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Kansas City unleashes 'The Beast' for Halloween

BY SUSAN R. POLLACK 0 COMMENTS

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📷 Scary times await this Halloween season at “The Beast” haunted attraction in Kansas City, Mo. (photo courtesy of VisitKC.com).

Julie Henning thought she’d be touring historic homes that were haunted when friends persuaded her to join them on a late-night, pre-Halloween excursion this month while attending a business conference in Kansas City, Missouri.

Instead, she and her colleagues battled “The Beast,” one of America’s largest haunted house attractions. Located in a creaky, five-story warehouse in the city’s historic West Bottoms — a former stockyard district

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where livestock awaited slaughter — it’s been in the business of scaring daring visitors for 22 years. With an “open floor” format that makes participants find their own way rather than follow a prescribed path, the terror relies on theatrics and sound effects more than blood and gore.

“It was my first haunted house ever and it was awful ... in a good way,” says Henning, a mother of three and technical writer in Madison, Wis., as she describes how her fingernails gouged the arm of a colleague to whom she clung throughout the harrowing experience. “I’m glad I survived.”

For about 90 minutes, twice the time advertised, Henning and her friends screamed and clawed their way through the pitch-black, sometimes fog-filled chambers of The Beast. Horrors include a quarter-acre “Werewolf Forest,” a slick four-story slide, and a Louisiana swamp with faux snakes falling from the ceiling and a real alligator in a pit.

“Half the time I sort of had my eyes closed,” recalls Henning. “The scariest thing was being lost in the strobe-light room. We got very disoriented and the girl next to us started having a panic attack. ...

“The actors would taunt you if you were going the wrong way, they wouldn’t help you at all.”

She remembers sliding down two slides and climbing along a narrow, elevated ledge, with costumed actors, including one with a real (though motor-less) chainsaw, reaching up to grab her legs. At some point during the night, the Grim Reaper joined her group, walking along without uttering a word. “The worst part was having no concept of when it was going to be done,” Henning says. “There was a lot of psychological stuff going on.”

When The Beast finally spit them out, shaking and dazed, they ended up at a concession stand. Just the kind of reality-check they needed.

Full disclosure: I was too scared to join Henning and her companions on their pre-Halloween adventure in Kansas City; just hearing about it gives me the creeps. But for those braver than I, there’s still time to experience

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The Beast most nights through Nov. 9. Tickets start at \$27 plus tax; children under age 12 are discouraged. For schedule and details, check www.kcbeast.com.

Find Kansas City travel information at www.VisitKC.com; (800) 767-7700.



Globetrotting journalist and former Detroit News staff writer Susan R. Pollack has covered travel since 1985, visiting scores of countries on five continents, 47 states, six Canadian provinces and hundreds of cities, islands and outposts along the way. From Alaska, the Galapagos and New Zealand to Tasmania, Thailand and Wales, she has suffered the occasional lost luggage, jetlag and Montezuma's revenge but still delights in sharing travel news and adventures with readers. In addition to The Detroit News, her award-winning stories have appeared in major newspapers including the Dallas Morning News, Toronto Star and Chicago Sun Times; Midwest Living, Long Weekends and Hour Detroit magazines, travelingmom.com and in several books, including "Rand McNally 2008 Ultimate NASCAR Road Trip Guide."

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