

ECHOES: *Abandoned Places*

If you're planning your own personal world tour, your trip might take you to climb the Eiffel Tower or to traverse the canals of Venice. You may want to marvel at the pyramids of Egypt. But there are a lot of very interesting (and creepastic) abandoned places that can be quite an adventure—if you're ever allowed to visit.

1. CENTRALIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Once a small coal town, Centralia, PA, now looks more like a gateway to the underworld.

The fire was intended to be a controlled burn in a landfill. Little did the residents know the fire beneath their town would still be ablaze over fifty years later. The controlled burn ignited a coal seam which quickly spread to the coal in the mines beneath the town. All efforts to extinguish the underground fire failed.

At first, residents complained of the smell. But soon, the underground fire began to have more grave effects. A sinkhole opened up underneath a young boy. Smoke rose from the ground, and the air became unsafe to breathe. Eventually, the city was condemned.

Today, only a few residents remain, and adventure-seeking tourists stop in to take photos of the smoke that is still rising from the ground and the split, graffiti-covered highway.



Centralia's Graffiti Highway



Empty Classroom, Pripyat

2. PRIPYAT, UKRAINE

While a nuclear meltdown might sound like something out of a movie about the apocalypse, it really happened in Pripyat, Ukraine, in 1986. The Chernobyl nuclear power plant experienced a meltdown, and due to the extremely high levels of radiation that resulted, the entire city had to be evacuated. The city was completely emptied in four hours.

Pripyat has been left exactly as it was the day the meltdown occurred. To this day, the radiation is too high for anyone to occupy the area, and Pripyat, once home to around 50,000 people, remains a true ghost town.

3. THE WINCHESTER MYSTERY HOUSE

You could find a multitude of abandoned homes in the United States, but few have a stranger tale than that of the old Winchester House, which has the mysterious vibes you may expect to find in a Hollywood version of a haunted house.

But the Winchester house is very real and belonged to Sarah Winchester. She was married to William Winchester of the Winchester Gun Company fortune, and the two had an infant daughter. Unfortunately, tragedy struck the family, with both her child and her husband passing away in a short time. Sarah moved from Connecticut to San Jose, CA, where she began construction on her home, which she never allowed to cease.

The house became a labyrinth that led to nowhere, containing hidden doors and dead ends. The construction continued 38 years, when Sarah passed away. The house had reached approximately 24,000 square feet. The real mystery is that no one truly knew why Sarah continued building her home.

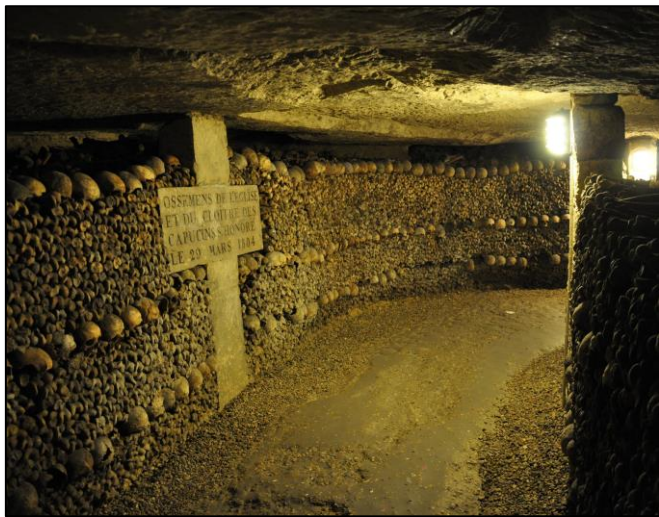


The Winchester House

Today, the public can tour the Winchester House. It even has its own website called the Winchester Mystery Hour!

4. THE PARISIAN CATACOMBS

Try this for a real-life horror story: what if you found out your town was built over a graveyard? Now, imagine over six million bodies buried in catacombs underneath one of the most famous cities in the world: Paris, France. They were actually constructed in the 18th century. The catacombs were used as tombs because at the time the graveyards being closed due to public health concerns. They were later used during World War II as a headquarters for the French resistance. Ironically, everyone from aristocrats to peasants are all buried here with only the original cemetery names as labels. If you're interested in exploring the labyrinth of tombs yourself, they are open to the public.



The bones are stacked decoratively.

5. THE ISLAND OF THE DOLLS, XOCHIMILCO, MEXICO

Also called La Isla De Las Muñecas, the Island of the Dolls in Mexico is an abandoned island made famous by a forest of dolls and doll parts hanging in the trees and otherwise scattered throughout the island. Don Julian Santana, who previously inhabited the island, discovered the body of a girl in a nearby canal and decided to bring the dolls to the island to ward off evil spirits. He spent time collecting dolls, buying them, and then hanging them in the trees. He also filled his home with the dolls.

In 2001, Don Julian Sanata was found drowned in the same canal where he had seen the girl. Today, brave tourists looking for an adventure can still see the island by boat, and witness for themselves the decrepit dolls still hanging from the trees.



Las Muñecas



photo by Ken Marshall

6. THE WANLI UFO HOUSES, TAIWAN

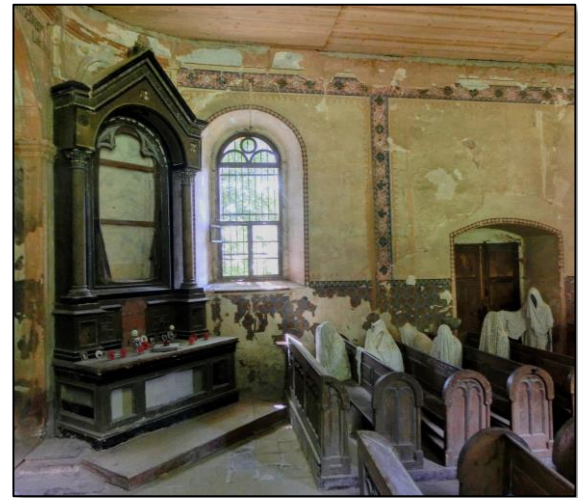
These otherworldly homes built in Taiwan were definitely peculiar; they actually resembled flying saucers. The unique and futuristic homes were the brainchild of Finish architect Matti Suuronen, although some speculate that these specific UFO houses were built by someone else, as Suuronen had stopped making the homes by the time the village was constructed. Some pod homes were constructed, but unfortunately, before the eccentric community was finished, the building project was abandoned. They were uninhabited, and became something of a ghost town (or perhaps we should say an extraterrestrial village).

If you ever visit, you'll find that not all of the homes are actually empty. It seems that some adventurous people took to the design, and have moved into the houses. Maybe the pod homes do have a future after all.

7. ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, LUKOVÁ, CZECHIA

If you're interested in the supernatural, you should make sure to check out the so-called 'church of ghosts' in Czechia. The church fell into disrepair in the late 1960's. Services were moved outside and the church boarded up, which only served to make it look more dilapidated. Throughout the church's history, it had been plagued by rumors of unnatural occurrences, and a roof collapse during a funeral was the final straw for churchgoers.

Residents, however, eventually decided to have the historic church rebuilt. Artist Jakub Hadrava was commissioned to create art for the church. He embraced the church's creepy history, filling the pews with statues of ghosts.



The Church of Ghosts
(photo by Marcus O Bst)

Today, St. George's church is a tourist attraction and anything but traditional. Intriguingly, the congregation has returned to the church and people sit among the ghosts during services.



Shicheng

8. SHICHENG, QIANDAO LAKE, ZHEJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA

Talk about old school! Shicheng actually existed during the Eastern Han Dynasty in 25-200 AD. However, if you want to visit, you may have to don scuba gear. Shicheng isn't exactly easy to reach. That's because it was flooded in the late 1950's when a dam was constructed, turning the ancient city into a modern-day Atlantis.

Fortunately, the water has actually served to protect the city from the elements. If you're interested in a visit, be prepared to descend into the depths for some genuinely stunning views of the ancient city and its architecture. You might even discover something secret about the Shicheng, as the underwater ruins have yet to be completely mapped.

9. SIX FLAGS, NEW ORLEANS

Nothing goes from fun to incredibly spooky faster than an abandoned theme park. When the monster Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, it caused widespread devastation in the city. The New Orleans Six Flags amusement park was destroyed and the location has never been rebuilt.

The current status of the park is closer to dystopian landscape or horror movie than family outing. Water rose to six feet in the park, wreaking absolute havoc. Six Flags decided the park was too expensive to restore, with 80% of the park destroyed. Grime-covered clowns and toppled roller coasters remain.



Abandoned Six Flags (photo by Erik Jorgensen)

Unfortunately, entry into the now defunct Six Flags is illegal, but that doesn't stop explorers from hopping the fence to check out the abandoned amusement park. It's one risk we don't recommend you take.



Brestovac's foreboding façade

10. BRESTOVAC SANATORIUM, ZAGREB, CROATIA

Just the word sanatorium is enough to raise goose bumps...but imagine an abandoned sanatorium, once a medical facility for those suffering from tuberculosis, crumbled into ruins. Built in the early 1900's, the treatment center was the brainchild of a doctor who fell in love with a theatre actress who later contracted tuberculosis.

After its beginnings as a state-of-the-art medical facility, the building was converted into a military hospital during the world wars, which means the ruins have seen more than their fair share of tragedy. When the building fell into disrepair, it was eventually abandoned to slow decay.

Today, the building is open to people with a thirst for exploration, but watch out: it is also frequently used as a hideout for paintball enthusiasts.

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