

[SAN DIEGO]

By John Gregory
Special to The Press Enterprise

A visit to San Diego's downtown around this time of year is a bit different. There is a slight nip in the air, and a thick darkness falls on the city earlier than before, bringing out eerie shadows. San Diego feels unusually sinister.

So beware. Sometimes evil

Fear is in the house

comes in groups of three, and when visitors venture into downtown during this bewitching time, they have the opportunity to experience three times the amount of horror as before. That's because there are now

three very good, fun yet terrifying haunted houses to choose from during the spooky Halloween season.

Partners Robert Bruce and Greg DeFatta have now created Trail of Terror in San Diego's eerie Balboa

Park. They have added this to their other horrifying houses: Haunted Hotel (424 Market St.) and Frightmare on Market Street (530 Market St.). The new addition in Balboa Park is just east of 6th Avenue and Juniper.

Trail of Terror is a bit different from the other haunted abodes. This is an outdoor place of terror. Horror movies flash across a huge screen as visitors nervously wait in line anticipating the terror inside the fence. They see zombies and mutilated bodies as characters, clearly insane, jump up to scare the wits out of anyone who dares go past. Be prepared to stand before a busload of Freddy Kreugers and hear the evil sound of chainsaws coming from the skinning shack.

The haunted houses are designed to include a variety of elements, including visual and sound effects. Surprise, of course, is also important, and there is plenty of gore, aided by Hollywood know-how that helps add to the realistic atmosphere.

Another big factor are the actors who jump out to scare the guests and who don bloody attire to chase visitors around the rooms. One tactic that continues to create a chill comes when an actor, wearing knee

pads, takes a run and lands on his knees, sliding across the ground. It is unnerving.

Guests brought through in groups face a series of ghastly surprises as they pass through hallways and enter rooms. Horror movie characters abound as familiar faces from "The Exorcist" and "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" appear. The choreographed scares have been changed from last year's to keep repeat visitors on their toes.

The Frightmare on Market Street scene is designed to confuse visitors, to get them lost in the rooms and let them enjoy the scares more. Some people like to return for a second look to see what got past them the first time around. The houses are not meant for young children since the experience can be too frightening. Ten years is the recommended minimum age for kids who want a frightening experience.

Hours for the haunted houses are Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday 7-11 p.m.; Thursday 7 p.m.-midnight; Friday and Saturday 6 p.m.-1 a.m., through Oct. 31. Admission is \$9.95. Trail of Terror, 6th Avenue and Juniper in Balboa Park, (619) 231-0281; Haunted Hotel, 424 Market St., (619) 231-0131, www.hauntedhotel.com; Frightmare on Market Street, 530 Market St., (619) 231-3611, www.frightmareonmarketst.com

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