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CHILDREN'S MAGICKAL COTTAGE  
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The Wandering  
Witch Goes to

# SALEM



## Witch City USA

You'll find her in the newspapers, on police badges and even on the t-shirts at Ben and Jerry's. She's the high school mascot and the center attraction in the town square. She's the Salem Witch, and no matter what form she takes, whether domestic goddess or pagan crone, you're sure to find her everywhere.

Despite all the witches flying around, Salem, Massachusetts is neither a sacred site nor a spiritual center. Yet, Pagans find themselves wanting to come here. Transcending the kitsch is a rare sense of acceptance of the Pagan Path; you can walk down the streets of Salem wearing a pentacle as big as your face and no one will say "boo" to you — except, of course, if it's Halloween. Then, anything goes.

### Legend Turns into Reality

Thanks to Arthur Miller's famous play *The Crucible* and the darkly romantic literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne, an air of mystery has sprung up around Salem. When you walk its narrow cobblestone lanes, that 17<sup>th</sup> century New England spirit swirls all around you. However, those whom we would consider to be "real witches" weren't serving up brews in the late 1600s (or if they were, they kept a low profile). The good citizens who decided to charge their neighbors with practicing witchcraft were motivated by petty jealousies and greed; accusing a person of being a witch often became an opportunity to claim damages from surviving family members.

The hysteria started in the neighboring town of

Danvers, then known as "Salem Village," while "Salem Town" (the Salem we know today) is where the trials and executions took place. There are a handful of sites directly related to the trials; the Witch House is the former home of judge Jonathan Corwin and now a museum dedicated to period architecture and 17<sup>th</sup> century family life. (See [www.salemweb.com/witchhouse](http://www.salemweb.com/witchhouse)) Gallows Hill, the site of the executions, is now a field used mainly for sporting events — Go Witches! (the name of the high school football team — really!).

Salem began capitalizing on its notorious history in 1890, when local jeweler Daniel Low sold silver spoons with witches on them; and, whether it was serendipity or an unusual marketing strategy, Parker Brothers manufactured Ouija Boards in town for many years. But Salem as we know it today — the "new-age haven" — began with Laurie Cabot. When she opened the first witch shop in 1971 — selling herbs, jewelry, tarot cards and other occult paraphernalia — she planted the seed that would grow into a prosperous community. There are now over a dozen shops in Salem that cater to Pagans and new-agers alike, and you'll find yet more in other harbor towns along the coast. Cabot also helped to found the Witches League for Public Awareness, an organization dedicated to dispelling misconceptions about Wicca and Paganism ([www.celticcrow.com](http://www.celticcrow.com)). The efforts of Pagans from many traditions have made Salem the oasis it is today; part kitsch, part serious craft, it is a truly unique environment.

Salem vies with Anoka, Minnesota and Hell, Michigan for the title of "Halloween Capitol of the World." For the record, Anoka's claim is that it was the first town to hold a public Halloween celebration back in the 1920s. As for Hell, Michigan — well, the name pretty much says it all. However, add "Witch City" to "Halloween," and you have the ingredients for a wickedly successful and very crowded autumnal destination.



Without a doubt, Salem is a happening place at Samhain. October brings psychic fairs, street performers, seances, masquerade balls, and celebrity Pagans to town. The Mall on Essex Street is “haunted” with extra goodies for the entire month, while the Festival of the Dead offers classes and events every weekend in October. Take some time to check out the Haunted Happenings Guide, a schedule of Salem’s Halloween events, [www.hauntedhappenings.org](http://www.hauntedhappenings.org)

If you’re intent on visiting at Samhain-tide, be prepared to make your hotel reservations up to a year in advance — that’s for the entire month of October, not just the weekend leading up to Halloween itself. If you don’t want to or can’t make plans that far in advance, consider staying in one of the neighboring seaside towns; Gloucester, Rockport, and Newburyport are 15-30 minute drives from Salem, each boasts their own winding streets and witchy shops, and there’s even commuter trains that connect them to Salem.

Salem’s Pagan community is a strong presence all year round, not just in October, so if you aren’t into Halloween mayhem, consider visiting during the off-season, from mid-November through April. In the summer and fall, Salem swells up like a Jack-o-Lantern; during winter and spring there’s fewer tourist-oriented events but also less crowds to deal with, and more openings for readings and classes.

## Witchy Must-Sees

Be you tourist or pilgrim, you’ll miss out if you don’t...

- **Walk the line.** Look down almost anywhere in Salem, and you’ll see a red line running down the center of the sidewalk. Following the line will take you all around town and past all the historic and esoteric sites there are to see — but you’re on your own. Keep a sharp eye out for quirky decorations, window displays, informative plaques, and New England architecture — especially on Chestnut Street.

- **Take a spin on the Trolley.** If you’re not up to hoofing it, the Trolley is the way to see all of Salem. Get your ticket at the Trolley Depot on Essex Street and for a whopping \$12, you’ll get to ride all around town, hop on-and-off at any of the thirteen (of course!) stops, wave at the tourists and get an earful of history. This narrated tour will fill you in on facts and folklore and makes a great introduction. ([www.salemtrrolley.com](http://www.salemtrrolley.com))

- **Talk to a Local.** I spent my first Halloween season in Salem with my elder and friend, Kat. She took a breather while I ran around to take



some photos, and when I returned, she was deep in conversation with a local named Dave. Their chat started with the question: Where can a couple of hungry gals get their hands on some good chicken and peanuts? (He was holding one of those white take out containers.) Eventually, the talk turned to witches — not a big surprise considering the time and place. Dave was pretty exemplary of the people we met in the area — friendly, accepting, and ready to help. So while you’re browsing for crystals or sitting down for coffee, strike up a conversation. No matter what the path of the person, you’ll find their hearts are true.

- **Get a reading.** Most of the occult-themed shops in town offer metaphysical services. I got a fantastic reading from Laurie at Crow Haven Corner ([www.crowhavencorner.net](http://www.crowhavencorner.net)) which included a Tarot layout, a psychic

reading, and a look at my palm. Pyramid Books ([www.pyramidbooks.com](http://www.pyramidbooks.com)) has several readers on staff every day to provide Tarot readings at the lowest advertised price in town — \$20 for 15 minutes. For something different, visit Angelica of the Angels ([www.angelicaoftheangels.com](http://www.angelicaoftheangels.com)) for an aura reading — an image of your aura is captured, and the colors and positions are interpreted for you.

- **Get inked.** If you’ve been thinking of wearing your Wiccan-ness on your sleeve, there’s no better place than Salem to turn that dream into reality. Visit Witch City Ink ([www.witchcityink.com](http://www.witchcityink.com)) for a permanent memento of your visit. The sign says that walk-ins are welcome, but this popular spot was fully booked when I walked in so I advise you to make an appointment.

- **Take a snap with Samantha.** Visit the bronze *Bewitched* statue in the square by town hall and strike a pose with Samantha Stevens; several episodes of “Bewitched” were filmed right here in town. Peek through the moon and sit on the broom — you know you want to! (Head down the street to the Ben and Jerry’s afterwards!)

- **Buy a witchy t-shirt.** Let’s face it, everyone wants a tee-shirt with a medieval woodcut of a man levitating during an inquisition with the caption “Whoops!” Best place to buy is Witch Tees ([www.witchtees.com](http://www.witchtees.com)) conveniently located inside Museum Place Mall near the town center.



• **Visit a Witch Museum**

— and in this town, there are plenty of them, all ready to present you with their retelling of the events that led up to the witch trials (or in some cases, tales of the high seas — there's also a pirate museum: [www.piratemuseum.com](http://www.piratemuseum.com)).

I did the **Salem Witch Museum's** ([www.salemwitchmuseum.com](http://www.salemwitchmuseum.com)) tour; the narration that accompanies the life-size scenes hovering above you in the darkness is backed by moody lighting, eerie music, and sound effects. There is also a presentation on Paganism, presented by live tour guides. For something more hands-on, try the seasonally presented *Cry Innocent* ([www.cryinnocent.com](http://www.cryinnocent.com)). Here, you're not merely a spectator, but a part of the jury that sentences poor Bridget Bishop, one of the unfortunate victims of the hysteria (apparently no one cared for her red bodices and successful taverns).

• **Go A-Haunting.** If the paranormal is more your speed, go a-haunting. The Spellbound Museum ([www.spellboundtours.com](http://www.spellboundtours.com)) offers ghost and cemetery tours led by professional paranormal investigators; Back at the Salem Witch Museum, there's more to do including a visit to a Victorian spirit parlor. **Dead Man Walking** tours ([www.bewitchedinsalem.com](http://www.bewitchedinsalem.com)) features locally-based, costumed guides who will point out spooky settings and spine-tingling tales for the gothically-inclined.

**Spellbinding Shopping**

Salem surely must win the Pagan Shopping Award: there are more arcane and magical shops than your credit card will probably bear visiting. Starting at the top of Essex Street by the Hawthorne Hotel, you won't have to walk far to get to **Crow Haven Corner** ([www.crowhavencorner.net](http://www.crowhavencorner.net)) Salem's original witch shop. Like any of the shops in town, many of the fancier items can be a bit pricey (handmade athames fashioned from copper and crystal can run into hundreds of dollars), but there are plenty of books, jewelry items, crystals, and candles that can be had for a tenth of the price. Don't leave until you see **Crow Haven's Spirit Cottage** (a separate building behind the store) and ask about the haunting spirit photo that inspired the creation of the cottage. Crow Haven Corner was Laurie Cabot's first witch shop, but she is no longer affiliated with it — although by some twist of serendipity the current owner's name is also Laurie. Laurie Cabot's new shop, **The Cat, the Crow and the Crown** ([www.thecatthecrowandthecrown.com](http://www.thecatthecrowandthecrown.com)) can be found on Pickering Wharf.

Walk next door to indulge your goth fantasies at the **Fool's Mansion** ([www.foolsmansion.com](http://www.foolsmansion.com)) a darkly romantic boutique where you'll find high quality Victorian, Renaissance, and Medieval clothing. Not cheap — expect to pay about \$80 for a corset and up to \$400 for a more elaborate Victorian-style coat — the shop also stocks locally-produced jewelry and art. Or pick up a handmade stained glass pendant from **Arcane Nonesuch** ([www.arcanenonesuch.com](http://www.arcanenonesuch.com)). Further up Essex Street, **Hex** ([www.salemhex.com](http://www.salemhex.com)) charms its visitors with old world magic. Christian Day (the brains behind the Halloween extravaganza Festival of the Dead) and Leanne Marrama welcome their visitors to step back in time. With a focus on witchcraft, folk magic, root-work, and hoodoo, Hex offers an enchanting collection of candles, incense, charms, capes, robes, and handcrafted ritual and magical items.

Wander down towards Pickering Wharf and stop in at **Pyramid Books** ([www.pyramidbooks.com](http://www.pyramidbooks.com)). Besides the large selection of books, you'll find jewelry, statuary, and tools for a variety of traditions and paths. Prepare to spend some serious time browsing what's on offer at **Artemisia Botanicals and Witch's Weeds** ([www.artemisiabotanicals.com](http://www.artemisiabotanicals.com)). Besides the best selection of besoms (witches' brooms) in town, there is a lovely assortment of candles, including tiny goddesses perfect for a quick ritual or to top a celebratory cake. Browse the jars upon jars of herbs to stock your magical pantry — it's self-serve and you pay by the ounce. Shop owner Teri Kalgren also runs the Green Witch School of Herbalism, so ask about the classes that are in session.

Tucked into a corner of Pickering Wharf is **Nu Aeon**. Run by Richard and Gypsy Ravish (who also create Pagan- and Wiccan-themed music), the shop is home to the sacred space of the **Temple of Nine Wells**. ([www.tnw-salem.org](http://www.tnw-salem.org).) Besides holding public rituals and circles, classes and workshops are also offered, so check out their website or call the shop to see what's happening when you're in town. The shop itself offers a variety of books and unusual tools (including some wonderful athames and wands). It is also the place to get **White Light Pentacles Sacred Spirit Products** ([www.wlpssp.com](http://www.wlpssp.com)) Pick up a packet of one of the many varieties of this top notch incense for \$4.50, or better yet go for the sampler—28 sticks of incense, one each of every scent they make — and it comes tied in a pretty parchment, all for \$5.50.

## Eat, Drink, and Be Witchy!

If you can only eat one meal in Salem, go to **Reds** ([www.redssandwichshop.com](http://www.redssandwichshop.com)) a local hangout and the best place to get breakfast. The red line runs right past their door; write me if you can put away more than one of their plate sized pancakes.

You can get a quick, satisfying, warm and toasty bite at the **New England Soup Factory** ([www.newenglandsoupfactory.com](http://www.newenglandsoupfactory.com)) or a little further up the street at **Boston Hot Dog** ([www.bostonhotdog.us](http://www.bostonhotdog.us)). For dinner, try the New England clam chow-da at the **Witch's Brew Cafe** ([witchsbrewcafe.com](http://witchsbrewcafe.com)), or hang out at **Salem Beer Works** ([www.beerworks.net/html/locations\\_salem.html](http://www.beerworks.net/html/locations_salem.html)). In addition to the generous portions, there is the extensive selection of — you guessed it — beer. Try a pint of the Pumpkin Beer, or the Blueberry Beer (with whole blueberries on the bottom).

About accommodations; if you stay in town you'll be within walking distance to everything. Located across the street from the Salem Witch Museum, the **Hawthorne Hotel** ([www.hawthornehotel.com](http://www.hawthornehotel.com)) is on the National Registry of historic sites — try scoring room 612 when you make your reservation (rumor has it that it's haunted) — while the Salem Inn is made up of three historic buildings ([www.saleminnma.com](http://www.saleminnma.com)). If you'd like to go for something more homey, try the **Amelia Payson House Bed and Breakfast** ([www.ameliapaysonhouse.com](http://www.ameliapaysonhouse.com)) which, in addition to the cozy rooms, period furniture, and drop-in local historian, provides yummy muffins in the morning that will tide you over for your trek across town to Reds.

All in all, Salem is a must-see for North American Witches (and adventurers from Across the Pond). However you feel about the combination of Wicca, tourism, and trendy shopping, it's a wonderful place to visit. Say hello to Samantha for me!

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— *Wandering Witch* NATALIE ZAMAN is a student of Celtic Wicca and co-author of the Graven Images Oracle. She co-publishes [broomstix.com](http://broomstix.com), an ezine for Pagan kids with Katharine Clark and Charlotte Bennardo and lives with her family in New Jersey.



## Farther Afield

Check out these places, all within an hour's drive or less from Salem...

- Head into New Hampshire and visit **Mystery Hill**, America's Stonehenge ([www.stonehengeusa.com](http://www.stonehengeusa.com)). About forty-five minutes from Salem, this pre-historic site is home to Equinox and Solstice celebrations — sometimes featuring live music. Check out their website for this year's astronomical dates and events.

- One of the many reasons to head out to Gloucester is **Hammond Castle**, ([www.hammondcastle.com](http://www.hammondcastle.com)) the former home of inventor John Hays Hammond of the Hammond Organ. The castle is now a museum, featured on the Travel Channel, home to several purported spirit residents, including Natalie Hammond — who likes to peer out of an upper story bedroom window.

- Besides being alternatives to in-town accommodation, **Gloucester**, **Rockport**, and **Newburyport** offer their own shops, sites, and activities (try whale watching!).

- A 45-50 minute drive north from Salem will put you in Southern Maine and charming **York Village**. Get some traditional pub food at **Rick's** (great fish and chips) and then visit the cozy quarters of **Gravestone Artwear**. Besides the silk-screened tees and pouches featuring authentic New England gravestone rubbing imagery (made right there in the shop), you'll find a treasure trove of sparkling crystals and Goth goodies. All this and you're only 10 minutes from the shore in York Beach!

- And of course, if you get tired of small town New England and want a taste of the big city there's always **Boston** — only a 30-minute train ride from Salem and the area's travel hub. If you're flying in to visit Salem, this is where you'll land (Boston's Logan Airport) or, if you are driving, Salem is about six hours from New York City).

