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Walk with ghosts at Fort Fright

Kingston's Fort Henry transforms itself for the haunted Halloween season

Eva Holland

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What did you do?

I took a spin around Fort Fright, Fort Henry's haunted walk in Kingston.

Haunted walk? What's that?

Each year, part of the fort is taken over by ghosts, skeletons and zombie soldiers -- sort of an outdoor haunted house. Visitors can follow a set route through the fort if they dare. There's also a guided ghost tour available, on which visitors can hear ghost stories from Fort Henry's history, in the actual rooms where the supernatural occurrences took place.

Sounds scary.

Both tours are, in their own way. On the haunted walk through Fort Fright, you never know what might pop out at you, or when -- it's loud and fun and suspenseful. The ghost tour, on the other hand, creates a different kind of tension. You follow your guide into the depths of the fort, and listen to the stories -- each verified by at least two sources, apparently -- by lantern-light. I'm not embarrassed to admit I got goosebumps a couple of times.

Oh yeah? Got a favourite moment to share?

I liked the story of Nils Von Schultz, the leader of a group that attempted to "liberate" Canada from what he viewed as British oppression in the 1830s. After losing the Battle of the Windmill near Prescott, Von Schultz was hanged at Fort Henry -- and, they say, continues to haunt the fort to this day.

Are there any age restrictions at Fort Fright?

No. It's definitely a family-friendly event, but everyone from small children to students to older folks seemed to be enjoying themselves when I was there. The guided tour might not be as much fun for young kids as the haunted walk -- not because of how scary it is, but because it involves a lot of sitting and listening quietly.

How long does all of this take?

The guided ghost tour takes about 45 minutes. For the haunted walk, each visitor can go at their own pace -- most people spend around half an hour or 45 minutes inside the fort.

When do Fort Fright's gates open?

Fort Fright is open from 6 to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, until Nov. 15. Last entry is at 9:30 p.m. The guided tours run on the half-hour and can be signed up for at the fort entrance.

How much does it cost?

Entry to Fort Fright costs \$7.35, or \$14.70 if you'd like to try the guided tour as well. There's also an option for kids (or the young at heart) to purchase a loot bag with their ticket, for a combined total of \$9.61.

How do I get there?

Fort Henry is located beside the Royal Military College, just east of downtown Kingston. It's well-signed. From Ottawa, take the 416 to the 401, then head westbound until you reach Exit 623, Highway 15. Turn left on 15, and then take a right on Highway 2, and a nearly-immediate left onto Fort Henry Drive. Park in the main lot, then follow the path down to the ticket booth. It's about a two-hour drive from Ottawa.

Is there anywhere nearby to get a bite to eat?

There's not much right around the fort itself, but The Brew Pub is just across the causeway. It offers good food and microbrew, and has plenty of fun Halloween decor. Families are welcome and the kitchen is open until 10 p.m. on weeknights, or midnight on weekends -- so you can go before or after your visit to Fort Fright. It's at 34 Clarence St.: take Highway 2 into downtown Kingston, bear left onto Ontario Street, and then take a right on Clarence. Call 1-613-542-4978.

Anything else I should know?

If you're arriving in time for the sunset, don't forget your camera. The views from the fort over Kingston and Lake Ontario are wonderful. Also, be sure to bring warm clothes. Much of the tour takes place outdoors, and there's a cold breeze up there on the cliffs above the lake. Or maybe that's just a chill in the air from all those unfriendly spirits ...

Eva Holland is an Ottawa-based writer.

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