



Actors in zombie costumes live up the atmosphere at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant in the Saudi capital Riyadh's Boulevard entertainment city. — AFP photos



A woman takes pictures of a skeleton model seated at her table at the horror-themed 'Shadows' restaurant.



Actors in zombie costumes live up the atmosphere.

Dining with the undead in Saudi



A zombie model is seated at a table with diners.

A restaurant in Saudi Arabia is offering patrons in the conservative kingdom a unique experience—dishes with a side of skull and blood in the company of zombies and vampires. The restaurant, "Shadows", caters to horror film buffs with strong stomachs, allowing them to savor their dishes while staff in gory costumes put on interactive shows. It's located in the Boulevard entertainment district of the capital Riyadh and has opened as the Gulf country seeks to soften its image. "I came here to have fun and laugh... but the atmosphere and the shows are actually very scary," one diner, Nora al-Assad, told AFP. "I've lost my

appetite," added the 26-year-old who works in human resources, as a waiter presented her meal on a tray with a smiling black skull.

Her friend, Jawaher Abdullah, a doctor, was more than thrilled to wolf down her dinner. "I like horror in general... I think the atmosphere is great and lots of fun," she said, before taking a selfie with a performer with a fake bleeding chest wound. For businessman Sleiman Al-Amri, the restaurant experience caters to his hunger for a good adrenaline rush. "We're always looking for new and exciting things to do in Riyadh," said the 45-year-old, dining with his family.

Amri, donning the traditional dishdasha robe, added: "Going to restaurants used to be about eating, getting full, chatting, and we'd go back home. "But now we are eating, we are enjoying our time—and we're also terrified." The rise of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in 2017 has ushered many sweeping reforms, with the kingdom opening its doors to tourists in 2020. In the past, Saudis would have to go abroad for entertainment, but a social shift—including the opening of cinemas and mixed-gender concerts—has changed the local dynamic. — AFP



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Elton John tests positive for COVID-19, postpones Dallas shows

Pop megastar Elton John on Tuesday postponed two concerts in Dallas—part of what is expected to be a lengthy farewell tour—after testing positive for COVID-19. "It's always a massive disappointment to move shows and I'm so sorry to anyone who's been inconvenienced by this but I want to keep myself and my team safe," said the British musician, 74, in a statement on social media. "Fortunately, I'm fully vaccinated and

boosted and my symptoms are mild." The concerts, part of John's "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour, were scheduled for January 25 and January 26. Both John and the American Airlines Center, where the shows were to take place, said they will be rescheduled and fans should keep their tickets.

John said he expected to be healthy enough to play his show on January 29 in Little Rock, Arkansas. The tour, which is anticipated to be Sir Elton's last, has run into pandemic-era cancellations and postponements, like many other performing arts events. The pop legend also recently had a hip operation that forced him to push back several dates. Last year, John released an album entitled "The Lockdown Sessions," which was recorded entirely under COVID-19 restrictions. — AFP



In this file photo Elton John performs onstage during the 92nd Annual Academy Awards at Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Art Basel wins Paris slot over France's own art fair

The French art world was shaken Wednesday by news that the Art Basel fair has swooped in to replace France's own, long-running FIAC at the Grand Palais in Paris. The shock decision comes at a time when Paris is regaining its place as a pre-eminent center for art in the world, helped by a slew of new museums and the impact of Brexit on its main rival London. FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain) has been running for nearly half a century as France's leading international art fair, almost all that time at the Grand Palais, the illustrious glass-and-steel exhibition hall on the Champs-Élysées.

But it has lost its slot for the next seven years following a surprise bid in November from Art Basel, the international market-leader that is part-owned by billionaire investor James Murdoch and already has annual fairs in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong. RMN-GP, the French authority that oversees several museums including the Grand Palais, responded by putting FIAC's October dates up for tender along with the Paris Photo fair in November, both owned by French-Dutch group RX. On Wednesday, the authority announced its decision to grant the art fair slot to Art Basel's owner, the Swiss firm MCH. Paris Photo will, however, remain in RX's hands.

'Dynamism'

Murdoch, son of the media mogul Rupert, holds a controlling stake in MCH, and was reportedly a key driver behind the takeover move in Paris. "James Murdoch is very enthusiastic about this project. He will help us in every way possible," Art Basel's global director Marc Spiegler told AFP by phone. "No other town in Europe has this combination of art market dynamism and cultural importance," he added. "We want to make a very strong fair at the highest international level and create ties with different cultural sectors such as cinema, fashion, music and design."

FIAC had warned of the "danger" of handing its slot to a huge global player like Art Basel. The decision worries small galleries in Paris, who were strongly supported by FIAC with around a third of the slots every year. "It is part of a wider shake-up of the terrain, beyond just

France, with a concentration in the hands of the big players," said Marion Papillon, head of the Paris galleries association.

'Not just a satellite'

Chris Dercon, president of RMN-GP, said there was pressure from gallery owners, collectors and artists to come up with more innovative models for art fairs. "Nothing can compare to Art Basel's address book at a time when Paris is regaining a strong place globally in contemporary art," he told AFP. RMN-GP insisted that the new fair would not be "just a satellite of the Basel fair" and that it will have its own branding, yet to be decided. They also vowed to ensure that the price of a stall at the new fair "would not explode" for local galleries. — AFP



This file photograph shows visitors at the Paris International Contemporary Art Fair (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain - FIAC) at The Grand Palais, in Paris. — AFP