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## RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS FOR BEING BURIED AT SEA IN THE UK

**BURIAL AT SEA** is the disposal of [human remains](#) in the ocean, normally from a ship or boat. It is regularly performed by navies, and is done by private citizens in many countries.

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### DEFINITION

Burial-at-sea services are available at three MMO designated locations in England and with many different customs, either by ship or by aircraft. Usually, either the [captain](#) (or commanding officer) of the ship or aircraft or a religious representative (of the decedent's religion) performs the ceremony.

The ceremony may include burial in a casket, burial in an urn, or scattering of the cremated remains by ship. Burial at sea by aircraft is usually done only with cremated remains. Other types of burial at sea include the mixing of the ashes with concrete and dropping the concrete block.

Below is a list of religions that allow burial at sea, with some details of the burial. However, beliefs and views may differ within the same religion.

### BY RELIGION

#### **Buddhism**

There are very few Buddhist burials at sea.

Traditionally, the deceased are cremated and the ashes are placed in a grave or [columbarium](#). Particularly in East Asian or [Mahayana Buddhism](#), a physical gravesite is considered important for the conduct of memorial and ancestor rites. The [Buddhist Churches of America](#), the North American branch of Japanese [Jodo Shinshu](#) Buddhism, has created a service for Buddhist burials at sea, primarily for military service members.



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## **CHRISTIANITY**

### **CATHOLICISM**

Officially, the [Roman Catholic Church](#) prefers normal casket burials over cremations, but does allow for cremation subject to the condition that the ashes are entombed or buried.

Catholics believe it is not proper to scatter or pour the cremated remains over the sea, water, or on the land. According to the Roman Catholic Church this action does not give due respect to the remains of the deceased, nor does it allow for the closure and healing of family and friends.

Visiting the deceased in a holy place provides believers with a space to offer prayers, commune with those who have gone before them in faith, and reminds them to await the resurrection of their own bodies.

Burial at sea in a casket or in an urn is approved for cases where the deceased expired in the sea.

### **PROTESTANTISM**

#### **ANGLICANS**

The [Anglican Communion](#) has detailed procedures for burial at sea. The ship has to be stopped, and the body has to be sewn in canvas, suitably weighted (not allowed in the UK).

Anglican (and other) chaplains of the Royal Navy bury cremated remains of ex-Naval personnel at sea. Scattering of cremated remains is discouraged, not least for practical reasons.

Words from the Common Prayer Book may be used:

*At the Burial of the Dead at Sea. The same Office may be used; but instead of the Sentence of Committal, the Minister shall say, UNTO Almighty God we commend the soul of our brother departed, and we commit his body to the deep; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the sea shall give up her dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.<sup>[2]</sup>*

#### **LUTHERAN**

Many [Lutheran](#) naval veterans and seamen prefer to be buried at sea. In those cases either the casket or urn is set to sea, or ashes scattered. The procedure is similar as that with Anglican.

#### **Hinduism**

Traditionally, the deceased are cremated, the bones and ashes are collected, and the ashes/remains are immersed in the [Ganges River](#) if possible or in any other river if not.

#### **Islam**

The sacred texts of [Islam](#) prefer burial on land, "so deep that its smell does not come out and the beasts of prey do not dig it out".

However, if a person dies at sea and it is not possible to bring the body back to land before decay, or if burial at land becomes impossible, burial at sea is allowed

#### **Judaism]**

According to [Jewish law](#), a dead person must be quickly buried and [burial](#) requires covering in earth.<sup>[4]</sup> This law is derived from Devarim (Deuteronomy) 21:23 "Bury, you will bury him the same day; for the (unburied body) is a curse to God" the double command to bury causing a positive commandment to entomb in the earth and a negative commandment forbidding leaving an unburied body.



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By country

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### **Australia**

Burial at sea within Australian territorial waters, exclusive economic zone and continental shelf is covered by the *Environmental Protection (Sea Dumping Act) 1981* administered by the federal Department of the Environment. A permit is required for burial of bodies at sea. Permits are usually only granted in cases of a strong connection to the sea, for example long serving navy personnel. The body must not be embalmed or placed in a casket, it may only be sewn into a weighted shroud. The burial must be in water deeper than 2,000 metres (6,600 ft) and not interfere with shipping, fishing or undersea communications. Australian Defence Force vessels engaged in armed conflicts or emergency situations are exempt from these requirements.<sup>[10]</sup>

No permit is required to scatter ashes at sea.

### **In England**

In [England](#) today, cremated remains may be scattered freely at sea, but a burial must be made in a coffin meeting MMO regulatory requirements and in one of three locations: off [The Needles](#), [Isle of Wight](#); between [Hastings](#) and [Newhaven](#); off [Tynemouth](#), [North Tyneside](#). Permission may also be sought for a novel burial site.