

# THE GREAT JACK O' LANTERN BLAZE

**On a cool October night,** I stand at the entrance to the Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze at Van Cortlandt Manor in Croton-on-Hudson. The Blaze is an annual self-guided tour through the grounds of this 18th-century mansion, with more than 7,000 artisan-carved pumpkins.

The atmosphere of the Blaze is spooky but festive, beginning with a windmill made entirely of pumpkins. The blades change color as they go around, turning from blue to purple to red to pink.

I walk cross the Pumpkin Zee Bridge. The stanchions of the bridge are completely covered with jack o'lanterns.

Exiting the bridge, I pass a wall of beautiful Celtic knots. Each design is unique and glows with warm, golden light. The knots are a work of art, intricately engraved into pumpkins.

Moving on, I come to another wall of pumpkins arranged to look like stained glass windows.

The next stop has a medieval fantasy theme. Pumpkins are stacked on top of each other. The carvings resemble a flock of owls. A pumpkin wizard stands among the flock, with his wand held high, casting quite a spell!

A magnificent flying unicorn is opposite the wizard, next to a glowing castle guarded by a giant sea serpent. Smaller pumpkins carved like waves surround the serpent, as if it is swimming.

I continue down the path, entering the Zodiacs. I excitedly look for my sign, Libra, which glows a brilliant turquoise.

In the "Pumpkin Planetarium", hundreds of stars carved into pumpkins change from blue to rainbow colors, to the sounds of twinkling, shimmering stars.

Exiting the Planetarium, a moving pumpkin carousel wows me. Skeletal horses float by to eerie amusement park music.



Next, I come to a ginormous spider web on a hillside. The ground is covered with pumpkins, each with a different spider carved into it. Toward the top of the hill, I see larger arachnids, their bodies made up of several pumpkins and their faces that of skeletons. Truly spook-tacular!

Then Lady Liberty stands before me, tall and proud, with her pumpkin torch atop her outstretched arm, illuminating the night sky.

Leaving the Statue of Liberty, I'm swept into the Jurassic Era. Pumpkins form a tyrannosaurus rex, stegosaurus, triceratops, pterodactyl, even a long-necked apatosaurus.

Finally, I reach the manor house, which is decorated with a giant jack o'lantern made of individual pumpkins. The front lawn is covered with pumpkin zombies and hundreds more grinning jack o'lanterns.

Happy Halloween!

To read more about Allyson Macci's visit to the Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze, go to [NewYorkByRail.com/Great-Jack-OLantern-Blaze](http://NewYorkByRail.com/Great-Jack-OLantern-Blaze)

**DO IT BY TRAIN!** Take Amtrak to Croton-Harmon Station (CRT). Walk 0.7 mile to Van Cortlandt Manor. Use Amtrak's **SEE NEW YORK AND SAVE!** 15% discount.