

TOURISM RISES AT UNESCO WORLD WAR MEMORIAL SITES



A total of 139 memorial sites to the Great War were inscribed on the World Heritage List by an international organization. These sites, located in Flanders, Wallonia, North and North-East France, are the final resting places of soldiers from 130 countries who lost their lives in the First World War. The war claimed 10 million lives and left 20 million amputated. These sites serve as a reminder of the horror of the war and draw tourists from all over the world who come to pay their respects.

UNESCO has selected a list of sites that represent its global character. The list includes a Portuguese cemetery, an Indian memorial, and the largest Chinese cemetery in Noyelles-sur-Mer (north), France. **This cemetery is the final resting place of 842 Chinese workers who served the British army behind the front.**

Many of these sites are Commonwealth cemeteries and memorials that attract tourists from the UK, Canada, and New Zealand. For these tourists, memory is essential as they pay homage to their fallen fellow citizens.

Many tourists from Commonwealth countries share a culture of remembering fallen ancestors rooted in Anglo-Saxon traditions. Before the Rugby World Cup, the All Blacks stopped at the Wellington Quarry in Arras. New Zealand soldiers redeveloped this network of galleries during the war. This place has become a memorial hub, attracting over 60,000 visitors annually.

The Thiépval Memorial in northern France has experienced a 50% decrease in visitors, primarily British, due to the pandemic. However, according to Pascal-Louis Caillaut of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), which manages 51 out of the 139 memorial sites, visitors are slowly returning. Olivier Gérard, director of the Douaumont Ossuary, where the remains of 130,000 unknown soldiers killed during the Battle of Verdun are buried, noted that **being classified as a World Heritage Site results in a 30% increase in attendance.**

The Douaumont Ossuary welcomes around 250,000 to 300,000 visitors annually. Gérard has observed a renewed interest in the site, particularly among young people aged 20 to 30 who are exploring the history of their families and roots. He hopes that Unesco's inscription will help keep this memory alive so that history is not repeated.

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