

German town wants its own Great Pyramid

By Bojan Pancevski in Berlin, Sunday Telegraph

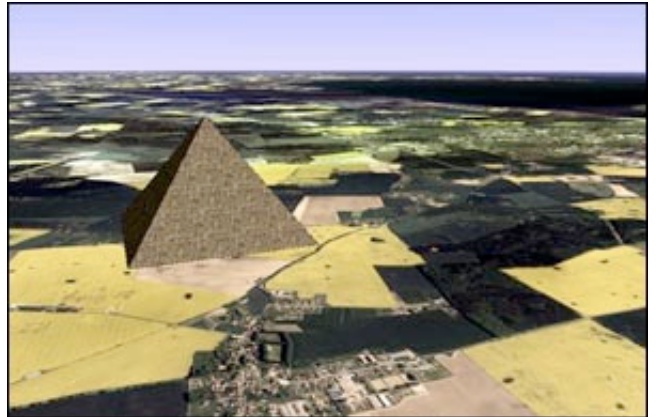
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The pharaohs may have set the standard, but German entrepreneurs are hoping to challenge Egypt's pre-eminence in monumental self-indulgence by building the world's largest pyramid.

They have secured €90,000 (£61,000) in state funding to assess the feasibility of building a 1,600ft tall "Great Pyramid" near the town of Dessau, in the impoverished east German state of Saxony-Anhalt.

Like the original Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt, this would be a place of burial. But instead of one ruler and his hangers-on, it would come to house the remains of millions of people.

The improbable plan is based on the belief that people will pay to have their ashes encased in the concrete blocks used to construct the monument. Millions of people would have to sign up to make it viable, though if the team behind it is successful, its members will be rich beyond the wildest dreams of even the most ambitious pharaoh.



The pyramid of tombstones planned at Dessau

Jens Thiel, one of the initiators of the project, says that becoming part of what he expects to be the greatest memorial in the world should be affordable to everyone: "Our current estimates are that a burial space in a concrete block will cost up to €700, depending on the size. Outlasting physical existence was reserved for the select few in Egypt, but this pyramid will be open to everyone. No one should be denied a place just because they can't afford it."

advertisement The blocks are expected to be up to one cubic metre in size and, given that the volume of the completed pyramid is likely to be in excess of 40 million cubic metres, it could ultimately bring in £13.2 billion.

The completed pyramid would dwarf the Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt, which, at about 432ft, was built as the last resting place of Pharaoh Cheops and his entourage.

Mr Thiel, an economist, teamed up with local artists and engineers to secure state funding for the development of the idea, while the rest of the money is expected to come from private investors.

The Weimar Bauhaus University has confirmed the technical feasibility of the project, and its backers are inviting architectural proposals. The international jury to select the final concept will be headed by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and construction work is pencilled in to start next year.

Hundreds of people from around the world are said to have reserved a place in the memorial, which is being marketed as a "monument for all of us" and a "tomb for all people". A decorated custom memorial stone is available for those willing to pay extra.

The pyramid team expects Dessau to attract churches and other spiritual organisations, as well as visitors from around the world viewing their future grave, paying respects to loved ones, or just admiring the project.

Giza's Great Pyramid is said to have taken 20 years to build. With blocks expected to be added only as they are paid for, this one may take longer. According to Mr Thiel, the pyramid is unlikely to be much higher than 150 metres (492 ft) within two decades. "It is an open-end project that will develop perpetually, and that is the beauty of it," he said.

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