

Tips for Surviving Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Orlando: A Universal Orlando Special Event Review

by Jennifer Best, PassPorter Guest Contributor

For those who enjoy frights and scares, consider an evening at Halloween Horror Nights (HHN) at Universal Orlando resort. Fall 2017 is the 27th year for HHN at Universal Orlando.

The event runs on select nights from September 15 through November 4, 2017. Halloween Horror Nights is a separately ticketed event. Having a ticket for HHN will not get you into the theme parks during regular hours.

So what is HHN? It is NOT Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween party. HHN is here to scare, so know what you are in for. The event includes specific houses, scare zones and live shows. Also, some of the regular rides at Universal studios are open during the event, including Escape from Gringott's in Diagon Alley.

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□The most anticipated part of HHN is the elaborate haunted houses, each with a different theme. Some are based on specific movies or TV shows. This year's HHN will include houses based on *The Shining*, *American Horror Story*, *Saw*, and *Ash vs. Evil Dead*. Specific scenes from the movies and shows are re-created in the houses. Expect to see some twins at the end of the hall in *The Shining* house! There are also original houses every year not based on known intellectual properties.

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□Scare zones are immersive street experiences between the houses that guests may walk through as they make their way to different houses. They use actors, sounds, smells and sets to terrify guests. This year's scare zones include *The Purge*, *Trick 'r Treat*, *Altars of Horror*, *Invasion* and *Festival of the Deadliest*. There are two live shows this year: a performance dance troupe called *Academy of Villains*, and the final farewell of *Bill and Ted's Excellent Halloween* show, which is somewhat raunchy with lots of pop culture references.

So here are some tips for surviving Halloween Horror Nights:

□1. Go on a Sunday through Thursday (if possible). Saturdays are the busiest nights, followed by Fridays. The HHN 2017 dates are September 15-17, 21-24, 29-30, October 1, 4-8, 11-15, 18-22, 25-31 and November 3-4. The crowds will increase as it gets closer to Halloween.

□2. Buy tickets in advance so you don't waste time in line buying tickets

when you arrive.

03. Get to the park early. The event begins at 6:30 p.m., but Universal often lets guests in up to half an hour early. If you start early, you can hit a few houses with minimal wait times. If you are staying at a Universal Resort property, take advantage of the priority entrance gate for those guests on the far right end of the Universal Studios arches.

04. Consider buying Express Pass. There are nine haunted houses and it is near impossible to see them all in one night. Regular lines to get into the houses can be hours long, especially on Friday and Saturdays. HHN Express Passes are separate from the Express Passes used during the day at Universal Orlando's parks. HHN Express Passes are also separate from HHN admission tickets. The unlimited Express Pass guests receive when staying at select Universal resort hotels (Hard Rock hotel, Royal Pacific Resort, Portofino Bay hotel) is NOT valid for HHN. Express passes often sell out and may be more expensive or unavailable inside the park, so buy them in advance.

05. Go to the most anticipated houses early. Prediction: The Shining house will be busy this year.

06. Leave the kids at the hotel. This event is too intense for young children. Universal says specifically on its site that HHN is not recommended for those under age 13. Leave them with a sitter service or at the resort's children's club.

07. Scare-actors in the houses and scare zones have no problem invading your personal space, but know that they cannot touch you (and you are not allowed to touch them)!

08. Have a game plan. Look at the list of houses and a map prior to going. Decide what is important to you and get to those houses first.

09. Start at the back and work your way forward, as the houses near the entrance will start to get the biggest lines first.

10. Leave your costumes and masks at home. Universal won't let you in with them.

11. Only bring the necessities (including ID if you want to purchase alcohol). The security checkpoints are more intense for HHN.

12. Eat early or before you get there. Get some sustenance early so you won't have to waste your time looking for dining options when you could be going through houses, scare zones or watching the live stage shows. There are snacks for sale and restaurants open during HHN. The food court on the second floor of Universal CityWalk is a place to get less expensive food before going in.

13. Alcohol. I am not a drinker, but just be aware that it flows freely at HHN. Look for ladies roaming the streets with IV poles containing alcoholic "blood bags" for sale. Because of alcohol, crowds can get a little rowdier, especially on busy nights.

14. Check the weather. It is a nighttime event. Consider bringing extra layers of clothing as well as rain ponchos.

15. Don't let them see your fear. Try to appear composed as you're

making your way through houses and scare zones. The frightened are targeted by the scare actors and will pick on them even more.

□16. If you're not sure if HHN is your cup of tea, look at some scare zone videos on-line to get an idea of what it's like.

□17. Have fun!

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