



ROGUES & VAGABONDS A Novel by Marilyn Lightstone

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5 TOP PLACES TO HUNT FOR VAMPIRES

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Like the immortal blood sucking creatures themselves, our fascination with vampires isn't

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dimmed by the passing centuries. These pale-faced, fang-toothed icons have inspired centuries of horror and mystery — not to mention a Hollywood blockbuster or two. (Who can forget Max Schreck as Nosferatu or Bela Lugosi's Dracula?) Before the *Twilight Saga* and *True Blood*, author Bram Stoker spun vampire legends into a literary classic that continues to capture our imaginations.

While today's vampire fans flock to the scenes of their favourite TV shows and movies, there are many places you can sink your teeth into some good old-fashioned vampire lore. After all, vampire haunts can offer more than sets: the history, culture and scenery make them destinations their own right.

In the spirit of Halloween, here are five vampire-spotting destinations inspired by Lonely Planet's *Best in Travel*.

Transylvania, Romania

Long before Bram Stoker's *Dracula* called this central Romanian province his home, the "land beyond the forest" has a tradition of the supernatural. Vampires reportedly haunt its sites on St. George's Day and the eve of St. Andrew, and its supposed location on one of the earth's strongest magnetic fields give the locals extra sensory abilities. Stoker drew inspiration not just from local lore, but from one of the country's famous rulers: Vlad III Dracul of Wallachia, better known as "Vlad the Impaler" for his brutal method of executing his enemies. Portraits of this infamous leader even look like our modern imagining of Dracula.

Today visitors flock to the area to see "Dracula's Castle" — the recent nickname for [Bran Castle](#)— but there's more fiction than fact about its connection to Vlad. While its picturesque setting and 14th century architecture certainly look the part, the site is actually a museum dedicated to Queen Maria of Romania. No one is sure Vlad ever set foot in the castle.

However, there's no shortage of sites to trace the history of this enigmatic ruler — from his birthplace in Sighisoara (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to the ruins of his real castle, Poenari Fortress. Many tour companies specialize in Dracula-themed tours of the area, especially around Halloween, and you can even spend the night in Hotel Castle Dracula. Even if you aren't a Dracula fan, Romania's pretty medieval towns, culture and castles are worth a look.

For more information, visit [RomaniaTourism.com](#) and [Transylvania Live Dracula Tours](#).

Dracula Tour of London, UK

Stoker's Count Dracula may have started out in Transylvania, but he soon made a move to a country more familiar to his author and audience. Fans of the book know much of the action happens in London, and the city is happy to indulge visitors with a ghoulish flare.

Tour companies like Transylvania Live offer [Dracula Tours in London](#) with the vampire fan in mind.

Popular haunts along the way include Dracula's House – the home where the fictional character supposedly lived during his stay in the city. Tours also delve into other local stories like the ghosts of Highgate Cemetery or the dark deeds that took place in Highgate Woods. In case you worked up an appetite, the tour finishes with a Medieval Banquet — or you can dine at Dracula's Castle restaurant. Naturally, these tours aren't the only spooky ways to enjoy the city. Walk in the footsteps of Jack the Ripper (offered by [London Horror Tours](#)), take a ghost tour or enjoy a haunted walk. Of course, there's the Tower of London too. Around Halloween, you can even hit the theatres to catch Dracula plays or films.

For more information on what to do in the city, see [VisitLondon.com](#).

Dracula's Haunts, Whitby, UK

Looking for another stop on your UK vampire tour? Fans of Stoker's novel know Whitby as the setting of Count Dracula's dramatic arrival to England aboard the Russian schooner, Demeter. On the leading edge of a storm and with its dead captain lashed to the helm, the ship crashed into the pier East Cliff but not before Dracula — in the shape of a dog — leapt to shore. Visitors still travel to see the view that inspired the famous passage. Another spooky spot? The graves in St. Mary's Churchyard.

Today, the remarkable ruins of Whitby Abbey stand watch over the ancient seaport and fishing village, also famous for being the home port of explorer Captain James Cook and part of the Heritage Coast of North East England. Now a thriving seaside resort town, you'll find many places to tuck in for a few nights, including cozy cottages and guest houses.

If you're looking for a little something extra, time your trip for the [Whitby Goth Weekend](#) held each April and October/November. Prefer a more traditional event instead? Try the [Whitby Folk Week](#) for seven days of music and dancing each August.

Thinking of a visit? Check out [Whitby.co.uk](#) and [DiscoverYorkshireCoast.com](#).

Musée Des Vampires, France

Not that you need another excuse to visit Paris, but this private museum offers something different from the usual touristy experiences. Located on the outskirts of the city in Lilas, this off-the-beaten-path destination is dedicated to all things vampire — including artefacts, books, signed movie memorabilia and nostalgia.

You'll want to plan ahead for this one: the museum is only open to guided tours and reservations are a must. (You may want to brush up your French language skills — appointments can only be made by phone.) If you're looking for more than a visit, the museum offers dinner packages in addition to tours, including meal, vampire-themed games and group discussions.

For more information, visit the [museum's website](#). You can also find a good overview of what to expect at [CoolStuffInParis.com](#).

Vampire Bats, Costa Rica

Behind every good legend there's a kernel of truth, and vampire bats are the real deal. Known for their razor-sharp fangs and keen noses eager to find a good vein, this species of bat is the only mammal to feed exclusively on blood. They emerge from their caves during the darkest hours of the night to hunt, and sneak up on sleeping prey. True, they're much smaller than you've seen in the movies — and they lap up blood rather than suck it — but they were part of many cultures' folklore and fiction long before Stoker conjured up shape shifting vampires.

Where can you see these creepy creatures? These bloodsuckers live throughout the tropics of Mexico, Central America and South America but Lonely Planet gives ecologically-diverse Costa Rica the nod as one of the best places to see them in the wild. In particular, Santa Rosa National Park and Corcovado National Park — both known for their diverse habitats which are home to many species of flora and fauna.

Don't worry about your blood supply — vampire bats usually go for sleeping or cattle but have been known to snack on the occasional human. Still, you'll want to keep a healthy distance as these bats

can carry disease. (Though in a strange twist, their saliva is being used to develop new treatments for stroke.)

For more information about vampire bats, visit [National Geographic](#). For travel information, see [VisitCostaRica.com](#).

Naturally, you'll want to approach any of these destinations with a love of literature and a mind open to the supernatural possibilities. Even if these ideas are the main attraction, they're still a fun add-on to any trip.

ON THE WEB

For the full list of vampire-themed destinations, see Lonely Planet's [World's best vampire-spotting locations](#) and [Best in Travel 2011](#).

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