

# Forbes

September 28, 2016

UMV: 25,236,993

## Best Halloween Haunted Attractions: New Technology & Trends Raise Fear Factor



*Interactive experiences are the buzzword for Haunted Attractions this Halloween season, as guests become part of the story. **Terror Behind The Walls**, set in a real Philadelphia prison, is one of the nation's best, and added six new interactive sections for 2016. Photo: **Terror Behind The Walls***

The scare business is good business, at least for a month or two each fall around Halloween, the “Haunting Season,” when elaborate haunted houses, theme parks and other attractions open to eager crowds nationwide. For the past two years past I’ve done roundups and Top 10 lists of the most awarded, elaborate and popular Halloween attractions nationwide, and these are still pretty current – you can read them [here](#) and [here](#). Also, last year I wrote about how [the Big Apple got its own full-blown new scare attraction](#), returning this season, courtesy of an established Los Angeles favorite. But this year I take a look at the cutting edge of fear.

Traditionally a mix of staged props, live actors and special effects like flashing lights and fog machines were used to shock audiences. But the haunting business has evolved, and now the top attractions are upping the ante with new technology and approaches. According to the industry group for scares, the Haunted Attraction Association (HAA), virtual reality, interactivity, and blackout experiences – indoors and out – are the top trends.



*Many of the top Haunted Attractions are elaborate campuses with multiple experiences. This is Idalia Manor, within the Frightland scare park in Delaware. Photo: Frightland.*

The HAA says it is seeing technology play a major role this season, especially the rise of virtual reality, the single biggest new development. “Last year our attractions used technologies in ways like never before. In 2016, our members have raised the bar and outdone themselves yet again,” said John Eslich, HAA President, via release. “Guests are not only having the chance to interact with the attractions, but now they’re also the leaders of their own destiny – whether it’s breaking out of an escape room, navigating a blackout maze or surviving the night at an outdoor sleepover – the guest is in full control...that is, until fear takes over. We’re proud that our members are again pushing the envelope to continually enhance the guest experience.”

Here are some top examples of how these trending elements are being used around the country this Haunting Season:

**Virtual Reality:** The hottest scare trend for 2016, VR experiences at haunted attractions include Creepy Hollow Haunted House outside Houston, which debuted a Virtual Reality Zombie First Person Shooter Game. Guests wear a VR headset which simulates being in a dark area with just a pistol and flashlight. Participants can hear zombies coming from all directions and must use the light to find and dispatch them before they get eaten. Fear Factory, in Salt Lake City, is an established attraction that added a new VR haunted house within which participants can slay zombies, and be scared in new ways. Ghostly Manor Thrill Center in Sandusky, OH operates Lake EERIE Fear Fest, home to five haunted houses including the latest, the “The Haunted Mine Ride” in an XD 4D Motion Theater. It uses VR technology to transport guests to a haunted roller coaster with cutting edge Hollywood-style effects.



*Outdoor darkness attractions are capitalizing on our primal fears and the success of films like *The Blair Witch Project* franchise. Wisconsin Fear Grounds just added a new camping experience, "Night Terrors: 13 Hours of FEAR!" Photo: WI Fair Grounds*

Outdoor blackout events relying more on natural settings than heavily produced sets are another hot trend, echoing the popularity of cult hit film *Blair Witch Project*, and its just released sequel, *Blair Witch*. At Walk of Nightmares in Walkerton, IN, patrons are given just a flashlight before being sent out for what seems like a simple walk in the woods but things quickly turns bad. The flashlights are the only form of light and based on where it is shined, patrons will spot different spirits, zombies and ghosts lurking in the woods (October 28th and 29th only). Wisconsin Fear Grounds is adding to its ample array of scares this year with a new outdoor event – lasting 13 hours! "Night Terrors: 13 Hours of FEAR!" will take place just once, on October 8th, and claims (believably) to be the only overnight haunting experience in Wisconsin. The Fear Grounds will provide tents and the sleepless nights' activities include a fright trail through the woods, scavenger hunt, bonfire ghost stories and scary movies played on a large inflatable screen.

Happy Halloween!