

Valley of the Temples – Hawaii

By Russ Allison

With magnificent beaches, Honolulu, Pearl Harbour, the Polynesian Cultural Centre and beautiful sunsets, the Hawaiian island of O'ahu offers a wide variety of tourist attractions. Like most tourist destinations, the island also has some well kept secrets, places visitors don't usually find. One such treasure is the Valley of the Temples.



A family estate tomb



Family estates flank the main entrance

Less than an hour's drive out of Honolulu, over the mountains, well away from the hustle and bustle of tourist areas, O'ahu offers a different face. Nestled serenely in the lush tropical vegetation of the Ahuimanu valley, beneath the majestic perpendicular cliffs of the mist shrouded Koolau Mountains, lies the Valley of the Temples Memorial Park. Turning off the highway into the main drive one is immediately overwhelmed not only by the magnificent panorama but also by an intense feeling of tranquillity. The towering mountains seemingly embrace the site, protecting the dead.

The cemetery provides traditional burial spaces, mausoleum interment, cremation memorialisation and spectacular family estate areas. The land in the estates sell for between one and two million American dollars. Clearly these prices are not set in the local Polynesian market place. The cemetery attracts mainland and international interest, especially from Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Prospective buyers are prepared to pay a premium for a permanent position with spectacular sea views, a mountain side location and proximity to the Byodo-in temple.

Built by the Valley of the Temples Corporation, at a cost of US\$2.6m, the complex was dedicated in 1968

in memory of Hawaii's first Japanese immigrants. The temple, garden and related structures (a bell house, ceremonial teahouse, man-made waterfall and two acre reflecting lake) replicate the famed Byodo-in at Uji, just outside Kyoto, Japan. The original Japanese Temple was built around 1053 AD and reconstructed in the 1950's by the Japanese government. Following the same plans the Corporation committed over seven acres within their Memorial Park to the first stage of development.

The Byodo-in has a temple prayer hall and two wings. Its tile roof is the largest ever custom made in Japan for any structure in America. The roof tiles were 14,500 square feet in all and were copied from the Kyoto temple by native Japanese craftsmen. Two Nagoya experts came to Hawaii for two months to construct and supervise the roof installation. The famous Japanese sculptor, Masuzo Inui carved a towering 18 foot high Amida Buddha for the temple.

Following tradition the Bon-sho or sacred bell is housed adjacent to but separate from the Byodo-in temple. The six foot high, three ton, brass bell cast in Osaka Japan closely resembles that hanging in an identical Bell House at the Uji Byodo-in. The original is said to be more than 900 years old.



The Bon-sho bell



The Byodo-in temple

Located at the rear of the Memorial Park, the Byodo-in, landscaped gardens and water features significantly enhance the marketability of cemetery property. The Valley provides a good range of cremation and burial and mausoleum interment options as well as a pet section. It understandably targets the creation of family estates. Recognising that its market is global, the focus is not on having a large sales team at the cemetery itself.

Extensive use is made of external commissioned consultants and funeral directors to promote pre-need sales. Given the array of payment plans, discount incentives, insurance options

on offer, it was no surprise to find the inside front cover of the Honolulu Yellow pages carried a full page colour advert for the Valley of the Temples and a tear out coupon inviting you to consider pre-need.

The RightStar Hawaii Management Inc. rightly makes no apology for the commercial focus of their chain of cemeteries and mortuaries (funeral homes). As a private corporation their positioning statement clearly states that 'Serving, Helping, & Caring – Is Our Business'. Recognising the particular attributes of the site and identifying a premium market niche, it made a significant



Valley of the Temples Mausoleum



Thousands of fish give life to temple water features



investment purchasing the Byodo-in and the Valley of the Temples. This would have to be one of the most picturesque cemeteries in the world.

Russ Allison is CEO of The Necropolis Springvale and a member of the ACCA Board. Russ visited in 2003 and appreciated the assistance of Mr Bruce Dooley, Executive Vice President of RightStar Hawaii Management Inc. at the Valley of the Temples. ■

