

# Ghost stories scare up new life at these historic hotels

From “The Shining” resort in Colorado to an inn with a zombie cat in New York, these ‘rooms with a boo’ offer up local lore and legends.

The online reviews for the Shanley Hotel in Napanoch, New York, are a bit disturbing. Recent visitors to the three-story 1895 Dutch Colonial inn report spooky footsteps, mysterious whistling, and an invisible zombie cat.

It’s surprising, then, that those same guests give the place high ratings. The reason? They’re checking in hoping to see—or feel—ghostly presences.

[The Shanley](#) (a ringer for the *Amityville Horror* house) is part of the [Haunted History Trail](#), which maps New York State’s creepiest hotels, museums, cemeteries, and other historic sites (including an asylum and a purportedly possessed amusement park). Launched in 2013, the list has grown from a handful of spots to more than 90 supposedly spirit-filled locations.



In New York State's Hudson River Valley, the Shanley Hotel capitalizes on its' haunted reputation with ghost-hunting weekends and other spooky events.

Photograph by Steve Shoemaker, Amity Photos

It's just one of many manifestations of paranormal tourism in the [United States](#), including conventions, haunted cruises, and ghost walks. This niche industry has gained popularity in the last decade, and the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) may have fueled even more interest.

"Times are really tough right now," says psychic-medium [Patti Negri](#). "In the olden days, when times were tough from diseases, famines, and wars, people turned to religion. Nowadays, everybody wants to go see ghosts."

To some, travel tied to death and tragedy might seem like [dark tourism](#). For others, bedding down in digs rumored to span this world and the next is a way to learn about history and culture. Whether it's [Marilyn Monroe](#), a Civil War soldier, or a deceased [pet](#), the presence of a phantom or two on the hotel registry can often be an amenity, on par with a spa or fluffy robe.

According to a [2019 YouGov poll](#), 45 percent of Americans believe in supernatural beings. "Regular tourists and amateur ghost hunters want the chance to experience real magic, or what psychologists and poets refer to as a sense of enchantment," says psychologist James Houran, author of a 2020 market study on paranormal tourism. "They want to be transported out of their mundane daily lives to another place that expands their understanding of reality."

Houran found that older hotels stand out if they're marketed as haunted. Ghosts are good for scaring up business, especially for historic properties that require costly maintenance.

## **Ghosts, good for the bottom line**

Paranormal tourism is an estimated \$100 million industry worldwide. According to Houran, Key West, [Florida](#), alone brings in more than \$20 million in paranormal tourism a year. Cities including [New Orleans](#), [Savannah](#), and [Gettysburg](#) rely

on ghost tours to attract visitors.

When the late Salvatore Nicosia purchased the Shanley in 2005 at auction, it was abandoned and in dire condition. He poured his life savings into restoring the building; its' new owner uses revenues from ghost tours and other paranormal events to help finance its ongoing preservation.







**Left:** In Kingston, New York, the Old Dutch Church was established in 1659. Its graveyard is said to be haunted by Revolutionary War-era American settlers who had their homes torched by the British.

**Right:** The dilapidated Rolling Hills Asylum near Niagara Falls is open for flashlight ghost tours and other paranormal activities.

Photographs by Steve Shoemaker, Amity Photos

A ghost in the building can provide both personality and a crash course in local lore, starring in “what I did on vacation” stories whether you see anything spooky or not. Check into Massachusetts’ circa-1716 [Concord’s Colonial Inn](#)—where

patriot soldiers are rumored to roam the hallways—and you'll discover the building once held a Revolutionary War hospital. At [Foster's Hotel](#) in Chama, New Mexico, specters of a cowboy and a frontier judge emphasize the town's (and the rustic 1881 building's) Wild West past.

*[\(These are the most haunted places in the U.S.\)](#)*

In early 2021, the [Lizzie Borden Bed & Breakfast](#) was sold to a company called Ghost Adventures for nearly \$2 million, four times more than the listing price for similar properties in Fall River, Massachusetts. In 1996, the site of the 1892 unsolved double murder of Lizzie's parents, Andrew and Abby Borden, was turned into a museum and bed-and-breakfast that leaned into the spot's gruesome reputation. The new owners are following that (bloody?) footprint.

"The entrepreneurial view is that a 'dated, rundown' hotel cannot effectively compete with a new, modern-fitted hotel—that is, unless it is haunted," Houran wrote in his study.

## **Room with a boo?**

Travelers who overnight at supposedly haunted lodgings might be the same demographic that chooses historic charm over cookie-cutter rooms or tiny country inns over mega-hotels. "These stories go beyond the glossy brochure and add another facet to a historic site," says Lawrence P.



Horwitz, executive vice president of [Historic Hotels of America](#), a membership directory linked with the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#).

Some old-house properties, such as the Shanley, are marketed exclusively as haunted hotels, hosting paranormal weekends or tours with on-site investigators. Others—including the [Hotel Coronado](#) near San Diego, California; the [Driskill](#) in Austin, Texas; and the [Stanley Hotel](#) in Estes Park, Colorado—are touted as historic properties first and hotspots for paranormal activities second.



Ghost tours of Oswego, New York, feature many of the historic city's 19th-century buildings.

Photograph by Steve Shoemaker, Amity Photos

At the [Hotel Bethlehem](#) in Pennsylvania, spirit-hunting visitors can stay in the reputedly possessed Room 932 where amenities include Wi-Fi, Keurig coffee, and occasional flashing lamps, flying paper, or mysterious orbs.

[\(Here's why historic hotels are worth saving.\)](#)

Hotel ghost stories are often handed down as oral traditions, drawn from deaths that happened onsite or inspired by famous former guests or local notables buried in nearby graveyards. Some are mere fiction, "recruited" by hotel owners who hire psychic mediums or ghost hunters to validate (and sometimes "create") rumors of abnormal activities.

Although horror movies (including *The Shining* and *Psycho*) paint dire pictures about the plight of guests at out-of-the-way hotels, lodging owners in smaller towns find that coverage on spirit-hunting podcasts or shows like *Ghost Hunters* and *Paranormal States* help fill rooms with living customers. "Previously unknown properties definitely get an uptick in interest from paranormal groups if they're featured on a show," says C.R. Sanders, an associate producer on Biography Channel's *My Ghost Story*.

## **Who are you gonna call?**

Mike Fraysse wasn't planning on running a haunted house



hotel when he purchased the 1907 [Burn Brae Mansion](#) in Glen Spey, New York, in 1993. The former Olympic cycling coach envisaged turning the sprawling Queen Anne house into a training center. "But there's no cycling here in the winter because of the snow," he says. "My daughter suggested that I open a bed-and-breakfast for people interested in historic places."

Shortly after he opened his inn, guests complained of hearing crying babies, footsteps, or feeling as if they'd been touched by icy hands. "People got very upset," Fraysse says. "They thought we were playing jokes."

To get to the bottom of things, he hired [South Jersey Ghost Research](#), a longtime paranormal investigation outfit. "They came for three days and did a full investigation with all the machinery and equipment," he says. "It was mind-boggling."



The 1907 Burn Brae Mansion in Glen Spey, New York, now serves as a hotel and paranormal tourism hub.

Photograph by Steve Shoemaker, Amity Photos

The ghost busters used motion sensors, digital cameras, voice recorders, and infrared thermometers, capturing more than 180 images and sounds of alleged spirits. Now the hotel website advertises those ghosts, and, says Fraysee, "if people come in and they don't experience incredible things, they're upset."

[\(Peek inside the creepy Irish hell caves where Halloween was born.\)](#)

Negri says she has encountered spirits at the [Hollywood Roosevelt hotel](#), the currently-shuttered [Cecil Hotel](#), the

[Black Dahlia house](#), and the Shanley. She believes spirits hang out in certain places because they knew them in life and they just want to stick around.

"I once asked a spirit at the Roosevelt why she was there, and the ghost responded, 'It is a hotel, isn't it?'" says Negri.

In her decades in business, Negri has exorcised bad energy at lawyers' offices, factories, and talent agencies, but she's never been asked to get rid of spirits in hotels. "I don't think that would be wise," she says. "Paranormal tourism is huge."

Rachel Ng is a Hawaii-based writer who has been hanging out at the Big Island's Volcano House hotel lately, hoping to run into the ghostly white dog said to haunt the historic lodge. Follow her on [Instagram](#).