

Get in the Halloween spirit visiting these spooky local haunts

By Anne Bokma on September 29, 2015

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According to The Boston Globe, "Salem owns Halloween like the North Pole owns Christmas."

This Massachusetts city just 25 kilometres north of Boston owes this distinction to its dark past. In 1692, after a group of young girls began exhibiting strange symptoms of fits and babblings, a local doctor pronounced them

possessed by the devil. The girls began to name names, claiming various townsfolk were witches who had cast spells on them. Their hysterical behaviour, combined with Puritan paranoia, was a potent mix that resulted in the execution of 20 people and the imprisonment of 150 others, five of whom died awaiting trial.

More than 320 years later, Salem promotes its witchcraft heritage as a tourist draw. There's a whimsical statue in town of Samantha Stevens, of Bewitched fame, perched jauntily on a broomstick. Local police proudly wear badges of a witch on a broomstick on their uniforms. And Salem is one of the few places in the U.S. where proclaiming you're a witch barely raises an eyebrow. (About 10 percent of Salem's population is estimated to be practising Wiccans and Pagans.)

More than 250,000 visitors flood the streets of this New England seaport town in October (about 70,000 on Halloween night alone) to take part in Halloween Happenings, a month-long celebration with costume balls, ghost tours, street parades, a psychic fair, tombstone tours, witchcraft expo, séances, haunted house tours and a zombie walk.

While the celebrations create a festive atmosphere in Salem's streets, the gruesome facts of the witch-hunts, in which innocent people were hanged, could be disturbing for very young children. There are plenty of books about Salem geared to young readers that can help prepare school age kids for a visit, including *You Wouldn't Want to Be a Salem Witch!* (Franklin Watts) and *The Salem Witch Trials* (Scholastic).

Begin your stay with a one-hour ride around town on the Salem Trolley, where knowledgeable guides cover 400 years of the town's history. The Salem Witch Museum offers a mesmerizing theatrical demonstration that provides a good understanding of the events that led to the witch trials. Cry Innocent is a live reenactment of the arrest and witchcraft examination of Bridget Bishop, one of the first women accused of being a witch. The Bewitched After Dark Walking Tours, led by a local modern witch, stops at 12 sites related to Salem's nefarious history, including the moving Witch Trials Memorial, dedicated by Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel in August 1992. The memorial features 20 granite benches, inscribed with the names of the accused. It's here in this peaceful spot, away from the carnival-like atmosphere of the town square, that the injustice of what happened to these victims really hits home. Haunting, indeed.

If You Go: The historic Hawthorne Hotel is the town's only full-service hotel. It is said to have at least one room that's haunted.

Hankering for more Halloween getaways? Here are 13 (yes, 13) Spooky Sites in Canada and Around the World That Promise to Give You Chills.

1. Toronto, Ont.: The largest city in Canada's Original Haunted Walk turns 25 this year. The original tour departs from Front Street downtown and includes haunted theatres and Mackenzie House. Or stroll the spooky cobble stone streets of the Distillery District by lantern light, where duels and War of 1812 battles were fought. [Hauntedwalk.com/Toronto-tours](http://hauntedwalk.com/Toronto-tours)
2. Stanley Park Ghost Train, Vancouver, B.C.: Climb aboard this covered train for a creepy journey as Dracula, Frankenstein and the Phantom of the Opera come to life from behind the silver screen. October 9 to November 1. [Ghosttrain.ca](http://ghosttrain.ca)
3. Fort Henry, Kingston, Ont.: The citadel is transformed into Fort Fright during October, complete with ghoulish creatures as visitors wander through haunted hallways and dark ditches. The site even issues Fort Fright "safe passes" so children won't be too scared. [Forthenry.com](http://forthenry.com)
4. Ottawa, Ont.: No surprise that the nation's capital might be haunted. The Original Haunted Walk includes the Fairmont Château Laurier. The spirit of Charles Melville Hays, a tycoon who commissioned this hotel but died aboard the Titanic just days before the hotel's opening, is said to roam throughout the property. [Hauntedwalk.com/Ottawa-tours](http://hauntedwalk.com/Ottawa-tours)
5. Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, Alta.: Canada's own Bates Motel is reputed to have several ghostly apparitions who wander around the historic hotel, established in 1888. The Halloween Heritage Ghost Tour runs October 23 to 30. [Fairmont.com/Banff-springs](http://fairmont.com/Banff-springs)
6. Stanley Hotel, Estes Park, Colorado: Mystery writer Stephen King was inspired to write his novel *The Shining* in room 217. The hotel is reputed to be haunted by at least three people, including the hotel's founder. Ghost Adventure Package is available, if you dare. [Stanleyhotel.com](http://stanleyhotel.com)
7. Disney World, Orlando, Fla.: The Magic Kingdom is all about Halloween from September 15 to November 1. From Mickey's not-so-scary Halloween party to nightly Boo-to-You parades, the Disney villains you love to hate finally get their day. disneyworld.disney.go.com
8. Anoka, Minn.: This city vies with Salem as the Halloween capital of the world and has the distinction of hosting the very first Halloween parade in the U.S. in 1920. [Anokahalloween.com](http://anokahalloween.com)
9. Savannah, Ga.: Eerie Spanish moss and plenty of ghost-ridden antebellum homes make this "spookiest little

city in the south” the perfect setting for Halloween. Tours from the TV show Ghost Hunters are available. SavannahTours.net

10. Oaxaca, Mexico: Costumed revellers visit local cemeteries to honour deceased relatives and decorate the streets with flowers and skeletons, during the Day of the Dead festival, October 28 to November 2. Mexonline.com
11. Tower of London, England: Visit gloomy dungeons, a haunted tower and a history full of hangings, tortures and beheadings, including Anne Boleyn, one of the wives of King Henry VIII. Hrp.org.uk
12. Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K.: With Edinburgh Castle looming over this UNESCO world heritage site’s stone streets and narrow “closes”, it’s no wonder Edinburgh is teeming with haunted walks. The City of the Dead Haunted Graveyard Tour meets at the “large black signs against the wall of St. Giles Cathedral on the Royal Mile”. Talk about spine-chilling. For more tours Google “Haunted Edinburgh” or check out viator.com
13. Bran Castle, Brasov, Romania: Nestled in the mountains of Transylvania, this is said to be the inspiration of Count Dracula’s castle in Bram Stoker’s 1897 gothic horror novel. Tours operate daily. Bran-castle.com

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