

Plan Your Trip

Wherever you are, you can generally find a cemetery nearby. Volunteers often look locally to find cemeteries to visit, but if you are traveling, search in those areas. Search for cemeteries on Find A Grave and also the Find A Grave app.

It's important to ask permission before you arrive at the cemetery. Ensure that you follow any cemetery policies and guidelines.



Photo Credit: Sarah K.

Go Prepared

When it comes to cemetery visits, the Boy Scout motto “Be prepared” really comes in handy. While you might feel like you're packing for a trip to the top of Mt. Everest, the supplies you bring may well determine the success of your trip. Here are some items to consider:

- **Camera/phone with GPS turned on** — Smartphones and Digital cameras are great for capturing photos of tombstones because you can see in real time whether you've captured the image you want. Take high-resolution photographs. Be sure to also bring plenty of memory, extra batteries, or chargers.
- **Sun Protection** — A hat and sunscreen, whatever you need for your area.
- **Small towel, old clothes and shoes** — Towel to help gently wipe dirt off a stone.
- **Spray bottle with plain water** — Wetting tombstones can make them more readable.
- **Small sweeping brush** — Paint brushes work well to brush loose dirt off without harming fragile stones.
- **Mirror** — Use the mirror to reflect sunshine and throw shadows off inscriptions. Foil-covered flat surfaces are less breakable and can also help when mirrors aren't available.
- **Scissors or clippers** — You'll need these to trim away grass that has grown over the gravestone.
- **Small kneeling pad** — You may need to kneel or even lay down while taking eye-level shots of smaller stones.
- **Notepad and pencil** — You may want to take some notes.

Remember to use non-invasive methods when it comes to reading tombstones. Shaving cream and chemical solvents should not be used because they can harm the stone. The Association of Gravestone Studies has an FAQ page* with more information.

*<https://gravestonestudies.org/knowledge-center/faq-s>

Be Safe

While we might think of cemeteries as a peaceful refuge, they can also be dangerous, so grab a friend or gather a group from a local society—the more the merrier. Criminals sometimes target cars in cemetery parking lots, so don't leave purses and other valuables in the car and never wander a seemingly empty cemetery alone.

In addition, cemeteries are home to biting insects, snakes, ticks, and other not-so-nice residents, so dress appropriately with sensible shoes and long pants, and bring a first aid kit to take care of minor injuries. Fully charged cellphones are also a must.

Be Respectful

Practice common courtesy, thoughtfulness and respect for the grounds. Steer clear of funeral processions and offer them privacy.

