

Destinations not for the faint-hearted

With the spookiest time of year fast approaching, international currency and payments specialist – Caxton – reveals the top four freakiest and most ghoulish destinations in the world. This list attracts scare-seeking tourists every Halloween; would you be brave enough to visit?

CHERNOBYL: UKRAINE The catastrophe that shook the world in 1986 is still as harrowing for audiences today. The explosive meltdown during an extreme power spike caused more than 350,000 people to be evacuated from radiation-contaminated areas of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Today, Chernobyl is a mere a ghost town with only a few thousands of individuals brave enough to continue to live in the affected areas, which are still permeated with high levels of radiation. It has only been deemed safe for public visits since 2011, yet within the last eight years this spooky, desolate landscape has been drawing people to Ukraine from all over the world. The most common symbol of the disaster is the abandoned Pripyat amusement park, which includes a skeletal, empty Ferris wheel and ghostly, untouched bumper cars.

DRACULA'S CASTLE: TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA Dracula has gone down in history as a trailblazing, horror-influencing villain. The legend of Vlad the Impaler or Dracula, first gained popularity in German speaking countries during the 1400s, when stories of his wickedness began to spread. This story has led to many representations of this character throughout history, most famously portrayed in Bram Stoker's Dracula. Bran Castle, otherwise known as Castle Dracula, is based in Transylvania, Romania and now offers Halloween tours of the region. These tours allow Halloween fans to visit the Snagov Monastery, Poienari Castle and Dracula's castle in Borgo pass. It also provides an after dark, special Halloween party in the biggest medieval castle in Romania, Hunyad Castle. Bloody Marys anyone?



HOIA BACIU FOREST: CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA A truly terrifying forest in Romania, the Hoia Baciu forest is infiltrated with paranormal activity and boasts a number of reasons to include it on our Halloween-inspired destinations. Mother nature isn't as graceful in Hoia Baciu, as an unusual feature of the forest is the abnormally shaped trees, which grow out of the ground at hook-shaped angles. Though, the aspect that attracts most horror-hungry individuals is the photo taken in 1968 by a military technician, which seemingly showed an UFO-like object hovering above the forest. Other tourists claim to see the ghost of a young girl that went missing in the forest years ago, whilst others say that they can hear the wind talking to them. This one isn't for the faint-hearted.

EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY: PHILADELPHIA Abandoned prisons are the pinnacle of all Halloween-inspired locations, however, the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia is particularly horrific. The castle-like prison was built in 1829 and is renowned for taking solitary confinement to an all-new level. Inmates were forced to live alone, exercise alone, and sleep alone; when a prisoner left his cell, a guard would cover his head with a hood to prevent him seeing or being seen. The prison had to abandon its solitary system due to overcrowding, though the forms of punishment did not get any less severe (for example, chaining an inmate's tongue to his wrists) before it closed for good in 1970.

Interestingly, the infamous Al Capone was incarcerated here. The spooky site now welcomes thousands of thrill-seekers every year, both for its museum and ghost tours. There are a number of paranormal happenings that have been reported, including shadowy figures, disembodied laughter and footsteps that pace through the corridors.



The real taste of America

MINNEAPOLIS
By Rory Smith

While I'm sure a real taste of America could be had in any one of its 50 states, I'm struggling to think of a reason why Minnesota wouldn't be at the top of even the most prolific traveller's recommendation list.

As I was constantly reminded, with the draw of New York, California and Florida, "Minnesota probably isn't the first place you'd think to visit when crossing the pond".

But this alone strikes as the ideal reason to take advantage of the truly beautiful landscape and adventures the City of Lakes has to offer.

Away from the dawdling tourists and clusters of people spread throughout the hotspots of the country, along with St. Paul, the Twin Cities provide a place to unwind without fear of becoming just one in a cluster yourself.

The two cities provide an abundance of indoor and outdoor activities enriched with local and national culture including food, industrial heritage, sport and music.

Across the world locations can call themselves the birthplace of a prince, but only one can boast the birthplace of THE Prince.

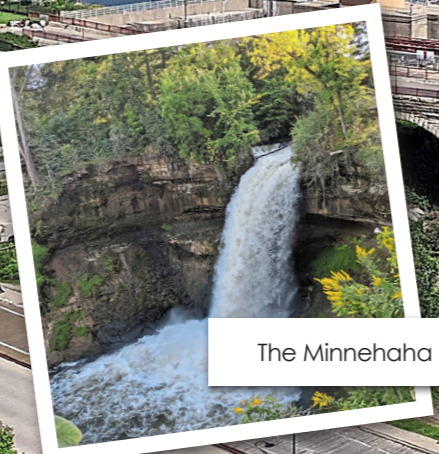
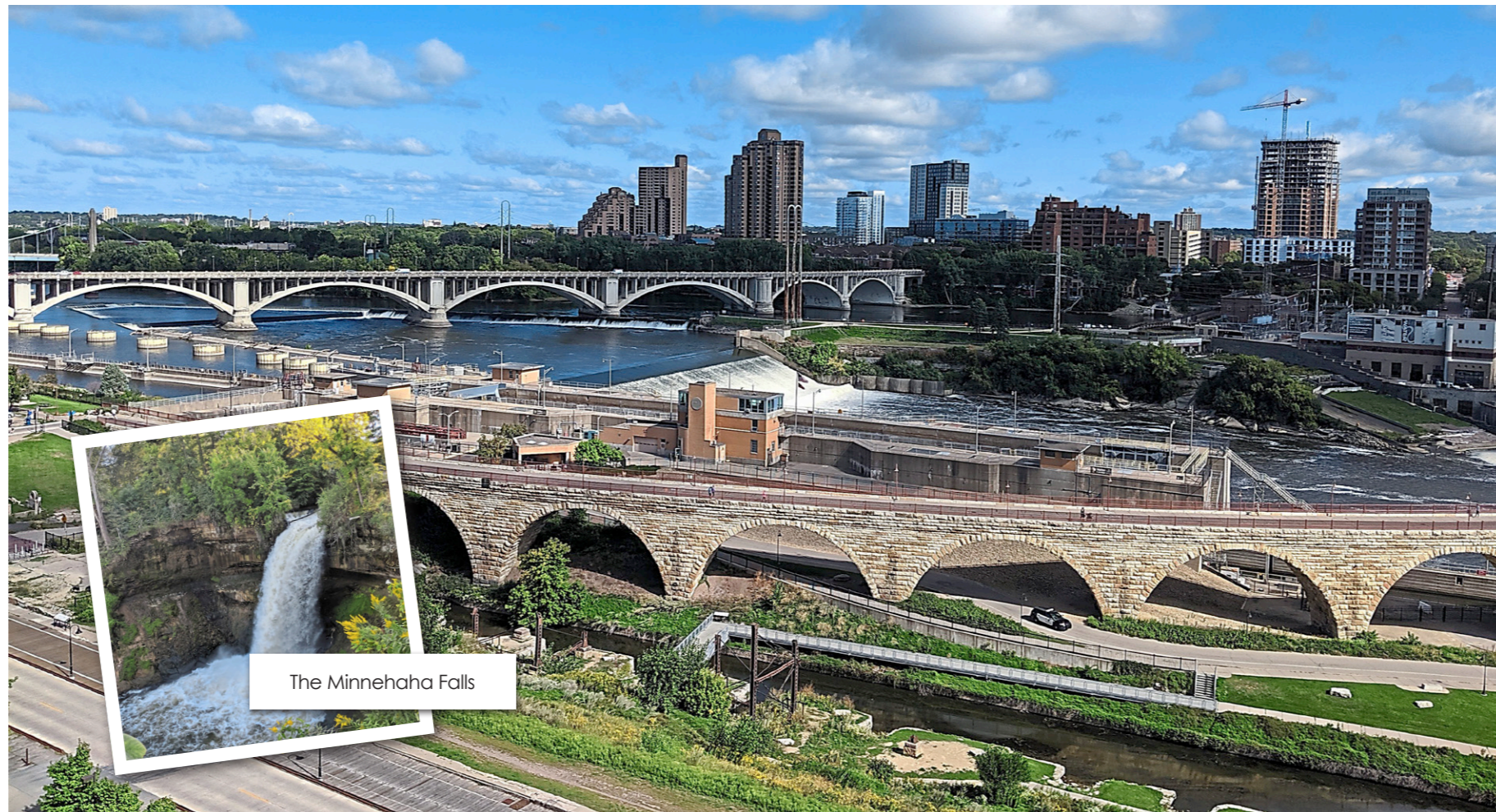
Paisley Park, the manor home of Prince Rogers Nelson, along with the world-renowned First Avenue music venue where countless acts have paved their way, provide the perfect spots for music aficionados looking to scratch that itch, or visitors simply wanting to delve into the musical culture of Minneapolis.

Tales of the multi-instrumentalist were echoed throughout the Twin Cities and stories of residents frequently catching the icon playing with up-and-coming musicians at the back of a dive-bar's stage further pushed the overall warm, friendly and down-to-earth feeling that surrounded the people of Minnesota.

Minneapolis is home to the **Mall of America**. Located in the city of Bloomington, it is the largest shopping and entertainment centre in the United States and proves to be the number-one tourist attraction in the whole of the Midwest, attracting more than 40 million visitors each year.

Spanning 4.2 million sq ft, the mall houses more than 520 stores, 50 restaurants, a number of nightclubs, hotels and North America's largest indoor theme park.

While I can't say I had time to pop into every shop, the state-of-the-art mall with its own reception desk and



The Minnehaha Falls

Minneapolis provides an abundance of indoor and outdoor activities enriched with local and national culture including food, industrial heritage, sport and music

numerous navigational computers could be the ideal place to spend a few rainy hours, day, or even a week.

Thrill-seekers can hare their way around above fellow shoppers on roller coasters and zip lines, gamers can marvel over the very latest in virtual reality, foodies can nourish on everything imaginable, fashionistas can browse the latest trends from worldwide brands and with golf courses and other activities around every corner, sports people can enjoy what's on offer. The mall has everything.

With countless waterfalls, lakes and parks winning awards for the state year-on-year, it really is a case of take your pick. The Minnehaha Falls was an idyllic, impressive

place of natural beauty, while Lake Harriet Bandshell Park allowed visitors to take to the water via boat.

While it comes as no surprise that a trip to the states will involve consuming at least twice your bodyweight in deep fried cheese curds, deep fried gherkins and even deep fried green beans – all of which are surprisingly delicious – make no mistake in thinking cuisine is given a back-seat role in Minnesota's four-wheel drive.

Whether it be tucking into the infamous Juicy Lucy, a jaw-dropping cheese-injected beef burger that bursts open upon the first bite, or fine-dining in top restaurants serving local foods, you can rest assured knowing a trip



Haunted happenings at Warwick Castle

It's October half term, it's rainy and cold and you're fast running out of ideas to keep the kids entertained.

So how do you stop the school holiday boredom seeping in?



How about a trip back in time where your little monsters can stay in a Knight's lodge, see real-life sword fights, delve into dungeons, stir up a few spells with friendly witches and search for spooks within the walls of a genuine ancient castle?

If this sounds perfect, you should look no further than Warwick Castle where boredom is well and truly banished and there is plenty to keep kids of all ages, and adults, entertained for days.

Warwick Castle has been turned into The Haunted Castle for the halloween period, adding extra thrills, scares and surprises for visitors.

This year there are three new attractions, and they are helpfully divided into three fear-factor levels – Plucky Pumpkins, Daring Dukes and Brave Knights.

By day, the castle is brought to life with the Dead Centre Stage, with characters in costume telling stories, getting everyone well and truly into the spirit of the occasion.

Youngsters can visit the witches tower, or go on a

junior ghost hunt, experiences made all the more fun by the hosts who dress up and get into character to make the experience all the more authentic.

There are tours around the castle itself, some with a ghost theme, revealing some of the spooky encounters reported by staff and stories surrounding some of the long-gone occupants.

After dark, things take a turn for the scarier, with the new Dead of Knight experience being well worth a visit for slightly older children and those adults who love to be scared out of their wits.

With more of the castle's talented cast of actors and staff taking up roles as zombies, blood-splattered servants and more, those who venture into the gloomy corridor are in for a terrifying experience.

The actors jump out at every turn against a backdrop of screams and moans.

We loved it and emerged shaken, but laughing at our reaction to some of the frights.

The dungeon tour is another must-do highlight and

can be joined in the day and at night. Once you're inside the darkness of the castle walls, it could be any time of day outside, and visitors are dragged screaming into the gruesome past of the castle with characters like the torturer, the executioner and the judge bringing the legends to life. A final spooky story, with extra special effects, finishes off the experience, leaving visitors emerging into the daylight with an undeniable sense of unease.

As Melissa Paniccia, head of history at the castle, says: "With fearfully fun attractions for all ages ranging from Wicked Witches to the dead come back to life, Halloween is one of the most evocative times for the castle that bristles with the energy of those who've lived – and died – here over the centuries."

If terror and gore are not your cup of tea, all the usual activities are on offer, such as Falconer's Quest and archery and, of course, walks around the wonderful castle walls and grounds.

With so much to do, a second day is often needed, and the castle now offers the chance to stay overnight in the Knight's Village.

A complex of wooden lodges set amongst the trees along the banks of the river offer a cosy end to the first day. With evenings meals and a hearty buffet breakfast



Target Field, home of the Minnesota Twins



An aquarium inside the Mall of America



Mall of America

FACT BOX

● **Aer Lingus** flies daily to Minneapolis-St Paul, via Dublin, from 14 UK regional airports, including Birmingham. Fares start from £229 each way.

● A stay for two adults at the four-star **Loews Minneapolis Hotel** starts from £115.07 for one night in a Superior King room, excluding taxes and fees. A stay for two adults at the four-star **Hyatt Regency Bloomington Hotel** starts from £91.97 for one night in a King Bed room.

two more in the equally homely **Hyatt Regency** in Bloomington, just a short trip from the Mall of America. Both were a pleasure to stay at with friendly staff looking to help in any way they could.

Flying with **Aer Lingus** was as quick and painless as air travel can be.

With the airliner's newly opened service to Minneapolis-St. Paul marking the start of its 16th transatlantic destination, the gateway to Midwest America has never been more open.

Long-haul flights can seem daunting but a comfortable flight was augmented by the best airliner food I have ever tasted.

served in the banqueting hall, it's a great experience.

And the entertainment continues while you eat, with sword fights between knights, making the whole experience unforgettable, especially for the younger guests.

By Sally-Anne Youll

FACT BOX

When: The Haunted Castle runs until November 3 **What's New:** This year there are three new attractions at the Castle, the Junior Ghost Hunt, Paranormal Encounters and Dead of Knight scare maze. The Castle Dungeon also enjoys a new Halloween twist to the show with an eerie new story in the final room. **Day Prices:** The Haunted Castle costs from £20 per person for daytime entrance and from £15 per person for evening entrance (5pm to 10pm from 24th-31st October only). Ticket prices are based on advance booking, minimum five days in advance. Some attractions incur an additional charge (the Castle Dungeon). Tickets including the Castle Dungeon experience cost from £25 per person. **Spend the 'night':** Treat the family to a spooky sleepover in the medieval-themed Knight's Village in the castle grounds. Halloween stays in lodges set in the riverside woodland start from £80.50 per person per night including breakfast, car parking and two full days to enjoy The Haunted Castle. Accommodation in a Woodland Lodge in the Knight's Village at Warwick Castle starts from £62 per person per night based on a family of four sharing a Woodland Lodge. Rates are subject to availability.



Horror hotels from the silver screen

As the nights draw in and October 31 approaches, hotel experts Guestline count down four hotels that all have one thing in common, they share the hallowed halls of horror cinema.

You can forget Psycho and The Bates Motel; these are all real-life hotels that you can actually book, something of a rarity with many films sets for horror based in the warehouse of a big-name production company.

Find out where these horror hotels reside and how deep you'll have to reach into your pockets to stay there.

1. Timberline Lodge, Oregon
Movie: The Shining (1980) IMDB rating: 8.4

The Shining is noted for being one of the most effective chillers of all time, and Timberline Lodge in Oregon is best remembered for the memorable exterior shots that feature towards the film's snow-driven climax and still looks much the same today.



Based within a ski resort this location is one of the most beautiful areas for not just people heading on a winter sports holiday but one of the most ideal sites in the world for commercial photography.

Don't forget to bring your camera if you want to stay in one of these cosy lodges, which don't quite mirror the terrifying atmosphere in The Shining. **Bed & Breakfast: £227.23 (Per night)**
Website: www.timberlinelodge.com
Image provided by Timberline Lodge, Oregon

2. Millennium Biltmore, Los Angeles
Movie: Ghostbusters (1984) IMDB ranking: 7.8

Serving up laughs and scares in equal measure, Ghostbusters was the top grossing movie of 1984 and numerous scenes took place at the 4-star Millennium Biltmore in Los Angeles (renamed the Sedgewick Hotel in the movie).

Today, the hotel remains largely unchanged and proudly claims to have hosted no less than nine U.S presidents. A night in the upscale two-storey Presidential Suite will set you back close to £1,800, which is immaculately clean with not a spot of ectoplasm in sight. Who you gonna call if you need a midnight snack? Why, room service of course. **Bed and breakfast: £241.46 (Per night)**
Website: www.millenniumhotels.com/

3. Bauer Hotel, Venice
Movie: Don't Look Now (1973) IMDB ranking: 7.3

Boasting some of the most disturbing imagery to ever grace the silver screen, Don't Look Now is the kind of film that will make your skin crawl for weeks. Multiple shots were filmed in the nearby Hotel Gabrielli, however, the notorious love scene between actors Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie took place in the Bauer Hotel.

Of course, the décor in the five-star Bauer has been updated since the '70s, however, the distinctive gold trim used on the bed frame in the movie and the deluxe vintage style remains in many of the hotel's rooms to this day. In the heart of Venice this classic décor hotel with luscious spa facilities might just be the spooky weekend getaway you need. **Bed and breakfast: £526.34 (Per night)**
Website: www.bauervenezia.com/en/

4. The Headland Hotel, Cornwall
Movie: The Witches (1990) IMDB ranking: 6.8

The Headland Hotel has welcomed many celebrities and Royals over the years, including regular customers Charles, Prince of Wales, and Camilla Parker Bowles, Duchess of Cornwall.

Author Roald Dahl was famous for his deliciously dark children's books and The Witches, which was turned into a feature film in 1990's. Most of the film's action played out at The Headland Hotel in Cornwall.

Perched on a clifftop with dramatic ocean views, this decadent retreat is a spot of serenity by the sea. With full spa services, the Headland hotel in Cornwall is a great weekend escape for any couple or family. Much more relaxing than the witches might have let on.

Bed and breakfast: £170 (Per night)
Website: www.headlandhotel.co.uk