison. If you can't afford the same gesture, take inspiration from one of his most famous quotes - "Iced champagne is a favourite drink of mine - against doctor's orders".

in Germany and London for his beer-drinking ability. Pub-crawling was a favourite after-dark activity and Marx developed a taste for stout. Mackeson or Guinness - take your homage choice.

Like Pere-Lachaise, Highgate became a very fashionable place to be laid to rest, as grandiose monuments such as the Circle of Lebanon and the Egyptian Avenue in the West Cemetery clearly show. Nicknamed "the Victorian Valhalla", whispered tales of occult ceremonies and the so-called "Vampire of Highgate" titillated Londoners from the 1960s to the late 1980s and the oldest part of Highgate Cemetery is off-limits except to tour groups because of the accompanying desecration entailed in pagan rites.

The extravagant tomb of Karl Marx is in the East Cemetery. Famous names that can be found nearby include Douglas

Friedrich Engels was the first champagne socialist - literally - but Marx was famous in Germany and London for his beer-drinking ability.

well-lived. And, as in the 19th century, what better way to salute the great, the good and the infamous than to pack a gourmet picnic and to make a fitting wine selection for the time and place.

The most visited cemetery in the world is Pere-Lachaise in Paris. Named after the confessor of Louis XIV, its administrators organised one of the earliest marketing campaigns in the funeral business when the vast resting place opened in 1804. To encourage Parisians to book a plot, Moliere and Jean de la Fontaine, two of France's literary giants, were reburied in Pere-Lachaise and a few years later the purported remains of the star-crossed mediaeval lovers, Abelard and Heloise, were transferred here with much fanfare. The enterprising strategy paid off. Less than a decade later, the number of "permanent residents" had soared to 33,000.

Some of the world's greatest composers are also buried at Pere-Lachaise, including Chopin, Bizet and Rossini. Painters are also well represented - Delacroix, Gericault, Modigliani, Georges Seurat and Camille Pissarro to name a few. Honore de Balzac, Marcel Proust and Gertude Stein divert a regular stream of literary fans to their headstones. Hediard, the gourmet food shop on the Place de la Madeleine, uses Pinterest these days to spruik the fancy foods you can stuff into a ready-made or hand-picked picnic basket to take along for an afternoon's stay.

The "Jim Morrison" of Highgate Cemetery is Karl Marx, but more than 170,000 people are buried in London's most famous necropolis. His friend Friedrich Engels was the first champagne socialist - literally - but Marx was famous

Adams, author of *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, novelist George Eliot (although the gravestone reads Mary Ann Cross), noted actor Sir Ralph Richardson and Anna Mahler, daughter of the composer, Gustav Mahler. Over in the West Cemetery, Sir Charles Cowper, the premier of NSW who successfully campaigned for the end of transportation to Australia's eastern colonies, lies in close proximity to Charles Dickens' parents, John and Elizabeth, the great chemist Michael Faraday, Nobel Prize-winner John Galsworthy and actress Jean Simmons.

Stop by at Bull in nearby North Hill, a great brewpub that makes its own beer and stocks some great suds from top independent breweries in the UK and Europe. Or check out the extensive range of wines, champagnes and spirits at the

Highgate Wine Merchants, which also boasts one of the largest selections of organic wines in London.

World fame can be fleeting even when everyone knows your name. For years, the most decorated grave in Vienna's Central Cemetery was that of a 32-year-old Wehrmacht major who had been killed on the Eastern Front. My Viennese grandmother would often comment - How much he must have been loved - as we by-passed the tomb of Beethoven like so many other visitors. It's long been rumoured that the great composer was an alcoholic but DNA analysis of his hair put this long-held belief to rest a few years ago. The Austrians claim to have invented dessert wines in the early 16th century and Beethoven preferred sweeter wines. A Beerenauslese from the Burgenland would make a fitting vinous tribute.

Some cemeteries are places of extraordinary beauty such as Campo Verano, the biggest cemetery in Rome, where the statues and elaborate tombs almost rank as museum-quality art pieces. A chilled Frascati from nearby Lazio with cheese will make you glad to be alive.

Madrid's Cementario de Nuestra Senora de la Almudena, where five million people are buried, including Fernando Rey, the charismatic star of many of Luis Bunuel's movies, is more awe-inspiring for its vast size than scary. Bunuel loved dry martinis and even published his favourite recipe, so Rey must have enjoyed many a glass, too. Too difficult? I am sure the burly actor loved a good Rioja as well.

There's nothing like a bit of Gothic horror to provoke a frisson of fear. Edgar Allan Poe, best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre such as *The Pit* and *The Pendulum*, rests - or rather doesn't - in the Old Western Burial Grounds in Baltimore where his ghost is abroad on many a night, according to the locals. A stiff shot of bourbon might stop the shivers of fear and cold. 🍷

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