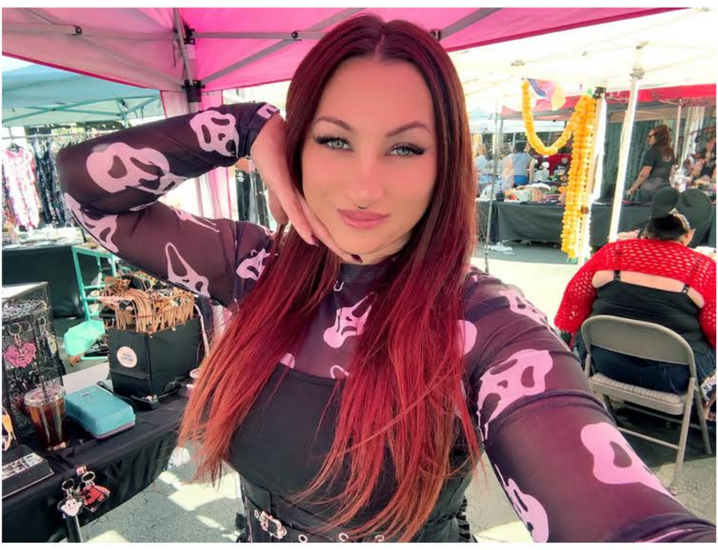
Lookout
SANTA CRUZ

2024 Breaking News Pulitzer Prize winner



April Shimabukuro, aka Spooky Girl 831. Credit: April Shimabukuro

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Spooky Girl 831’s guide to weird, wild and haunted Halloween events in Santa Cruz

BY **JANA MARCUS** October 25, 2026

Gift this article

Quick Take

From haunted hotels and vampire balls to drag raves and downtown costume madness, Santa Cruz County is ready to get its freak on this Halloween weekend. Jana Marcus teams up with local paranormal storyteller Spooky Girl 831 to pick eight ways to eat, drink, dance and be scary.

Santa Cruz has never been shy about embracing its weird side. And when Halloween rolls around, things only get stranger.

So I teamed up with local content creator April Shimabukuro, the woman behind “Spooky Girl 831” and “Weird Spooky Storytime,” who entertains tens of thousands of social media followers with tales of horror, haunted history, the paranormal and all things unexplained.

Santa Cruz County has plenty of spooky fun before and after Halloween, but we’ve narrowed it down to eight ways to celebrate the big weekend itself.

From haunted hideaways and creepy attractions to costume parties and a little romance with a side of fright, there’s something for just about everyone.

So grab your costume, summon your courage, and get ready to get weird.

1. Love at first fright: Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

Nothing brings two people closer than a good old-fashioned scream. At least, that’s Shimabukuro’s theory.

“I’m a huge horror fan, so naturally, I think getting scared together makes for a great date,” she says.

On Halloween, start with the Fright Walk at the Boardwalk, a subterranean maze of dark corridors, creepy surprises and jump scares when you least expect them. Then hop aboard the Haunted Castle for another round of ghostly fun. The Boardwalk is also celebrating Halloween with trick-or-treating and a costume contest, making it a good bet for families and couples.

When: Saturday, Oct. 31. The Boardwalk is open until 8 p.m.

Information: https://beachboardwalk.com/

If you can’t wait until Halloween, the Boardwalk’s final Fright Flicks screening features M. Night Shyamalan’s “The Sixth Sense,” starring Bruce Willis, at the historic Grove ballroom on Wednesday, Oct. 28. Admission is $18 and includes a beach chair and one hosted drink, plus themed giveaways for the first 50 attendees. The movie starts at 8 p.m. Tickets: https://beachboardwalk.com/boardwalk-fright-flicks/

. . .

2. Lost in the corn: Rodoni Farms

The corn maze at Rodoni Farms north of Santa Cruz. Credit: Rodoni Farms / Facebook

Not every Halloween adventure needs bloodcurdling screams. Sometimes all you need is a corn maze, a pumpkin patch and someone you don’t mind getting lost with. “There’s something about wandering through a corn maze together that makes for a fun fall date,” Shimabukuro says.

Rodoni Farms, just past Davenport, offers 5 acres of twists and turns along the spectacular North Coast, with a maze that takes roughly 20 to 40 minutes to navigate, depending on your sense of direction. Add pumpkin picking, hay bales, fall produce and ocean views, and you've got a classic Santa Cruz autumn outing.

When: Through Saturday, Oct. 31, daily 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., rain or shine. Corn maze admission is $10 for ages 5 and older; younger children are free.

Information: http://rodonifarms.com/

· · ·

3. Down the rabbit hole: Freaker's Ball at Brookdale Lodge

Things are about to get even curiouser at one of Santa Cruz County's most famously haunted hotels. "Brookdale Lodge has some of the most fascinating paranormal lore in Santa Cruz County," says Shimabukuro, a devoted fan of haunted history.

Brookdale Lodge's two-night Freaker's Ball returns this year with a "Through the Looking Glass" theme, inviting partygoers to unleash their inner Alice, Mad Hatter or whatever strange creature lurks in their imagination. Expect music, dancing, outrageous costumes and plenty of Halloween revelry.

While you're there, Shimabukuro suggests grabbing a bite at the diner, enjoying a drink and learning about the lodge's haunted past. After all, what better place to tumble down the rabbit hole than a hotel where things already go bump in the night?

When: Friday and Saturday, Oct. 30-31. Doors open at 6 p.m.; music starts at 7 p.m.

Where: Brookdale Lodge, 11570 Highway 9, Brookdale.

Tickets: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/freakers-ball-through-the-looking-glass-tickets-2001704440867

· · ·

4. Sink your teeth into Chaminade's Vampire Ball

Credit: Chaminade Resort & Spa

If your idea of Halloween involves a little glamour with your gore, Shimabukuro has just the ticket. Chaminade Resort and Spa's Vampire Ball is a grown-up Halloween night out, complete with DJs, dancing, fire performers, fortune-tellers, specialty cocktails and a costume contest. Tickets are $75 and include a signature cocktail and a buffet of hearty bites. There's even an overnight package for those who want to make a night of it.

"This is where I'll personally be spending Halloween night," Shimabukuro says. "I love that it's an opportunity to get dressed up and enjoy a more glamorous, grown-up Halloween experience. It's definitely one of my top recommendations for couples looking to make Halloween night special!"

When: Saturday, Oct. 31. Ages 21 and older.

Tickets and information: https://www.chaminade.com/things-to-do-santa-cruz/vampire-ball/

· · ·

5. Who let the dogs out? Halloween at Abbott Square

Forget the witches and vampires for a moment. Halloween is going to the dogs.

Abbott Square kicks off its Halloween festivities with a dog costume contest in the late afternoon where Santa Cruz's four-legged fashionistas get their moment in the spotlight. Expect everything from tiny superheroes to canine creatures of the night, all competing for prizes and bragging rights.

The fun continues with the Abbott Square Halloween Bash, featuring trick-or-treating around the market, live music, food, drinks, and costume contests for the human crowd. It's an easy downtown stop for families before the evening gets considerably wilder.

When: Saturday, Oct. 31. Dog costume contest, 4-6 p.m.; Halloween Bash, 4-10 p.m.

Information: Dog costume contest | Halloween Bash

6. Drag yourself to the dance floor: Dance or Die at The 418 Project

If your Halloween plans call for more glitter than gore, The 418 Project has you covered.

"Dance or Die: A Drag Rave" returns for a second year, promising a night of outrageous costumes, bone-rattling beats and some seriously over-the-top performances. DJ afterPRTY provides the music, while a Halloween drag show and costume contest turn the dance floor into a celebration of all things vamp, camp, and wonderfully weird.

Come dressed to kill. Figuratively, of course.

When: Friday, Oct. 30, 9 p.m.-midnight.

Where: The 418 Project, 155 S. River St., Santa Cruz.

Tickets: $15 in advance, $20 at the door. Tickets and information

. . .

7. Creatures of the night: Downtown Santa Cruz and the Blue Lagoon

A Pacific Avenue Halloween standby. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

Head downtown after dark, where Pacific Avenue becomes an unofficial parade of zombies, superheroes, vampires and costumes that defy explanation.

For those who prefer their Halloween with a soundtrack and a cocktail, the Blue Lagoon is celebrating all weekend. The festivities begin Thursday, Oct. 29, with Beach Goth Night, followed by Devil's Night on Friday and Espooky on Halloween night.

Whether you're out to dance or people-watch, downtown Santa Cruz rarely disappoints on Halloween.

When: Thursday through Saturday, Oct. 29-31, with downtown costume-watching peaking on Halloween night.

Where: Pacific Avenue and the Blue Lagoon, 923 Pacific Ave., downtown Santa Cruz.

. . .

8. Rave to the grave: Halloween at the Catalyst

If you're not quite ready for the afterlife, you can at least dance like there's no tomorrow.

The Catalyst's "Rave to the Grave" brings DJs, dancing, and costume contests to multiple rooms for a Halloween night packed with music and mayhem. With a 16-and-older admission policy, it's also an option for younger Halloween revelers looking for something beyond trick-or-treating.

Dress to impress, bring your dancing shoes, and prepare to raise a little hell.

When: Saturday, Oct. 31, starting at 7 p.m.

Where: The Catalyst, 1011 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz.

Tickets: https://catalystclub.com/event/rave-to-the-grave/the-catalyst/santa-cruz-california/

. . .

And keep an eye out downtown ...

Of course, one of Santa Cruz's best Halloween shows doesn't require a ticket at all. Just take a stroll down Pacific Avenue and enjoy the parade of characters, creatures, and creative costumes that make Halloween in this town such a spectacle.

And if you're out haunting downtown on Halloween night, keep an eye out for yours truly, camera in hand, capturing the madness from 9 p.m. to midnight. I'll be photographing the festivities for a special Lookout photo feature the following week.

So dress to impress, strike a pose, and give me your best Halloween face.

You might find yourself in the picture.