

What are pyramids?

The pyramids are the stone tombs of Egypt's kings - the Pharaohs and one of the world's greatest historical mysteries. They have stood for thousands of years, filled with many hidden secrets: clues about what life (and death) was like in Ancient Egypt.



Why did the Ancient Egyptians build pyramids?

The Egyptians believed that if the pharaoh's body could be mummified after death the pharaoh would live forever. The tombs were designed to protect the buried Pharaoh's body and his belongings.



Where were they built?

Most of the pyramids can be found on the western side of the Nile River, just into the dry desert.

How does the dry desert help?

The dry desert heat worked to keep the Pharaohs's body and his belongings from decomposing and rotting away.

Why did they build pyramids next to the Nile?

The reason they built the pyramids next to the Nile River was so it would be easier to get the blocks to the pyramid. The stones could be bought nearer to the pyramid building site by boat.

What guards the pyramids?

The Sphinx stands in front of all the pyramids in Giza. It has the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh.

Ancient Egypt

Pyramids

The Ancient Egyptian pyramids are some of the most impressive structures built by humans in ancient times. Many of the pyramids still survive today for us to see and explore.

Why did they build the pyramids?

The pyramids were built as burial places and monuments to the Pharaohs. As part of their religion, the Egyptians believed that the Pharaoh needed certain things to succeed in the afterlife. Deep inside the pyramid the Pharaoh would be buried with all sorts of items and treasure that he may need to survive in the afterlife.

Types of Pyramids

Some of the earlier pyramids, called step pyramids, have large ledges every so often that look like giant steps. Archeologists think that the steps were built as stairways for the pharaoh to use to climb to the sun god.

Later pyramids have more sloping and flat sides. These pyramids represent a mound that emerged at the beginning of time. The sun god stood on the mound and created the other gods and goddesses.

How did they build them?

How the pyramids were built has been a mystery that archeologists have been trying to solve for many years. It is believed that thousands of slaves were used to cut up the large blocks and then slowly move them up the pyramid on ramps. The pyramid would get slowly built, one block at a time. Scientists estimate it took at least 20,000 workers over 23 years to build the Great Pyramid of Giza. Because it took so long to build them, Pharaohs generally started the construction of their pyramids as soon as they became ruler.

What's inside the pyramids?

Deep inside the pyramids lays the Pharaoh's burial chamber which would be filled with treasure and items for the Pharaoh to use in the afterlife. The walls were often covered with carvings and paintings. Near the Pharaoh's chamber would be other rooms where family members and servants were buried. There were often small rooms that acted as temples and larger rooms for storage. Narrow passageways led to outside.

Sometimes fake burial chambers or passages would be used to try and trick grave robbers. Because there was such valuable treasure buried within the pyramid, grave robbers would try to break in and steal the treasure. Despite the Egyptian's efforts, nearly all of the pyramids were robbed of their treasures by 1000 B.C.

A GUIDE TO...

THE PYRAMIDS

What were the Egyptian pyramids?

In Ancient Egypt the pyramids were impressive structures used as tombs for the burial of pharaohs, alongside their greatest treasures. The pyramids were built during the time of the Old Kingdom, but pyramid building fell out of fashion after that because the structures were too costly to build and it became too easy for robbers to know where precious grave goods were buried. Some of the pyramids have survived for thousands of years and provide important clues about life in Ancient Egypt.

What did the pyramids look like?

Earlier pyramids were called Step Pyramids and were made of a series of ledges that look like steps. Some historians say that the step design was a way for the deceased pharaoh to ascend to the sun god. Other pyramids that were built a little later had flatter sides and are said to represent the mound on which the sun god stood at the beginning of time when he created the other deities. As well as human guards standing around the pyramids, the pyramids in Giza were also guarded by the Great Sphinx, an enormous lion-like creature with a human face carved from rock.

What would you see inside a pyramid?

The pyramids were very large and filled with many rooms, courtyards and passageways on the inside. Deep at the heart of each pyramid there was the royal burial chamber in which the mummified pharaoh would have been placed along with his great treasures. The Ancient Egyptians believed that the Pharaoh would be able to take his treasures with him to the afterlife. The inner walls would have been decorated with hieroglyphics making up stories and prayers. There would also have been extra rooms for the king's servants and family to be buried.

What was on the land around the pyramids?

The pyramids were hard to build. While they were being constructed, cities emerged around the base of the pyramids where the workers and their families could settle and find shelter and food. Even after the construction work was completed, many of the cities continued to flourish. The pyramids were built to the west of the River Nile, because building by a river meant that heavy blocks could be easily transported towards the pyramids along the river.