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## **Welcome to Salem: Here come the crowds**

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Staff Writer

SALEM - If the pay toilets are here, can Halloween be far behind?

Halloween season got underway this week with the arrival of a few dozen port-a-potties. It didn't officially begin, however, until last night's Haunted Happenings parade, which drew thousands of spectators.

The big crowds are expected to keep coming right through the month, according to several barometers.

"We're busier than we've ever been, and I don't know how that's possible," said Juli Lederhaus, general manager of the Hawthorne Hotel.

The city's official Halloween Web site - [www.hauntedhappenings.org](http://www.hauntedhappenings.org) - is also reaching new heights. The record of 1.8 million hits in September 2005 was completely shattered last month with 2.8 million Internet visitors.

"It tells me a lot of people are excited about Haunted Happenings and planning trips here," said Carol Thistle, executive director of Destination Salem.

There are new attractions this year and a lot of old favorites like The House of the Seven Gables and the Salem Witch Museum, which still draws the most visitors in the city.

Among the newcomers are Salem's 13 Ghosts, a 3-D attraction on Essex Street opened by John Denley, the city's haunted house guru. There are several new, or at least revamped haunted houses - the Salem Haunted House in Museum Place Mall, Frankenstein's Laboratory at the Salem Wax Museum and Edgar Allan Poe's Witch Mansion on Derby Street.

There are several big weekend events for the family, including the Bizarre Bazaar on Oct. 14-15 on the Essex Street pedestrian mall and the YMCA's Family Fun Days at Salem Common on Oct. 28-29.

As always, this is the month for candlelight ghost tours, vampire walks, street performers, seances with angels, tarot card readers and psychic fairs.

It is also the month for traffic jams and parking nightmares. The city has about 2,000 spaces available in the Museum Place Mall and South Harbor garages and in lots on Church Street and at the MBTA commuter rail station.

The best advice for surviving Salem during Halloween?

"Get here early," said Jim Hacker, the city's parking director.

