

USA ABROAD

HELPING INFORM USA CITIZENS ABROAD



By Brian Hill

AWAITING YOU: These actors are at the Halloween party at Frankenstein castle outside Frankfurt, West Germany

Expats scaring up a little October fun

By Andrea M. Thompson
USA TODAY

Parties, tours of haunted caves and a "monster revue" at Frankenstein's legendary castle are how USA citizens overseas are celebrating Halloween this year.

FRANKENSTEIN'S CASTLE: In West Germany one of the biggest Halloween attractions is the festivities put on by Brian Hill at the ruins of *Burg Frankenstein* in Eberstadt, near Frankfurt. Hill, 33, a former U.S. soldier stationed there, first rented the castle in 1977 as a unique way to keep the spirit of Halloween alive. "I love Halloween and I wanted to bring it over here to other Americans," he says.

Buses chartered by Hill bring in soldiers and their families from army bases in Germany. Other Americans fly or take the train from as far away as New Zealand, neighboring England and even the USA where Hill's reputation for throwing a great Halloween bash has spread.

Germans have adopted All Hallows Eve as their special celebration as well. Stevan Nowotka, 23, a German University student, first learned about Halloween when he lived in Virginia for 5 years. He says other Germans, "are beginning to catch on to the custom because they learn it from the US soldiers. We don't trick or treat, but many of my friends have costume parties at their homes."

JOINING THE ACTION: Visitors become part of the action as they tour the castle. "Picture all the horror movies you've ever seen before and imagine seeing them live," says Hill about the annual show he puts on for \$100,000.

An open moat with a "living" graveyard, an executioner who turns into a monster, and a swamp creature with human skulls hanging from his costume greet visitors as they first enter the castle.

Once inside, horror and adventure movie figures both past and present roam around the dark corners of the castle. Frankenstein, Dracula, Freddy Krueger, Ghostbusters and for the first time this year, Batman, are among the group of movie figures represented by actors who put on shows with fake blood and gore, using live victims. The realism can be so intense that a patron or two has been known to literally faint from fright.

For precautionary measures, Hill stations ambulance crews, fire department, police and security personnel on the castle grounds round-the-clock.

TOO POPULAR: In spite of the success and popularity of the shows, Hill is not without his critics, namely the local government. They say the castle is not sufficiently capable of holding the Halloween crowds, now growing to more than 40,000. Hill asserts, "I'm not going to let them stop me."

Entrance to *Burg Frankenstein* castle and the show costs \$5. Directions: South of Frankfurt, look for the Pfungstadt-Eberstadt exit on the A5 Autobahn. Look for park and ride signs directing you to shuttle bus service to the castle, overlooking lovely German woods. Elsewhere for Halloween:

► **PARIS:** Two tickets to New York City to celebrate Halloween night in style are being raffled off by Randy & Jay's restaurant. Randy & Jay's will be having an early Halloween party on October 22 at Studio A on the Champs E'lysee. The best costume prize is worth 1,500 French francs to another lucky winner. "There's a big interest in Halloween in the French and American communities," says Randy Garrett, one of the owners of the restaurant.

► **LONDON:** There are several events planned around London on Halloween night. Among them, Mitchell and O'Brien's New York-style deli in Soho, (01) 434-9941, will have free "Witches Brew" on tap, pumpkin pie and an apple dunking contest. Rita Cruise O'Brien, owner of the restaurant, says that she often gets calls from Americans in Britain who, "expect us to do something for the American holidays." But she added, "British kids know about Halloween too and they love to celebrate it."

For those who want a real scare, an "Evening Ghost Bus" to the 8,000 year old Chiselhurst Caves is being planned by Tragical History Tours, (01) 857-1545. Adventurous souls are handed a lantern and invited to explore 22 miles of haunted, dark passages. Tour director Michael Jones says, "It's our busiest night of the year."

► **EDINBURGH:** Ghosthunters can dine in "The Witchery Restaurant" — founded 10 years ago this Halloween — and take the "Witchery Murder and Mystery Tour." Call (031) 225-5613. The tour takes place "only in darkness" says Witchery owner James Thomson, exploring the city's old streets and Castle Hill, where Thomson says some 1,500 reputed witches were put to the torch.