



IT'S A SMOKY MOUNTAIN HALLOWEEN, CHARLIE BROWN!

So Much Fun It's Scary. They race from one store to another, totally oblivious to the charming historic buildings and surrounding mountains that are decked out in dazzling fall foliage. After all, what do little goblins and witches care about cultural history and jaw-dropping natural beauty? This is Halloween in Bryson City, North Carolina, and the name of the game is "fill those bags with trick-or-treat goodies"!

"It just gets bigger every year," says Tammra Cetin, Bryson City's finance officer. "They come from all over the countryside in full costume - both kids and their parents. It's a way that merchants show their appreciation to the public." By all appearances, the merchants are having as much fun as the visitors. "It's one of the best things the town has done," beams a costumed Diana Clampitt, who is handing out goodies in front of Clampitt's Hardware. "That gypsy across the street, the one surrounded by all the kids... that's my sister," smiles Clampitt. "She really gets into this."

The Most Fun You Can Have in Broad Daylight. Besides the picturesque setting in the Smoky Mountains, the most unusual aspect of this Halloween scene is that it takes place in the afternoon - not the dark of night. The festivities start at 3 p.m. and end at 6 p.m. on the last Friday before Halloween. "Since it takes place during the day," says Cetin, "it's a very safe environment." There's even a healthy aspect to the celebration. In the past, there has been involvement by the Swain County Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the Fire and Police departments. So in addition to the usual Tootsie Rolls and M&Ms, the kids will bag toothbrushes and pencils, and reminders to stay away from drugs. This is a family-friendly celebration all the way.

The Great Pumpkin Patch Express. The Halloween fun in Swain County isn't restricted to just one afternoon. Each October weekend before Halloween, Great Smoky Mountains Railroad presents Peanuts™ - The Great Pumpkin Patch Express. Costumed kids and parents gather at the old Bryson City Depot and board the train along with Peanuts™ characters Snoopy, Charlie Brown and Lucy. Their destination is the legendary Pumpkin Patch, 40 minutes away by rail.

"The kids really love the Peanuts™ Pumpkin Patch," says Great Smoky Mountains Railroad General Manager, Kim Albritton. "We have Violet's Halloween Party, hayrides, a petting zoo, face painting, live music and bobbing for apples all in the theme, 'It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown.' And it all takes place in the safety of daylight." That may be true, but kids can still get an authentic "nighttime" experience when they enter the blackout tent for trick-or-treating on the popular cartoon set in the specially constructed Halloween trick-or-treat street.

It's Frightfully Beautiful. Even if the kids are totally absorbed in Halloween fun, parents can't help but notice the amazing color show that's taking place all around them. Swain County is 87 percent national park and forest lands, and with so many hardwoods blanketing the mountains, the colors are truly breathtaking. "Even when you're preoccupied with pumpkins, games and candy," says Karen Wilmot, director of the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, "you can't miss the spectacular fall colors. If there's a better place to celebrate Halloween, I can't imagine where it would be."

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800.867.9246.