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18 3

THE GETAWAY



Travel Gets Even Scier This Month

Festivals, theme parks and a real prison to help get you into the spirit of Halloween.

By ELAINE GLUSAC

Trick or treat? How about a trip instead? Halloween has long since expanded from the childhood holiday of bagging for Milky Ways and Smarties to include the adult celebration of costumed role-playing. Now, drive by these park pop-up events, festivals and destination-worthy frights. It's even become its own travel season.

"Halloween's almost become more and more like one of the most significant holidays of the year," said George Agard, president and chief executive of Visit Orlando.

Orlando, Fla., is home to the annual Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios and other frightful events including Spooky Empire, a horror convention featuring a zombie walk, costume contest and taco arena, to be held through Oct. 8 at the Orange County Convention Center.

Destinations like Hudson Valley, N.Y., and Salem, Mass., highlight their haunted associations during October. Home to wooded legends and year-round cemetery walks, New Orleans is among those that nationally harmonize with Halloween, which also marks the return of cooler temperatures, and tourism, to the city.

"New Orleans is a city that lives to reanimate," said Kristian Szasz, a spokesman for the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, placing Halloween just behind Mardi Gras for dressing up. "People really turn up the volume on Halloween."

The Haunted Attractions Association, a trade group, estimates there are more than 1,500 scary installations across the country this season. The following aim to attract fearless travelers.

Scary Theme Parks

Universal Studios Florida in Orlando hosts the Halloween Horror Nights

(halloweenhorrornights.com) 24 years ago, and the seasonal pop-up featuring haunted houses and "attractions" employed to frighten visitors has since expanded to Universal's locations in Hollywood, Calif.; Singapore; and Japan. In Florida, the event runs on 31 evenings through Oct. 30 (tickets, \$95). This year's iteration includes nine haunted houses with characters from movies including "The Exorcist" and "The House on Haunted Hill," a virtual reality experience, and zombies and vampires that chase visitors between "scary zones."

On the Gulf Coast, Beach Gardens Tampa Bay's Howl-O-Scream (howl-oscream.com), running Thursdays through Sundays until the end of October, keeps the park open until 11 p.m. (tickets from \$40). Visitors can ride the park's roller coasters at night, visit seven haunted houses and five roaming ghosts. A similar version of the event takes place at SeaWorld in San Antonio, Tex., and Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Va.

A number of vintage westerns were shot at Old Tucson studios in Tucson, Ariz. Now largely a theme park featuring live shows, dance and musicals and train rides, the compound accepts two nights (nightfall.com) on select evenings through Oct. 31 (20). Kicked as a haunted town, it includes nine tunnels, a few squares populated by the undead and a zombie shooting gallery.

Bloody Attractions

For the creepiest sites-in-sites, it's hard to get more realistic than the Eastern State Penitentiary (easternstate.org) in Philadelphia. With crenelated walls, barred-walked hallways and cell windows, the 19th-century prison was designed to intimidate its occupants, including Al Capone. Closed in 1979, it now offers tours, none as chilling as Terror Behind the Walls running through Nov. 5 (admission from \$19). During the nighttime tour, the compound is broken into six haunted areas, from prison cells to an infirmary filled with zombies and convicts hunt-



Above, from left, the Eerie of Boo parade in New Orleans, inspired by Mardi Gras; Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia; and the BareBones Annual Halloween Outdoor Puppet Extravaganza in Minnesota.



ing for madman chilling effects.

In a similar vein of historic building-meets-haunting, the Deist Schoolhouse (rightthis.com) in Cincinnati opens its cell as a haunted school with its legend of a horridical teacher who killed several students and stuffed their remains in the basement. Enroll at your own risk through Nov. 5 (tickets from \$10).

In Orlando, A Perilous Forest (perilousforest.com) springs up weekends through Oct. 28, featuring two walking trails in a rural setting with wild-scary creatures (tickets from \$25).

Florida goes frightful in a series of zombie runs held across the country in which the able-bodied fee flesh eaters, usually over a 3K course. Runners get three chances to throw the green-labeled corpse safely with flag-football style straps attached to a belt during the Zombie Run at ACE Adventure Resort near Menden, N.C., on Oct. 22 (\$31).

Horrorling Culture

In the Hudson Valley, Skippy Hollow, N.Y. (skippyhollow.com), the setting for Winifred's frightful "The Legend of Skippy Hollow," captivates on its wooded lanes each fall. Throughout the month, catch a cemetery tour, a ghost show based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven," or a telling of Irving's short story in the Old Dutch Church.

In the Twin Cities area, BareBones Productions presents an annual pageant of puppetry, costumes, music and dance in its BareBones Annual Halloween Outdoor Puppet Extravaganza running Oct. 22 to 31 (barebonespuppets.org).

The Orlando Ballet (orlandoballet.org) contributes artfully to the horror season with its rendition of "Dracula" every the choreographer Michael Pink based on Bram Stoker's classic novel, Oct. 28 to 30 (tickets from \$15).

Fright Festivals

Salem, Mass., builds on its spectral past as the historic site of colonial witch trials with

the monthlong Festival of the Dead (festivalofthedead.com). Events include public readings, stories, a Halloween ball, a mourning-themed bus and, as Halloween night, a witches gathering.

On the rocky side of the season, Fantasy Fest (fantasyfest.com) in Key West, Fla., Oct. 21 to 30, draws a costume-crazed party crowd. The weeklong festival includes a Mangrove March and culminates in the annual Fantasy Fest Parade themed this year to the presidential election, or "Political Voodoo & Balloons for Barbarians."

Festival Fun

Halloween is not all scary theme costumed and zombie makeup. Across the country, family-friendly Halloween events offer a gentle take on seasonal dress-up.

In Orlando, the Walt Disney World Resort hosts Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party (Disneyworld.disney.go.com) on select nights until Oct. 31 (tickets from \$47 for children, \$71 for adults). Activities include trick-or-treating, Disney character encounters, a dance party and fireworks.

Nearby, Six Flags' Halloween Spooktacular (sixflags.com), taking place at a park reopened in October, already offers trick-or-treating. Seaside Bites character encounters and themed musical shows.

For visitors to the Grand Canyon, the Grand Canyon Railway Pumpkin Patch Train (canyonrail.com) pulls out of Williams, Ariz., in eight dates in October (\$20 for children, \$25 adults). The trip stops at a pumpkin patch where families can pick out a pumpkin, and returns to the station, which has a hay-bale maze, arts and crafts and a haunted train car.

In New Orleans, the Eerie of Boo (eerieofboo.com), taking place Oct. 22, is a Mardi-Gras-inspired Halloween parade with floats devoted to themes like werewolves and vampires. Float riders throw oranges to the crowd, including locally made candy. New Orleans hosts plenty of all-ages parties, but the procession itself draws all ages in costume.

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An undated handout photo from Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, a former prison with haunted house style tours. Halloween is for tricks, treats and trips. Driven by theme park pop-up events, festivals and destination-worthy frights, it's even become its own travel season. (Eastern State Penitentiary via The New York Times)

— Bloody Attractions

For the creepiest mise-en-scène, it's hard to get more realistic than the Eastern State Penitentiary (easternstate.org) in Philadelphia. With crenelated walls, barrel-vaulted hallways and tall windows, the 19th-century prison was designed to enlighten its occupants, including Al Capone. Closed in 1971, it now offers tours, none as chilling as Terror Behind the Walls running through Nov. 5 (admission from \$19). During the nighttime tour, the compound is broken into six haunted areas, from prison cells to an infirmary filled with demons and convicts lurking for maximum chilling effects.

In a similar vein of historic building-meets-haunting, the Dent Schoolhouse (frightsite.com) in Cincinnati opens in the fall as a haunted school with its legend of a homicidal janitor who killed several students and stuffed their remains in the basement. Enroll at your own risk through Nov. 5 (tickets from \$10).

In Orlando, A Petrified Forest (apetrifiedforest.com) springs up weekends through Oct. 29, featuring two walking trails in a rural setting rife with creepy creatures (tickets from \$15).

Fitness gets frightful in a series of zombie runs held across the country in which the able-bodied flee flesh eaters, usually over a 5K course. Runners get three chances to thread the ghoul-flanked course safely with flag-football-style strips attached to a belt during the Zombie Run at ACE Adventure Resort near Minden, West Virginia, on Oct. 22 (\$35).