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WHAT'S UP

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PLAN AHEAD

By Tamala Malerk



PHOTO BY MANDY MILLS

BAVARIA

Tollwood Winter Festival, Munich | Nov. 24 – Dec. 23, 2026

Also known as “Munich’s alternative Christmas market,” this event is for those looking for something a little different during Christmas market season. This festival features street performances, international productions, organic crafts and food from all over the world. While the main event ends on Dec. 23, you can also join the midnight waltz on New Year’s Eve. tollwood.de/tollwood-winterfestival



KAISERSLAUTERN

Cultural Market in the Fruchthalle | Nov. 26 – Dec. 20, 2026

Check out this market Thursdays through Sundays across the four Advent weekends. There are a variety of vendors featuring items such as pottery, arts, crafts, jewelry, toys, one-of-a-kind pieces and fair-trade products. While some exhibitors stay the entire time, others only participate for certain weekends, so go more than once to get the full experience. Outside of shopping, enjoy live music performances, coffee and cake. kaiserslautern.de



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SPANGDAHLEM

PLAY! – Interactive Gaming Convention, Trier | Nov. 7 – 8, 2026

Put on your best cosplay and make your way to this convention for a weekend of fun. Shop the vendors, marvel at the artists onsite and take part in a tournament. There will be special guests, gaming and e-sports. Preview the program and buy your tickets at play-con.de.



STUTTGART

chocolART – Chocolate Festival, Tübingen | Dec. 1 – 6, 2026

Welcome the colder season at Germany’s largest chocolate festival. Around 90 exhibitors will be there so you can peruse and taste chocolate and chocolate products from all over the world. Along with tasty treats, there will also be vendors throughout the old town. In the evening, a light show illuminates the skies and buildings after the sun goes down. chocolart.de



WIESBADEN

“King Arthur,” Frankfurt | Nov. 8 – Dec. 16, 2026

Spend the evening at the opera on select dates through mid-December. Get caught up in the drama of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Lancelot makes all the other knights jealous and begins an affair with the king’s wife, Guinevere. The show will be performed in French but also features German and English subtitles. Learn more and purchase your tickets at oper-frankfurt.de. ■



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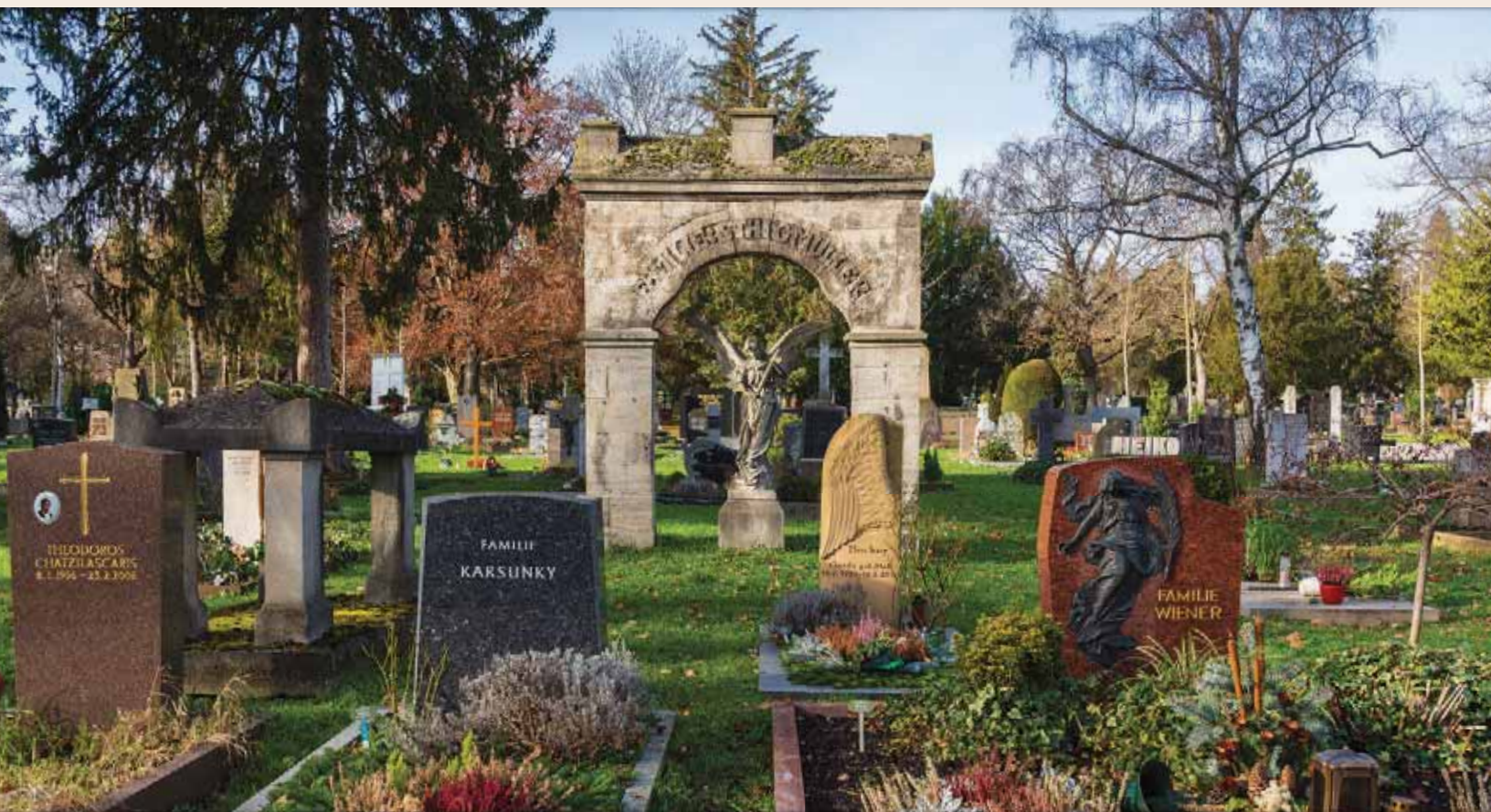
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German Grave Renewals



By Kat Nickola

When my father-in-law came from the States to visit, we took him to the small German town of Weisweil. Some genealogical digging led us there and he wanted to poke through the local *Friedhof* (cemetery). Finding grave markers is a common way, in many places, to find records that help further family tree information, but in Germany my father-in-law, came up short. Here's why.

At public cemeteries in Germany, grave plots are rented. Contracts last for 25 years, though depending on the local soil, the *Mindestruhezeiten* (minimal rest time) may be up to 40 years. Plots can be a single person, one-time-use, standard grave (*Reihengrab*) or a renewable family plot (*Wahlgrab*) that allows for multiple burials and lease extensions.

After the contract period, all stone markers and plants (some parcels grow into tiny memorial gardens) are cleared. Grass is grown over the plot. Later, when the grave is dug again, any remains are sifted and reburied well below the visual opening for the new interment. While this may seem odd, it's important to understand that leftover remains are minimal since burials in Germany are aimed at environmentally safe biological breakdown; neither embalming nor sealed vaults are used, and caskets are made of specific solid woods.

There are exceptions for specific religious beliefs, like those of Jewish or Muslim burials, that allow for perpetual interment.

For my father-in-law, it was a bummer to not find an ancestral headstone. However, one of the cemetery workers told us that, like most villages in Germany, the town had an organized, publicly accessible record of citizens back to the late Middle Ages kept at the *Rathaus*, or town hall. ■

GERMAN WORD OF THE MONTH

Leichenschmaus (noun)
LYE-khun-shmows

Literal translation: Corpse feast

Meaning: A meal shared by mourners after a loved-one's funeral.



All Saints' Day
traditions in Germany

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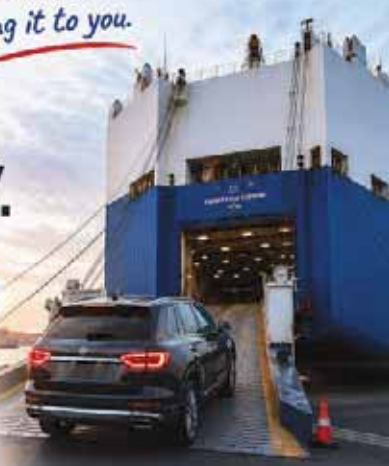


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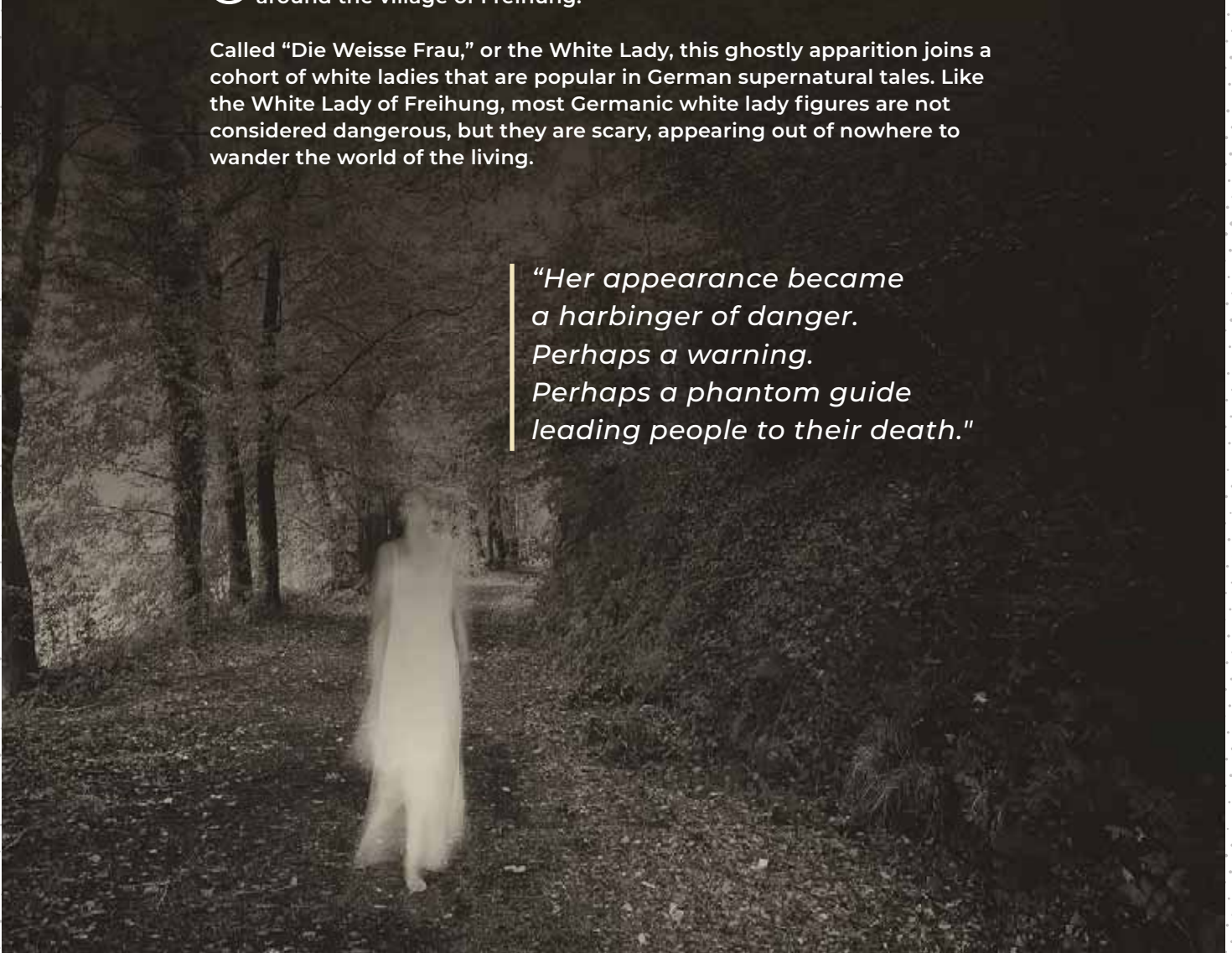
THE GHOST LIBERATED BY THE U.S. ARMY

By Kat Nickola

USAG Bavaria installations in Grafenwöhr and Vilseck have a ghostly neighbor who haunts the dark rural roads and abandoned mines around the village of Freihung.

Called “Die Weisse Frau,” or the White Lady, this ghostly apparition joins a cohort of white ladies that are popular in German supernatural tales. Like the White Lady of Freihung, most Germanic white lady figures are not considered dangerous, but they are scary, appearing out of nowhere to wander the world of the living.

*“Her appearance became
a harbinger of danger.
Perhaps a warning.
Perhaps a phantom guide
leading people to their death.”*



Some sources believe that Weisse Frau stories across German-speaking regions are a cultural relic from former pagan beliefs in elven spirits or ancestral guardians. Many of the white lady legends have, over time, taken on specific histories, often evolving to represent the unrestful spirit of noble women from the Middle Ages who met tragic ends. Such is the case at Freihung.

In the 12th century, lead deposits were found in the region and mining operations began, eventually digging a network of shafts and tunnels used until 1945. During the Middle Ages, a noble family oversaw the peasants who toiled all day in mines and Freihung grew as a prosperous mining village around their manor house. Legends say that the White Lady who haunts Freihung is a noble woman from that manor. In the past, she would appear in the dark tunnels, beckoning miners to follow her and get lost in the underground blackness. Her appearance became a harbinger of danger. Perhaps a warning. Perhaps a phantom guide leading people to their death.

Some of the tunnels she haunted were directly below the village. Many were still used into modern times, like those underneath the Alte Post Inn. The inn sits in the center of Freihung at the same location of the former medieval manor house where the White Lady presumably lived (and, perhaps, died). Eventually, the modern owners of the inn grew tired of being spooked by the White Lady and wanted both her and the haunted tunnels gone.

Supposedly, in the 1970s, a demolition team from the nearby USAG Bavaria Grafenwöhr Training Area was called in to safely destroy the tunnels. It's unclear why American soldiers were chosen for the job instead of local German authorities. Some have speculated that it made for an interesting, if not bizarre, training opportunity for the Army. The hope was to rid the town and the inn of its ghostly resident. But it did not work.

Nowadays, the wispy figure of a white lady is still spotted around Freihung: however, she is no longer limited to tempting people who venture underground. She is often seen wandering down dark nighttime roads, shocking drivers who think they spot her in the rearview mirror only to glance again and see nothing. Other cars have swerved around what appears to be a woman in the road who cannot be found afterward. Sometimes, people hear a disembodied female voice outside the village at night or feel an icy touch while walking along trails beyond their houses in the evening.

Is it possible that the Army helped to release Die Weisse Frau of Freihung from her confinement in the old mine tunnels? Perhaps, instead, she is wandering in the night air looking for the soldiers who destroyed her underground refuge. ■



GERMANY'S MOST HAUNTING LEGEND:

The Wilde Jagd

By Kat Nickola

In the States, I loved visiting haunted locations and staying up late in ghostly hotels trying to spot the spirits of the past. In modern American culture, ghosts tend to have unfinished business. Perhaps they are restless miners or asylum residents from the 1800s; maybe they are victims of large-scale tragedies or violent acts of the 20th century. They often reflect the youthfulness of our country, perhaps adding wishful importance to common places in a culture whose origin story is still being written. Regardless of why, ghosts are on the fringe.

Germany is different. Over here, hauntings are legendary with traditions that go back thousands of years. It is not so much that German people find ghost stories factual, more that the stories are accepted as cultural memory. They are so intertwined with local lore that their relics are encountered on a daily basis. With medieval castles and Roman ruins, megalithic tombs and Celtic hillforts, the landscape is covered in thousand-year-old paranormal stories.

Some places do adopt unique, modern stories. These are often reflected in the many modern abandoned places that take

on their own kind of creepiness like the Grandhotel Waldlust in the Black Forest or Munich's Olympic Stadium train station.

For true hauntings, though, and unexplained entities visiting our domain, Germany has some of the oldest traditions in Europe. Over time, many ghost stories have evolved, mysterious otherworldly creatures have grown, and legends and beliefs have intermingled. The White Lady or the Poltergeist are two broad archetypes, or universal haunting patterns, that seem to have grown here. But it is the wild hunt stories that have really lasted the test of time.



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THE WILD HUNT

Imagine that you are returning from the forest in the dead of winter. You've been gathering firewood late into the evening and your heavy bundle slows you down in the snow. Tired, you sit on a fallen log beside the trodden path to catch your breath. The sky darkens and a ferocious wind begins to blow. You grow nervous about making it home, but as the full moon rises, it casts a glow through the skeletal trees. It's enough.

Suddenly, something blots the moon. Through the cage-like forest you barely make out a huge wave of blackness descending to Earth before a deep rumble begins in your gut. It develops into a thumping that grows louder and louder. Soon you hear hooves crushing underbrush, wild howling and raucous laughter. You leap behind the log just as a horde of riders on horseback, wolves at their feet, come into view. It is an awful site: a host of the dead with gaping wounds riding phantom horses as ravens escort them.

The leader, sitting god-like on his eight-legged horse, looks your way and you go cold. He raises his hand to slow the mob as they near your hiding place. Then, without full control of your senses, you stand to face the throng. The leader speaks, "You may offer me your bounty or join our hunt."

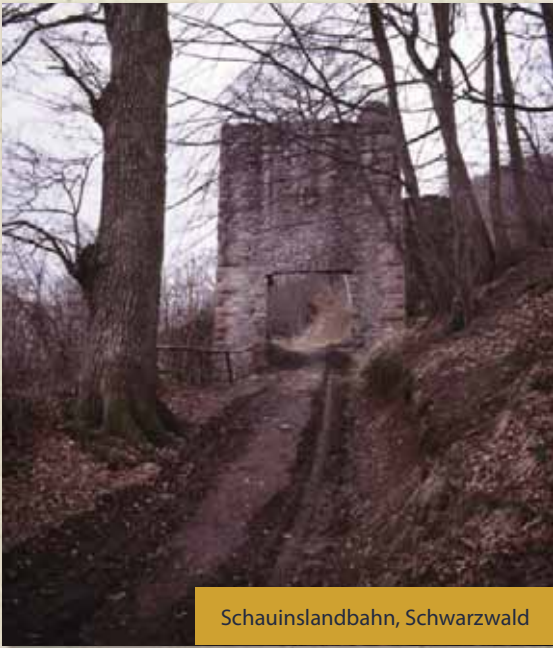


"You may offer me your bounty or join our hunt."

WHAT DO YOU DO?

Encounters with the Wilde Jagd vary across time. There is some evidence that the overarching motif of a flying horde on a mission came from early pagan beliefs and that the leader was Odin or Freya on a ride with their spirits, gods and elven followers. In some accounts, the Roman goddess Hecate leads, or perhaps the Alpine shapeshifter Perchta. As time went on, legendary leaders like Barbarossa and Charlemagne, and even local knights (often as punishment for sins) were said to front the troop.

Beliefs also changed. The earliest wild hunt visions may have been good omens for a prolific spring. In some places, they were full of wild female spirits. Offerings were left out in the blustery weather to sustain the group while they pursued their prey and rid the land of cruel winter spirits. As Christianity was adopted, however, the hunt took on a fearful, demonic nature and getting caught up in it could mean the entrapment of your soul into the mob. Best, in that case, to lay face down on the ground; if you don't see them, they won't see you.



Schauinslandbahn, Schwarzwald



Rodenstein Castle, Odenwald



Großer Arber, Bayerischer Wald

ENCOUNTER THE WILDE JAGD

ODENWALD

The Odenwald mountain range south of Frankfurt has a famous wild hunt story and you can follow the horde's route. It is here that a ghostly knight and his entourage race to carry a message of war from his burial place in Schnelerts Castle to his family home at Rodenstein Castle. You can visit both of these castle's ruins today on the many hiking trails in this region called the Bergstrasse-Odenwald.

SCHWARZWALD

The area around Freiburg in the Black Forest southwest of Stuttgart is teeming with wild hunt stories. Fierce winter storms invite the mob to battle at the top of the Schauinsland peak. Today, you can take a cable car up. On Kandel mountain, the wild hunt lives on as a relic of the pagan convoys, with Christians of the Middle Ages calling the area a witch's gathering place. You can hike or drive to the peak where storms invite the horde and clear days guarantee their absence and views far into France.

BAYERISCHER WALD

In the Bavarian Forest, southeast of Grafenwöhr and Vilseck, the Großer Arber is the highest peak in the area. It is here, on stormy nights, that the wild hunt is said to gather and sweep away any onlookers that cross their path. You can take that risk on a hike or gondola ride to the top. ■



SIX EUROPEAN CEMETERIES WORTH HAUNTING

By Stacy Roman

Graveyards and cemeteries lend themselves to the spookiness of the haunting Halloween season. Cross-laden headstones are often used as backdrops to ghost stories and zombie apocalypses. With burials dating back thousands of years, Europe is home to some of the oldest and most eerie cemeteries in the world. Here are six graveyards worth haunting... if you're brave enough.

Cimetière du Père Lachaise



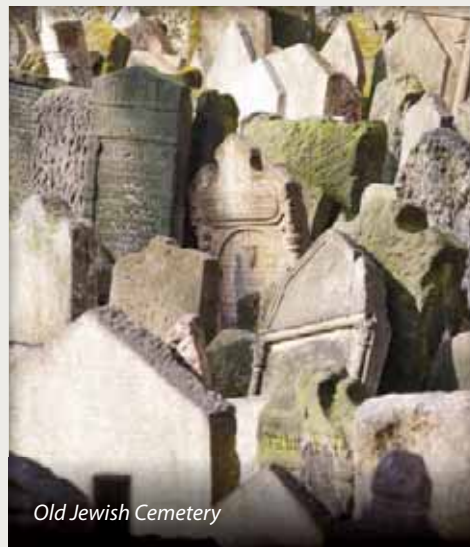
Statue of Greyfriars Bobby



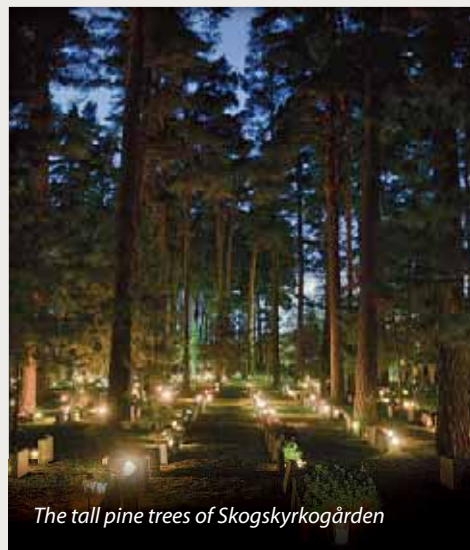
St. Mary's Churchyard



Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno



Old Jewish Cemetery



The tall pine trees of Skogskyrkogården

While these cemeteries invite visitors to wander and explore, please remember they are the final resting places for the dearly departed. Be sure to leave headstones and graves undisturbed and be respectful.

PÈRE LACHAISE PARIS, FRANCE

Due to the overcrowding of cemeteries in central Paris, the local government opted to open larger sites on the outskirts of the city. Cimetière du Père Lachaise on the east side opened in 1804 with just 13 graves. Today, more than one million souls are believed to have been buried on the site. With narrow plots and tree-lined hilly cobblestone pathways, the non-denominational cemetery is one of the most visited in the world. Notable celebrities buried there include Molière, Chopin, Gertrude Stein and The Doors frontman Jim Morrison.

GREYFRIARS KIRKYARD EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

Perched along the hillside behind the old town, Greyfriars Kirkyard has seen interments since the 1500s. Guarding the entrance is a bronze statue of Greyfriars Bobby, a loyal terrier who watched over the grave of his master for 14 years. Inside the cemetery, you'll notice weathered headstones with names such as Tom Riddell, Esq. and William McGonagall—from which J.K. Rowling garnered inspiration for some of her famous Harry Potter characters.

ST. MARY'S CHURCHYARD WHITBY, ENGLAND

With a stunning view of the North Sea in north-eastern England, St. Mary's Churchyard is rich with ghoulish literary history. Tombstones dating back to the Middle Ages populate this graveyard. Bram Stoker's haunting tale, "Dracula" takes place in the cemetery and surrounding community. Graves with skulls and crossbones etched in stone add to the mystique. Tragic nursery rhyme heroes Humpty Dumpty and Tom Thumb are rumored to have been buried here.

OLD JEWISH CEMETERY PRAGUE, CZECHIA

Established in the early 15th century, this cemetery is one of the oldest Jewish burial grounds in Europe still intact. Located in the heart of old town Prague, more than 12,000 worn headstones dot the graveyard almost in a haphazard fashion. However, because of religious customs and beliefs, when space became scarce, a new layer of soil was added and the newly deceased were buried atop the old. Thus, several layers of souls have been laid to rest here.

MONUMENTAL CEMETERY OF STAGLIENO GENOA, ITALY

Situated on a hillside on the outskirts of Genoa, Italy is one of Europe's largest cemeteries—Cimitero Monumentale di Staglieno. Opened in 1851, this graveyard resembles an Italian sculpture garden. Grandiose and borderline ostentatious statues, including a Pantheon, mark family burial plots, crypts and mausoleums. Many of the sculptures are carved so ornately, they appear to be loved ones mourning the departed.

SKOGSKYRKOGÅRDEN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Translating to "The Woodland Cemetery" in English, the Skogskyrkogården in Stockholm, Sweden has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. Just south of the city, this relatively newer resting place blends with nature. Tall pine trees envelop the graves peppering the vast landscape. Among the famous burials here is Hollywood starlet Greta Garbo. ■

YOUR

SNAPSHOT

PHOTO BY

Isai Martinez



Night Sky in Kleinarl, Austria

As the days grow darker in October, the night sky brightens with stars and other astrological sights. Photographer Isai Martinez captured this stunning starry night, stating, "The Milky Way rises above the mountains of **Kleinarl, Austria**, in the early hours in a rural alpine valley, far from urban light pollution." ■



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