

# Internet memorial site launched in Hong Kong

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A couple walks among graves in Hong Kong. In Chinese culture, relatives are expected to visit the cemetery at least once a year to pay their respects. But now, mourners can simply visit [memorial.gov.hk](http://memorial.gov.hk) and set up a page for free.

Even Hong Kong's dead cannot escape the Internet after the government Thursday opened the electronic gates on a brand new virtual graveyard.

In Chinese culture, relatives are expected to visit the cemetery at least once a year to pay their respects. But now, mourners can simply visit [memorial.gov.hk](http://memorial.gov.hk) and set up a page free-of-charge.

Up to 100,000 users can upload photos and videos of their loved ones, write descriptions and offer condolences.

Family and friends can make traditional offerings, as is the Chinese custom, by using "emoticon" symbols depicting fruit, flowers and candles.

There are even emoticons for roast pigs, chickens and paper money -- all popular graveside offerings in Chinese tradition.

Mourners can also upload any special images that their dead relative loved, such as the racing pages from a newspaper or a tasty bowl of their favourite noodles.

But no one has yet worked out how to offer incense, an essential offering, as downloadable smoke and smells have yet to be invented.

The online graveyard's welcome page features fluffy white clouds in a blue sky, and a quick burst of sunlight, as white dandelion seeds float peacefully by.

"Leave a message for your beloved ones with memories," the site says, explaining that it is aimed at "facilitating the public to pay tribute and show condolence to their beloved ones at any time, and from anywhere".

Only Hong Kongers can be registered and must be confirmed dead, and have been buried or cremated in the city.

Ng Yuen, who is in charge of the Hong Kong United Taoists Association, said the idea of worshipping ancestors online ran against an important Chinese tradition.

"The tradition is about families making an effort to visit the graves of

their loved ones at least once or twice a year to make offerings and pay tributes," Ng said.

"The idea that you can do all that by simply switching on the laptop before you brush your teeth in the morning may be acceptable 100 years later. But I don't think it will be the case now."

"Youngsters may like the idea," Ng Yiu-tong, chairman of the city's funeral association, told the South China Morning Post. "But the older generation still prefers to visit the graves in person."

The site cost the government one million Hong Kong dollars (130,000 US dollars) to set up and will cost 800,000 dollars a year to run.

Space for the dead is a big issue in overcrowded Hong Kong where permanent cemetery plots are rare and costly.

The Chinese calendar has designated two public holidays each year -- Chung Yeung Festival and Ching Ming Festival -- as gravesweeping days.

Many families choose to bury their dead in government-run cemeteries where they lease a plot for about 10 years, after which the corpse is either cremated or re-buried in a smaller plot.

Cremation has been gaining popularity in recent years because of a shortage of land and the difficulty of finding burial plots.

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