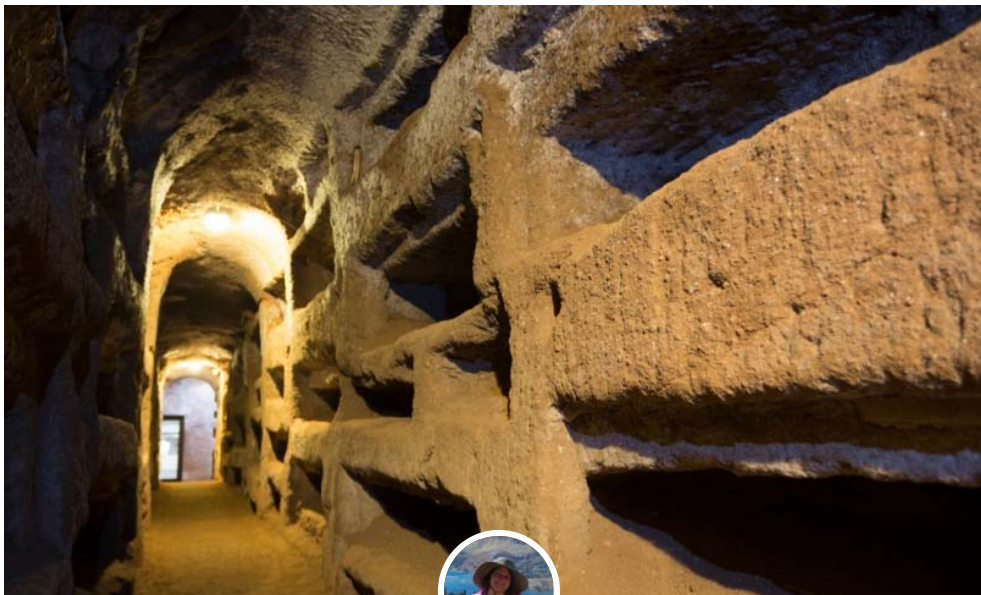


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# Digging Deep Into the Past: Take a Catacombs Tour

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Looking for more than just what meets the eye for your next vacation? If you're a history lover (and fan of archaeological sites) you should definitely consider an adventure that digs deep; a catacombs tour!

What's a catacomb, you ask? Like archaeological sites that are often times discovered by accident, underground mysteries can be randomly revealed. Ancient communities often used underground caves as their final resting place. These dark and musty chambers are interconnected by a series of tunnels. In many instances, lighting has been added while in other places visitors are provided industrial grade flashlights. Tunnels can be wide enough to fit several people or extremely narrow.

Private and public tours cater to this sub terrain adventure. If you're game, start planning soon. Water penetration and erosion are affecting the integrity of some locations so they might not be accessible for long. Other places can be extremely busy during peak seasons.

## Roman Catacombs in Italy





*Image via Sandra Bornstein*

Rome has both Jewish and Christian catacombs located outside the ancient perimeter walls. Only a handful of these Christian catacombs offer escorted tours. It's best to search online to determine your availability. Best options include the catacombs of San Callisto, San Sebastiano, San Domitilla, Pricilla, and Saint Agnes.

The [International Catacomb Society](#) organizes public tours of the Jewish catacombs on select Sundays. In various places, the cave walls have been reinforced with concrete bricks. Latin and Greek plaques mark the name of the deceased. Colorful paintings on the wall provide clues about these long gone Roman Jews.

## Bet She'arim National Park in Israel

Travelers trekking near the foothills of Mt. Carmel and north of the Jezreel Valley, can spend an hour or two exploring the necropolis (city of the dead) of [Bet She'arim](#). This is the largest surviving Jewish cemetery of antiquity, with more than 30 underground burial caves and over 300 tomb inscriptions in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Tadmorian. The catacombs are carved out of chalkstone and decorated with Jewish symbols. The burial vaults and sarcophagi reflect the social and economic status of the departed. The tunnels open to the public are easy to navigate and are adequately lit.

## Catacombs of Kom El-Shoqafa (Mounds of Shards) in Egypt



*Image via Sandra Bornstein*

This site is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Archeologists date this ancient Alexandria necropolis to the period between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Visitors enter by walking down a stuffy

dark cavern that has a circular staircase. The artwork and methods of burial depict a mixture of Egyptian, Greek and Roman culture. Two levels are accessible while the lowest level remains submerged under water. Stay focused if you want to remember this adventure. Photography isn't permitted in these catacombs.

## St Paul's Catacombs in Rabat, Malta



*Image via Sandra Bornstein*

Walking through the dark corridors of this ancient catacomb, visitors can visit the largest underground cemetery in [Malta](#). The tombs represent a cross section of socioeconomic status. Surprisingly, Jews, Christians, and pagans were buried within close proximity to one another. Inscriptions are in multiple languages and include Jewish symbols and evidence of Early Christianity.

### Helpful Hint:

If you're claustrophobic or have environmental allergies, reconsider.

Can you add to our list of Roman antiquity catacombs?