

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Where to be scared

BY JON MARCUS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

LONDON — Skeletons hang from walls alongside jars of disembodied hands and heads robbed from churchyard graves by body snatchers or supplied by willing executioners. There are amputation saws, bloodletting bowls, a preserved extinct giant sloth, the fossil molar of a mastodon, and the jaws of an extinct 52-foot shark called the megalodon.

No cardboard cutouts, these, with teenagers dripping in fake blood leaping from the dark to scare the guests. This stuff is real, an eccentric small collection.

Those few who find their ways to the morbid galleries of the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons — named for surgeon-to-the-king John Hunter, whose Leicester Square house inspired Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde — “are fascinated,” the curator, Sarah Pearson, said cheerfully on a private tour. “It makes them reflect on their own mortality.”

So you like Halloween? You can have it year-round at scary destinations like this one.

Also in London, for example, is the equally little-known Wellcome Collection, left by US pharmaceutical magnate Henry Wellcome, who in his extensive travels acquired everything from medieval torture chairs to 19th-century glass eyes, tattoos (skin still attached), a guillotine blade, and a lock of King George III’s hair, from which recent analysis concluded high levels of arsenic may have caused his famous madness.

The Dittrick Museum of Medical History in Cleveland boasts, among other things, sadistic-looking 19th-century amputation kits complete with handheld saws. Pittsburgh’s Trundle Manor is home to a private collection on public view of taxidermy, coffins, jarred specimens of body parts, and sadistic weaponry designed to inflict the greatest pain. And The Mutter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia exhibits the “anatomically strange” — abnormal body parts including diseased organs, walls of skulls, a tumor from the jaw of President Cleveland — and is the repository of Albert Einstein’s brain, stolen by the pathologist who performed his autopsy. (Einstein’s eyes are rumored to be hidden somewhere in a bank deposit box.)

Philadelphia, in fact, is something of a capital of creepiness. You can tour death row in the old black granite Eastern State Penitentiary there, for instance, where Al Capone and the bank robber “Slick” Willie Sutton were imprisoned, or buzz by the Insectarium, the only US museum devoted entirely to insects, including thousands of live cockroaches teeming through a re-created kitchen.

The National Museum of Funeral History in Houston displays such things as elaborate caskets and tombs, programs from the funerals of the famous, and African “fantasy coffins” shaped like fish and birds, plus exhibits about the very Halloween-y topic of embalming.

Few places anywhere are as scary as New Orleans, whose above-ground cemeteries are referred to as “Cities of the Dead” —



most famously St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, home to the tomb of voodoo priestess Marie Laveau. At the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum in the French Quarter, where displays of voodoo icons are lighted by flickering blue candles, visitors can make offerings of rum or money to the voodoo spirits. And the Lalaurie Mansion, popularized by the television show “American Horror Story,” is believed haunted by the souls of the slaves against whom its socialite owner committed atrocities so unspeakable that she was banished from the city.

“Other places do Halloween and dress up for that one day or week, but in New Orleans it’s an ongoing thing,” said Robert Florence, author of “New Orleans Cemeteries: Life in Cities of the Dead” (Batture Press, 2005) and president of Historic New Orleans Tours.

The Gulf Coast city “has a very specific and close relationship with death and the afterworld,” said Florence. “It’s been subject to natural disaster and devastating flooding, epidemics, diseases that are right out of the middle ages. You had slavery, a source of not only violence but violent death and trauma. This was a pirate colony. You had wartime occupation. There’s a really heavy atmosphere, very kind of spiritually charged.”

You don’t even have to go out of your way to experience this in the city. Stay at the Bourbon Orleans Hotel, for instance, a onetime convent purportedly haunted by the ghosts of children and nuns who died in a yellow fever epidemic, or the Hotel Provincial, which served as a Confederate Hospital, where guests report seeing blood stains appear and then disappear from the carpets. At Arnaud’s Restaurant, the ghost of founder Arnaud Cazenave supposedly rearranges silverware and napkins.

In another old and eerie Southern city, Charleston, S.C., said tour guide John LaVerne, interest in the supernatural and paranormal has been fueled by cable TV shows about ghost-hunting and the unexplained.

“That made people realize there’s a whole other world out there,” said LaVerne, who runs Bulldog Tours, which includes local jail, dungeon, and ghost tours.

Those people are right, he said. Charleston, too, has experi-



enced violence and death, with its legacy of Revolutionary and Civil War, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and epidemics. And “a lot of those people who died have unfinished business here on earth.”

It’s not only Charleston where there’s been a boom in haunted tours as travelers seek their Halloween fix on the other 364 days of the year. The Houston Ghost Tour includes Hermann Park, which was built atop a Civil War cemetery. Ghost Tours of Philadelphia features places haunted by, among others, some of the nation’s Founding Fathers, as does the Spirits of ’76 Ghost Tour.

The costumed guides of the Ghosts, Graves & Cave Tour in St. Paul take visitors to the Wabasha Street Caves, left over from onetime mines and used during Prohibition as speakeasies by mobsters who also left behind a legacy of violence and murder. So does St. Paul’s monthly Lost Souls Tour. Haunted Pittsburgh runs tours from May through November of the underside of that town’s age of robber barons and steel millionaires.

Chicago Hauntings takes in the sites of gang killings, serial murders, natural disasters, and abandoned graveyards. Haunted Manhattan concentrates on the underworld of Greenwich Village, and the dead poets who apparently bewitch its bars. In a similar twist, Charlotte, N.C., has a Haunted Bike Pub Crawl.

Back in New Orleans, Florence said, some people come on his tours of cemeteries and other scary places to be entertained. “There’s this kind of obvious surface level sensational aspect of it — it just seems it’s going to be more fun and chilling than just learning about architecture.”

But other people, he said, “are searching. They’re trying to answer questions in their own lives. Something puzzling has happened to them. In a confusing world, they want to think there’s something bigger than them.”

For them, he said, seeing the unexplained up close “is not the same as going to a haunted house at Halloween with a bunch of people with masks and chain saws. That’s just shock value and adrenaline. This is different. We show people what actually happened.”

Jon Marcus can be reached at jon@mysecretboston.com.

HERE

NEW CHIC HOTEL COMES TO BOSTON

The Godfrey Hotel Boston, a new four-star luxury boutique property just a block from Boston Common, opens in late November, offering a chic and sophisticated vibe in the Downtown Crossing neighborhood. Located at 505 Washington St., the Godfrey has 242 crisp, modern rooms with USB charging ports, a Bluetooth audio system, mobile room keys with interactive hotel services, high-definition LED televisions, and free fast Wi-Fi, according to the property. Large windows let in natural light and offer fabulous views of the surrounding skyline. Onsite amenities include a 24-hour fitness center, restaurant, lobby bar, and cafe. Rates start at \$199 per night, based on availability; book now for stays beginning Nov. 30. www.godfreyhotelboston.com

HOW TO LAND A FALCON

Learn how to handle birds of prey during your stay at the charming Woodstock Inn and Resort in central Vermont. Staff from the New England Falconry will meet with program participants in the resort’s historic 10,000-square-foot Rutherford Barn, where they will share the history of falconry, raptor adaptations, and conservation, and then offer flying and handling sessions (pictured at right). Rates for the Introductory Falconry Package start at \$473 per night through October, which includes luxury accommoda-

tions for two, breakfast for two, and a 45-minute falconry session for two (rate doesn’t include \$25 per day resort fee and taxes). Guests who don’t book the package can still sign up for the 45-minute falconry program for \$95 (for participants) or \$30 (for those who want to watch but not participate). 800-448-7900, www.woodstockinn.com

THERE

FUN NEW BAY AREA HOTEL LOOKING SHIPSHAPE

Step into the lobby of the new Hotel Zephyr at Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco and you will find re-created port-holes, shipping containers, sloped metal walls (like a ship’s hull), and a giant mermaid sculpture. The transformed hotel, a Radisson property until last summer, has elements found on a cargo ship (the story is that it traveled the world before landing here and turning into a hotel). Claiming to be “upscale but not uptight,” the Zephyr has 361 modern rooms, many with Alcatraz views, and all the latest technology, including flat-screen TVs that can become large displays for your smartphone or tablet. The property’s coolest spot: A guest-only outdoor area called The Yard (named after The Yard at Alcatraz), which serves as a funky and colorful gathering spot. Here, you can play tubular Ping-Pong and shuffleboard, see the city and bay through a giant working periscope, and buy food from a big camper



van. Rates start at \$229 per night, based on availability. 415-617-6565, www.hotelzephyryrsf.com

SEE TORONTO WITHOUT A STOPOVER FEE

Book a roundtrip Air Canada flight that takes you through Toronto and you can stop off in this happening city for up to a week without paying any extra fees. This special deal, good for flights booked by Oct. 31, applies to travelers routing through Toronto Pearson International Airport (not Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport) from the United States to Europe or Asia. That means you’re eligible if your flight originates in the United States and connects in Toronto while en route to anywhere in Europe or Asia. Choose to stop over in Canada’s biggest city on your outbound or inbound flight. The deal works for flights operated by Star Alliance members Air Canada, Air Canada Express, and Air Canada Rouge. 888-247-2262, www.aircanada.com.

EVERYWHERE

CORDLESS HEADPHONES FOR LITTLE TRAVELERS

Avoid tangled cords or broken headphone jacks with Kidz Gear’s new Bluetooth Stereo Headphones for Kids. These on-ear wireless headphones work with devices that support Bluetooth 4.0, including Apple and Android devices, tablets, laptops, Kindles, and Nooks. They offer great sound quality,

prove rugged enough to handle their wearer’s play, and have simple controls that are easy for little fingers to operate. Charge the headphones by USB and they will work wirelessly for up to 10 hours. The headphones also come with an audio cable, in case the battery runs out, and a removable omnidirectional boom microphone that kids can use while they talk on the phone or work on learning a foreign language, for instance. \$59.99. 877-543-9432, www.gearforkidz.com

KEEP YOUR BIKE SAFE DURING TRAVEL

Protect your bike while traveling with BopWorx’s new line of products. The plastic and rubber protective bumpers quickly attach to your bike’s frame or fork using an adjustable rubber strap (no tools needed). Once in place, they help keep your car from getting dinged and your bikes from banging against each other on a rear bike rack. BopWorx makes single and double bumpers that fit bikes of all sizes and styles. The clever fork guard protects your fork from getting damaged, while the rear derailleur guard keeps your derailleur and hanger from getting bent or broken when you pack the bike in a car with other gear or in a bike box for airline travel. \$19.99 (for the single bumper) to \$54.99 (for the fork guard). Available now through Bopworx.com, or soon through REI. www.bopworx.com

KARI BODNARCHUK