

# WHERE THE DEAD LIVE

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# BONNIER BONNIER

# DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

## THE DAY OF THE DEAD

Originating in the ancient territories of modern-day Mexico, Dia de los Muertos is a two-day festival in November, marked by its colourful, warm, and generous attitude to death and the dead. Combining pre-Hispanic and Catholic rites to form an identity of its own, contemporary celebrations of Dia de los Muertos range from energetic parties and parades in urban centres to calmer processions, family feasts and collective gravesite visits in the countryside. Here, the deceased are not mourned but welcomed home!

## LA CALAVERA CATRINA

The iconic La Calavera Catrina (The Elegant Skull) embodies this festival's view of the vivacious and welcoming dead. While her modern design is the work of illustrator Jose Posada in 1910 (her bones don't look a day over 100), this dashing dame descends from the mythic Mictéacatl, queen of the Aztec underworld. Having spent eternity collecting the bones of the dead for gods of creation, it's only fitting that she received a rebirth of her own (and a nice big hat).

## FAMILY, FRIEND, OFRENDA

Living friends or relatives create an ofrenda (offering display) to preserve the memory of those they have lost. Photos and images of their lives are surrounded by gifts, candles and garlands of fragrant cempasúchil (marigold), inviting and guiding the deceased back to the living world and reassuring them of their living memory.

## SWEET & SAVOURY

Food and drink structure the celebrations, whether by offering water or the deceased's favourite drink at their grave. A sweetbread called pan de Muerto (bread of the dead) and the presentation of Calaveras de Azucar (sugar skulls) symbolise the sweet commemoration of those who have passed.



## TELLING TALES

If you think everyone will forget your most embarrassing (and endearing) quirks after you clock out, think again; everyone loves the calavera literaria (literary skull), where friends and relatives write and read aloud fun memories about the dead to ensure we remember all their funniest follies and foibles. Alive or dead, nobody's perfect!

# THE PARIS CATACOMBS

When the famous author Victor Hugo wrote "he who contemplates the depths of Paris is seized by vertigo", it's likely he had the city's catacombs in mind. This underground network of burial chambers boasts six million residents but the living population has never hit half of that. So, what's with all the skeleton tunnels? Well, the first thing to know is that urban living usually results in a whole lot of urban dying...

## EN MASSE

Paris in 1774 was balanced on a honeycomb of cellars, tunnels, sewage systems and graveyards dug into marshy ground. If you knew a 600-year-old cemetery was on the Rue d'Enfer (everyone knew: it's literally 'Hell Street'), you might not be surprised that a chunk of the neighbourhood collapsed into itself, creating a 300-metre sinkhole! Then in 1780, a restaurateur near Saints-Innocents, the oldest cemetery ground, popped down to his cellar only to find one wall missing and a load of guests just dying for a table!



## BON VOYAGE

King Louis XVI knew that this problem was really dragging the city down, so in 1785 ordered the dead to get up and get out. For Saints-Innocents this involved digging a tunnel into a neighbouring building then carrying out bodies night by night in covered carts for two straight years. With similar projects soon dismantling cemeteries across the city, Paris realised modern problems occasionally call for ancient solutions...



## TETE-A-TETE

In the spirit of the Roman Catacombs from the second century, bodies were placed into disused underground quarries on the edge of the city (now at the heart of modern Paris). There, workers built the bones into dense architectural designs to line and secure the quarry tunnels, saving stone signs to indicate their origins. Meanwhile, the secret exit at Saints-Innocents became a public gallery for many of the original grave-markers and tombstones.



## PIECE DE RESISTANCE

Opening its doors to the public in 1809 as the Paris Municipal Ossuary, the Gothic mood of 19th century Europe turned this emergency storage solution into the hottest ticket in France – and it's still open for visitors. While the bones no longer rest beneath their original tombstones, they have met countless more living souls than they ever would have done on the surface, and as the sign above the entrance attests – Arrêt! C'est là l'Empire de la Mort – they have not been taken from the city but rewarded with their own. This is the Empire of the Dead!



# HEADING TO HADES

This ancient Greek underworld is named after Hades, the god of death, who ruled this world while his brothers Zeus and Poseidon oversaw the sky and seas from lovely Mount Olympus. Not by their what's-ever, Hades stuck his fingers over the gate and found a queen to help rule his underworld. The living can enter if they find a dear one, but only the dead can leave, so you just need to be buried in the River Lethe's sea of forgetfulness. *How do you get there? Well, you need to get your wishbones and a horse. So, reuniting with your wishbones. How do you get to the gates to your underworld? Well, it's a little sicker than that.*

## DOWN TO THE RIVER

After your death and for the coin buried in your mouth, the ferryman Charon will carry you over the River Styx. On the far shore, Hades will judge your worth and send you to Elysium (yay!) or Asphodel (so so) or Tartarus (no, no, no). Disagree? You might just meet Cerberus, a three-headed guard-dog...

## IDYLIC ELYSIUM

A paradise for the gods' favoured few, perhaps awarded as a reward, saved a god's kid, or one of your friends of the god family. Still, not good enough for you? If you miraculously do good to achieve Elysium every time, then you're off to the fortunate Isles, a private island resort of eternal leisure.

## ASHES TO ASPHODEL

It's this shady field of flowers for most of us here with our friends, we've to pass on get married but a few decades in this bland after-veffer and you and your friends will be eyeing one last pool party in the Lethe.

## TORMENT IN TARTARUS

No reincarnation for these folks; if you're heading here, you know what you've done to earn it. Tartarus is a pit and home to the worst did ever: Kronos, titan of time and gabber of gods, rightfully overthrown by his kids. Thus, this is the spot for all who offend Olympus.

## VISITING HOURS

- A few of the living have ventured in but be warned: Hades have made it out...
- Orpheus begged Hades to return his dearly departed Eurydice. Hades agreed, if Orpheus could leave without checking for her behind him. He checked. Wouldn't you?
- Odysseus sailed to Hades for guidance, only to have a surprise encounter with his own crewmate Elpenor—who had recently fallen off a witch's roof and who nobody had even noticed was dead!
- Hades abducted the goddess Persephone, but offered her freedom if she didn't eat or drink anything. Unfortunately, those pomegranates were to die for.

# THE ROMAN CATACOMBS

Did you know that the Romans invented the word Catacombs? It's thought to mean near the quarry or down in the hollows; either way, no prizes for guessing where to find it. You'll see it used in Paris and Egypt later, but it was definitely first coined for this cozy spot in Rome. Come on down and mind your head!

## REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Sligo-Christian workers carved their burial tunnels into the volcanic rock outside Rome, and for centuries, it was out of sight and out of mind. The volcanic rock was easy to dig into and self-handling afterward (the opposite of Paris, as you'll see on the next page) which was perfect for carving out tunnels. Burial spaces are hundreds of kilometres of corridors crisscrossing off and circling around larger chambers for martyrs and saints. The five still accessible tunnel systems are San Sebastiano (near Callisto), Priscilla, Domitilla, and San Andrea; others remain locked by the Vatican.

## STATUS QUO

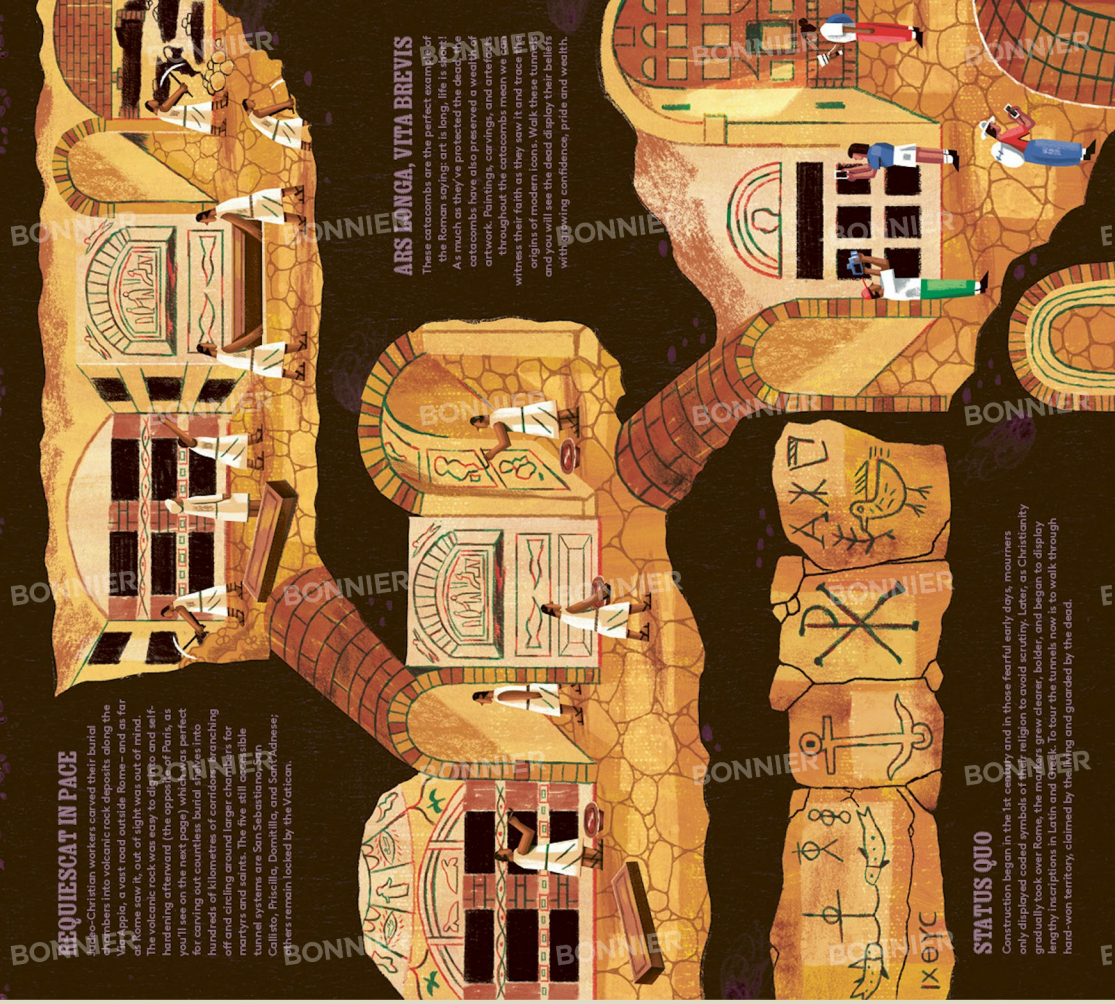
Construction began in the 1st century and in those fearful early days, mourners only displayed coded symbols of their religion to avoid scrutiny. Later, at Christianity's greatest peak over Rome, the markers grew clearer, bolder, and began to display lengthy inscriptions in Latin and Greek. In our times, the tunnels now sit to walk through, hard-won territory, claimed by tradition and guarded by the dead.

## MEMENTO MORI

Back in Roman times (around 1st-2nd century CE), religion was pantheistic (pan = many, theos = gods). Romans thought that you should want to go to the underworld after death, so for hygiene and practicality, they got cremated and burial was illegal. They had a belief, mostly inherited from Greek and Roman mythology, in the afterlife (Christianity) - felt differently. They thought that bodies must be buried intact (for a big no-no) so the souls could remain in the body before ascending to Heaven at the end of days. What to do? Well, Roman burial law only applied within the walls of Rome.

## ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS

These catacombs are the perfect example of the saying 'ars longa, vita brevis'. As much as the Romans loved the dead, the catacombs have also preserved a wealth of artwork. Paintings, carvings, and artefacts throughout the catacombs mean we can witness their faith as they saw it and trace the origins of modern icons. Walk these tunnels and you will see the dead display their beliefs with glowing confidence, pride and wealth.



# XUNANTUNICH

Should a secret taken to the grave stay there? It's 2016 in the humid forests of Belize and you're unearthing the lost Mayan city of Xunantunich, scrubbing dirt off some hillside steps. Before long you realise this is no hill – you have uncovered an ancient royal pyramid tomb! Gently unearthing the vast, vaulted burial temple, you encounter the bones of what seems to be an athletic young man, and notice two huge stone panels in a doorway. You have just answered a mystery nobody thought would ever be solved...

## SNAKES AND LEADERS

In the year 640, Lord K'an II of the Snakehead Dynasty was at the heart of Mayan political power. When the lords of nearby city Naranjo rejected Snakehead authority, K'an II vanquished them unmercifully. To celebrate his victory, the tale was inscribed onto huge stone panels making up a triumphant staircase. However, in 680AD the Naranjo lord K'ahk' Xiiv Chan Chaahk wanted revenge and stole the staircase!

## GAME OF STONES

It's no surprise that when you're stealing your enemy's trophy, you might edit the story carved on it. Four panels found in Naranjo were found the wrong way around, probably to mock K'an II's story, and four were missing. Two are likely circulating in illegal antique markets, but how did the other two end up at Xunantunich? For that, we finally need to know whose bones we're dealing with!

## WAR CHEST

The upside to a tomb collapsing is that all the dirt does a pretty good job cushioning the artefacts inside. Around the bones, archaeologists found obsidian blades, carved animal bones, 36 jars, remnants of a jaguar cape, and seashell jewellery. This rich collection led researchers to assume this was a royal male warrior of the Snakehead Dynasty guarding his family story, but radioactive analysis revealed these bones belonged to a woman – which leads to a fantastic possibility...

## THE WARRIOR QUEEN

Through the lens of modern science, archaeologists quickly changed their minds and came up with a new theory. This may in fact be the lost burial site of warrior-queen Lady Six Sky! Ruler of Naranjo, she fought most of her neighbours and kept waging war until her death. This makes it far more likely that she was buried with these two tablets as war trophies, to spite the Snakeheads forever! Rather fitting, really, that Xunantunich, literally means Lady of the Stone!



# KOM ASH SHUQAFa

Welcome to Alexandria, the Egyptian wellspring of civilisation. When talk turns to the Wonders of the World, you might hear Alexandria praised for its vast library, lost to fire centuries ago, but while the living lost their cultural archive, the dead kept theirs safe underground. So safe, in fact, that the whole place lay forgotten in the sandy earth until 1900, when a donkey fell through the ceiling...

## HORSING AROUND

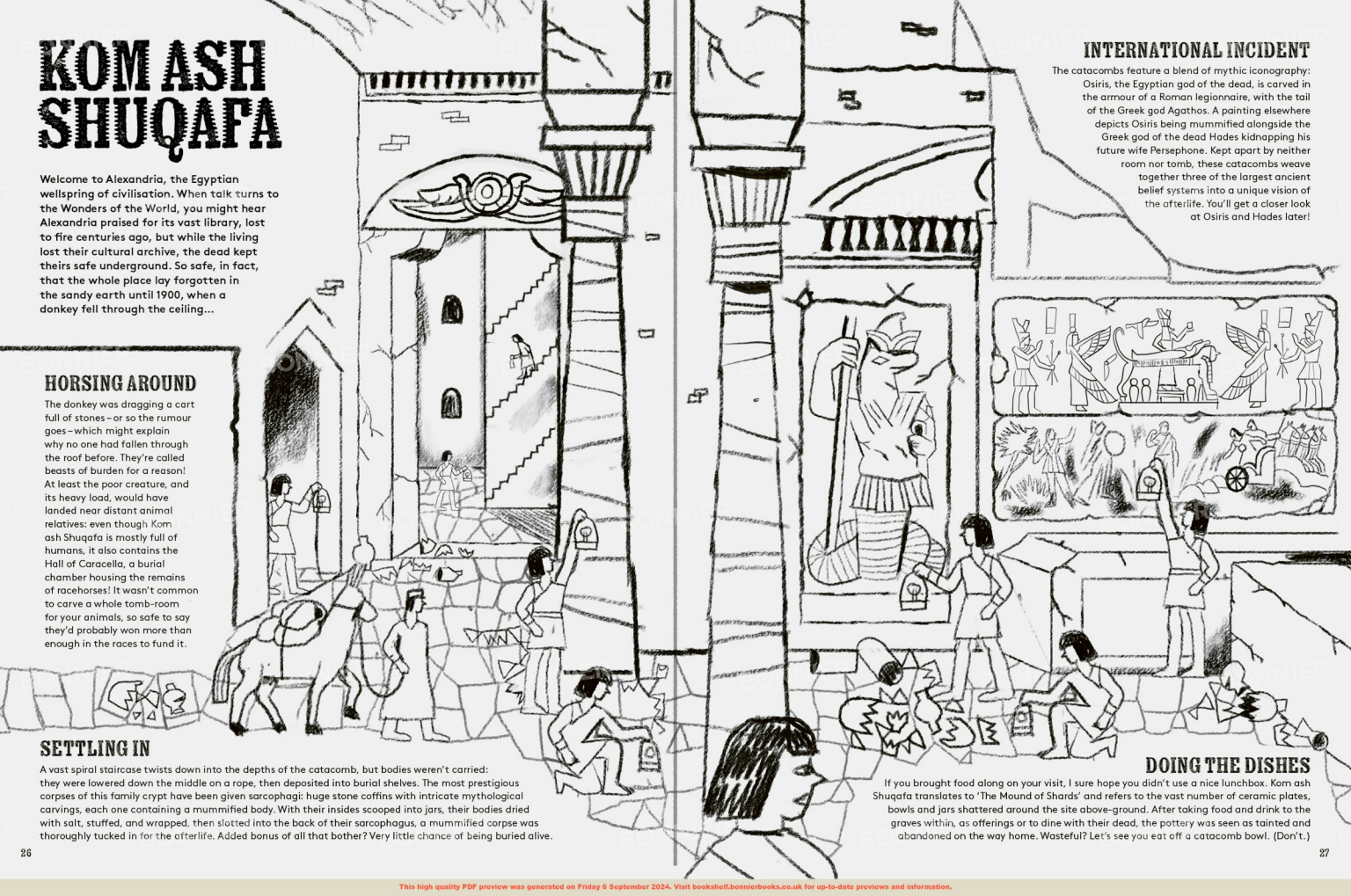
The donkey was dragging a cart full of stones—or so the rumour goes—which might explain why no one had fallen through the roof before. They're called beasts of burden for a reason! At least the poor creature, and its heavy load, would have landed near distant animal relatives: even though Kom ash Shuqafa is mostly full of humans, it also contains the Hall of Caracella, a burial chamber housing the remains of racehorses! It wasn't common to carve a whole tomb-room for your animals, so safe to say they'd probably won more than enough in the races to fund it.

## SETTLING IN

A vast spiral staircase twists down into the depths of the catacomb, but bodies weren't carried: they were lowered down the middle on a rope, then deposited into burial shelves. The most prestigious corpses of this family crypt have been given sarcophagi: huge stone coffins with intricate mythological carvings, each one containing a mummified body. With their insides scooped into jars, their bodies dried with salt, stuffed, and wrapped, then slotted into the back of their sarcophagus, a mummified corpse was thoroughly tucked in for the afterlife. Added bonus of all that bother? Very little chance of being buried alive.

## INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

The catacombs feature a blend of mythic iconography: Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, is carved in the armour of a Roman legionnaire, with the tail of the Greek god Agathos. A painting elsewhere depicts Osiris being mummified alongside the Greek god of the dead Hades kidnapping his future wife Persephone. Kept apart by neither room nor tomb, these catacombs weave together three of the largest ancient belief systems into a unique vision of the afterlife. You'll get a closer look at Osiris and Hades later!



## DOING THE DISHES

If you brought food along on your visit, I sure hope you didn't use a nice lunchbox. Kom ash Shuqafa translates to 'The Mound of Shards' and refers to the vast number of ceramic plates, bowls and jars shattered around the site above-ground. After taking food and drink to the graves within, as offerings or to dine with their dead, the pottery was seen as tainted and abandoned on the way home. Wasteful? Let's see you eat off a catacomb bowl. (Don't.)

# OKU-NO-IN CEMETERY

We've climbed high now to Mount Koya, Japan. Catch your breath. Oku-no-in, meaning Inner Sanctuary, is the largest and most sacred burial site in Japan. It lies in a misty thousand-year-old woodland, thriving in the temperate shadow of the mountain, tranquil by day and ghostly by night.

## FOLLOW THE LEADER

Here, all paths lead to one: the grave of Kobo Daishi, a monk known in life as Kukai, founder of Shingo Buddhism. Meals are laid at his mausoleum twice a day, for he is said to have simply slipped into a state of endless meditation. 20,000 monks rest in the earth alongside him—seen as asleep, not dead—united in their practise of his teachings (but excluded from his catering service!).

## BLUR THE LINE

Not only does Oku-no-in challenge the permanence of death but it also expands the idea of what or who a grave can be for. A giant rocket commemorates a space project, a bug extermination business memorialises all the creepy-crawlies they've killed, and huge industrial companies sponsor the graves of their employees.

## MIND YOUR MANNERS

The Goby-bashi bridge marks the entrance to the most sacred part of the cemetery. It's concrete, but each plank represents a different deity, and their symbols are carved underneath, visible only in the reflection of the water. Before crossing, splash the Mizumuke Jizo statue to send fortune to those who have passed, then bow, remove your hat, and put away your camera. No photos past this point.

## WITH A HEAVY HEART

After the bridge lies the caged Miroku Stone, spiritually connected to the deity Miroku, who will one day come down to Earth as a future Buddha. Oku-no-in challenges you to reach inside and lift the stone with one hand, but beware: the stone is lighter for the virtuous and heavier for wrongdoers. Fail, and you've got some reflecting to do. No prize for success, but hey, you're officially a good person!

## ETERNAL LIGHT

Every mossy stone lamp, every statue, every grave has led you here: Torodo Hall, the sacred centre of worship at Oku-no-in. In the basement, inaccessible, lie 50,000 Buddha statues donated for the 1,150th year of Kobo Daishi's long rest. The name means Hall of Lanterns, and the 10,000 ever-burning lamps inside might tell you why: night or day, year on year, the heart of Oku-no-in glows bright for the dead.



# DARGAVS

You are in 17th century Ossetia, central Europe, and you have just caught the plague. It's taken out 90% of the local population, so odds of escape are slim, but where do you go when you're too dead for the living and too alive for the dead? Careful now. This one's spooky.

## THE VALLEY OF DEATH

Walk a hidden path between towering hills and you will find a watchtower rising from the wild, guarding 99 white crypts perched on a hill. Dated from 12th century, nobody knows why 10,000 bodies were lain to rest here, but we do know many who entered weren't dead yet.

## HOW TO STOP DEATH

You may know the word quarantine all too well. By isolating the sick, this practice prevents the spread of disease and, in the worst cases, ensures that if life cannot be saved then at least death can be contained. Here, infected people sealed themselves into their family crypt and waited for the end, a sacrifice displaying incredible willpower and a selfless dedication to community. Evidence of food implies that visitors gave supplies, likely through the small narrow windows, while those without family crypts simply waited outside, braving the elements as their time ran down.

## TAKE IT TO THE GRAVE

The burial practices at play are not entirely unique, but they sure are different. Historians can't yet explain the nautical theme, with many of the crypts containing boat-like coffins and buried oars implying a watery afterlife – but there aren't any sailable rivers nearby. The belief system here hides a rich mythology. Whatever it was, for now, it sleeps with its believers.

## WELL, WELL, WELL

A small well stands at each crypt with a sturdy stone at the bottom, but it's not for what you think (don't drink groundwater in a cemetery, folks). Bring a coin, drop it in, and if you hear the distant clink of that coin bouncing off the stone, the soul inside the crypt made it to a good afterlife.

# THE PIRATE CEMETERY

Sail to the tropical island of Sainte-Marie off the coast of Madagascar, then walk at low-tide to the smaller, wilder Isle of Sainte-Pierre. Secret, plundered, sun-baked and broken, here lie the bones of lawbreakers and wave-wanderers, adrift in life – now settled at last. Forget what you've been told: these dead men have tales to tell.

## BLOW THE MAN DOWN

The cemetery on Saint Pierre is thought to hold 1,500 bodies, but only some thirty headstones remain. Centuries of storms, cyclones, and soil erosion have destroyed every wooden or coral-based grave-marker, but harder headstones have survived, carved with visible pirate markers like the skull-and-crossbones.

## THE PIRATE REPUBLIC

Sainte-Marie was founded in 1690 by Adam Baldrige, self-proclaimed Pirate King. Wisely hidden near wealthy trade-routes, the small island grew into a lawless haven where up to 1,000 pirates would find treasure, repair their ships, resupply, and most importantly: live and die as equals.

## DEAD MEN SAILING

In the Golden Age of Piracy (17th–18th centuries), pirates were largely military sailors who had overthrown their captain (a crime known as mutiny) and sailed away to attack and steal from other ships (piracy). Both crimes carried death sentences. Well aware of this, pirates flew the Jolly Roger (a flag with a skeleton symbol) to threaten other ships with a fight to the death.

## ABANDON SHIP

If a pirate ship ever met the 28 cannons of a navy frigate (war ship), the crew had little hope. The grandest headstones to piracy on Saint-Marie are the skeletal shipwrecks strewn around the coast, including the wreck of the pirate Captain Kidd's ship Adventure Galley.



## BURIED TREASURE

Both Kidd and 'Pirate King' Baldrige claimed to have hidden treasure in the island and its nearby waters, but nobody has found any. While legend says that Kidd was buried sitting up in this cemetery to keep him from resting, he was actually hanged in London (twice – the first rope broke!) and his body displayed over the Thames to rot in public. Happily, his bones fell into the saltwater below, so he had a pirate's burial after all.