UNIVERSAL’S FRIGHT NIGHTS THRILL IN FLORIDA

GO: ORLANDO
GETTING/STAYING THERE: Universal Studios Halloween Horror nights run until November 4. Virgin Holidays has seven nights’ room-only at Loews Sapphire Falls Resort from £159 per person including Virgin flights from Gatwick or Manchester direct to Orlando, car hire and a Universal Orlando three-park Explorer ticket with Halloween Horror Nights combo. Based on October 20 departure.

IT’S gone midnight and I find myself alone in a dark, narrow corridor. I hear screams all around, then spot a man with a pig’s head running towards me with a knife. The crazy thing is that this is the most fun I’ve had in years.

For its 27th year, Universal Orlando’s Halloween Horror Nights has brought together some of the latest scary flicks and iconic series. I’m confronted by the Grady twins from The Shining, plus several sharp-toothed clowns wielding deafening chainsaws.

This year’s event is themed on three series of TV scares fest American Horror Story — Roanoke, Asylum and Coven. There is a marathon maze which takes a terrifying ten minutes to complete and this is where I am confronted by the aforementioned ‘pig-man’.

Other not-so-friendly faces here include a serial-killer doctor and a coven full of witches waiting to collect you soul. Next up is The Shining, which scores points for being the most visually captivating and inventive event of the night.

With so much attention to detail, I manage to walk right through the Overlook Hotel without hiding behind the person ahead of me. Though I must confess, when the iconic “Here’s Johnny!” moment happens, I fall to the floor.

You soon realise it’s impossible to keep your cool. Even the most stern-looking muscle giants could be seen screaming in terror.

The creative team at Universal has gone to great lengths to recreate every sight, smell and sound of The Shining in a psychological maze that attacks all your senses.

Scarecrow: The Reaping is an original concept maze that takes you through an abandoned maze in 1920s America. The catch is that you are joined by an army of zombie scarecrows which wants to harvest your soul.

If you think you will be safe outside the haunted mazes, you’re wrong. A number of ‘scare zones’ keep the screams coming at a relentless pace.

This year’s The purge scare zone replicates the hit movie by the same name. The US government allows one night when all crimes are legal, leading to havoc on the streets. Bars dotted around the park remain open all night and I cannot stress how important it is to take every opportunity to use the loo.

Many rides stay open throughout the Horror Nights such as The Revenge Of The Mummy, an indoor rollercoaster full of intense special effects and fast-paced twists and turns. By now I’ve lost my voice from screaming and am convinced the ride really is haunted by a mummy’s ghost.

The event runs into the early hours and when you make it back to your hotel, you are going to want a good night’s sleep. There are five on-site hotels and a sixth on the way — enough to suit every budget.

We stayed at the Loews Sapphire Falls resort, which has frequent and direct boat taxis throughout the day and night, plus there’s a wealth of dining options.

Another bonus of staying at an on-site hotel is early access to Universal’s three theme parks, with free transport door to door.

And the new Volcano Bay water park’s R’kisk’ Body Plunge ride, with its vertical drop shooting you from a trap door 123ft up, gives a whole new reason to scream.

JON HORNBUCKLE