

Six virtual reality experiences that don't cost too much

November 18 2016, by The Associated Press



Marisa Ferrito, right, and her mother Michele Ferrito prepare to enter a virtual reality experience called "Ghostbusters: Dimension" at Madame Tussauds in New York, Aug. 4, 2016. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

Virtual reality, what's up with that? If you are curious about this highly

buzzed high-tech form of entertainment but don't feel like plunking down \$1,000 or more on sophisticated hardware, just visit one of a slew of amusement-park-type rides popping up around the world.

These experiences let you shoot aliens while riding a real-life roller coaster , cook a meal with a Japanese heartthrob or cozy up to players and cheerleaders at a baseball game.

One day, home VR systems will likely be common enough to make VR destinations unnecessary, just as video-game arcades are now rare. For now, though, these public attractions offer your best chance at giving you a taste of VR.

ROLLING WITH VR

At Six Flags theme parks in the U.S., the price of regular admission—roughly \$50—gives you access to a roller coaster redone with [virtual reality](#) overlaid on top.

At Magic Mountain near Los Angeles, that means strapping on a Samsung Gear VR headset to battle virtual alien invaders while in real life you're hurtling around a 40-year-old track of twisted steel. You don't steer or aim really, but you can look around the world as your ship blasts aliens in foreign spaceships.

It's a mind-blowing experience that combines a fictional futuristic setting with actual sensations you can get only from having your body tossed around. Check it out: youtu.be/d-uKEC1JWDk .



In this June 27, 2016 photo, riders put on headsets that give them a 360 degree view of an animation synched with the coaster's movements at The New Revolution, a virtual reality roller coaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, Calif. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Christine Armario)

Pro tip: Go around twice, once with the headset on and once without, and decide for yourself which scares you more.

— Ryan Nakashima, AP Business Writer, Santa Clarita, California.

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VIRTUAL HEARTTHROB

Fans of Japanese heartthrob actor Kento Yamazaki have to pinch themselves to keep from kissing him when he leans in with lazy machismo at a virtual-reality event in Tokyo.

In one restaurant scene presented by Fuji TV on Sony's PlayStation VR headgear, you've just cooked a pasta dish. Yamazaki, a squeeze from the hit TV show "When There is Someone You Love," condescendingly but lovingly tells you it could use a squeeze of lemon.

He then brings the pasta-wrapped fork to your mouth. Cue melted hearts.



In this June 27, 2016, photo, Associated Press business writer Ryan Nakashima prepares to ride The New Revolution, a virtual reality roller coaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, Calif. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it.

(AP Photo/Christine Armario)

In another scene, you are side by side with him on a balcony, looking up at the moon and stars. It's hokey and predictable, but a must-feel outing for fans.

The experience was part of a summer festival that cost 2,000 yen (about \$18). Though you missed this one, Fuji TV is already planning others and has demonstrated VR dating with a TV show announcer.

— Yuri Kageyama, AP Business Writer, Tokyo

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WHO ARE YOU GOING TO CALL?

Madame Tussaud's Ghostbusters.

Experience what it's like to be a Ghostbuster who zaps ghosts.



In this June 27, 2016, photo, riders enjoy The New Revolution, a virtual reality roller coaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, Calif. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Christine Armario)

A \$55 ticket gives museum goers entry to the 15-minute VR experience, too (normal admission is about \$30). Strap on a "proton pack"—a cleverly hidden VR computer—like Ghostbusters wear in the eponymous movies. Then grab a particle thrower, wear a VR headset and start blasting ghosts.

Up to three people can go through the experience together. Through the headset, your friends become (white, male) avatars of Ghostbusters. A dingy New York apartment is soon teeming with ghosts. Firing your particle thrower wraps a stream of protons around them, just like in the movie. After entering a dim elevator, Slimer rushes toward you, and

before you know it, you've been slimed.

And as you and your teammates vanquish the Stay Puft marshmallow man, the smell of burnt marshmallow hangs in the air.

—Mae Anderson, AP Technology Writer, New York

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PLAY BALL

With 10 VR cameras near first and third bases, fans of the KT Wiz baseball team can get up close to the players and cheerleaders.



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The technology isn't perfect. The camera placements don't make you feel as though you're on the mound, while fuzzy resolution masks which way the ball is headed and makes the scoreboard difficult to see. And a transmission delay means seeing plays on the Samsung Gear VR some 15 seconds after everyone else around you.

"It was good to see the players close," said Choi Eun-young, 40, clad in a Wiz uniform and black wizard hat. "But baseball games are the best when you come in person."

It's worth a try, though, if you want to experience South Korean baseball's festive culture and see the live K-pop dance up-close. Baseball in Korea is the equivalent of a live outdoor concert; cheerleaders perform to K-pop songs on stage, and the rest of the stadium becomes a giant picnic with family and friends.

There's no charge beyond the regular admission to the game, which starts at 10,000 won (about \$8.50). But the experience is by invitation only and is meant for local, Korean-speaking fans. KT Corp., which owns the team, selects four or five families based on their messages about why they want a seat there.

Though the baseball season is over, KT says VR will likely return next year.

— Youkyung Lee, AP Technology Writer, Suwon, South Korea



The Ferrito family dons headgear and other items in preparation to enter a virtual reality experience called "Ghostbusters: Dimension" at Madame Tussauds in New York, Aug. 4, 2016. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

NOT IF YOU'RE AFRAID OF HEIGHTS ...

You can display your virtual courage in Tokyo by rescuing a mewling cat perched on a wooden plank that balances from the edge of a skyscraper.

Walking out on the plank includes one heart-stopping moment where the

wood appears to bend slightly beneath your feet with the virtual sky stretching in all directions. Some participants were so freaked out they got on their hands and knees—for real—to keep going.

A fuzzy object that feels like a dead dog gets placed in your hands if you make it to the end. That's the extent of the illusion. If you're not convinced, you may feel like dropping the thing into the virtual abyss below.

The cat rescue is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot.

Each experience in VR Zone: Project I Can cost 700 yen (about \$6.30) to 1,000 yen (\$9). This one's over, but expect more like it to come.

— Yuri Kageyama, AP Business Writer, Tokyo



The Ferrito family, including Michele Ferrito, second from left, dons headgear and other items in preparation to enter a virtual reality experience called "Ghostbusters: Dimension" at Madame Tussauds in New York, Thursday, Aug. 4, 2016. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

TAKING A DIVE

At London's Natural History Museum, visitors can travel beneath the waves and explore the breathtaking Great Barrier Reef through virtual reality.

The museum's reef dive VR experience sits headset wearers next to British nature broadcaster Sir David Attenborough in a state-of-the-art submersible as it slowly descends to the ocean floor off the coast of Australia. There are vibrant coral reefs, darting fish and silhouetted scuba divers against the blue ocean.

Museum officials say they aren't worried these experiences might one day replace traditional museums.

"We see this as a real opportunity to show specimens in a new way, and we don't see it as replacing the amazing immersive experience you have when you come," says Celena Bretton, the museum's digital media strategy manager.

The 15-minute David Attenborough's Great Barrier Reef Dive

experience costs 6.50 British pounds (\$8). The museum admission is free.

—James Brooks, AP Writer, London



John Ferrito looks through his head gear before entering a virtual reality experience called "Ghostbusters: Dimension" at Madame Tussauds in New York, on Aug. 4, 2016. People who are curious about virtual reality but don't want to plunk down \$1,000 or more on hardware are increasingly getting the chance to test out the medium for a price. From roller coaster rides to baseball games, VR can bring a new level of reality or simply detract from it. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)



In this May 31, 2016 photo, a visitor, wearing a U.S. maker HTC's Vive headset, plays "Fear of Heights Show" to rescue a mewling cat perched on a wooden plank that balances from the edge of a skyscraper at the "VR Zone Project i Can" virtual reality experimental entertainment facility in Tokyo. The cat rescue is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



In this May 31, 2016 photo, visitors, wearing U.S. maker HTC's Vive headsets, operate giant robots as they play battles at the "VR Zone Project i Can" virtual reality experimental entertainment facility in Tokyo. The giant robot is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



In this May 31, 2016 photo, visitors, wearing U.S. maker HTC's Vive headsets, react to a horror experience while they play at the "VR Zone Project i Can" virtual reality experimental entertainment facility in Tokyo. The horror experience is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



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In this May 31, 2016 photo, a visitor, wearing a U.S. maker HTC's Vive headset, plays the "Ski Rodeo," a skiing simulator, at the "VR Zone Project i Can" virtual reality experimental entertainment facility in Tokyo. The "Ski Rodeo" is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



In this May 31, 2016 photo, visitors arrive at the "VR Zone Project i Can" virtual reality experimental entertainment facility in Tokyo. You can display your virtual courage in Tokyo by rescuing a mewling cat perched on a wooden plank that balances from the edge of a skyscraper. The cat rescue is one of eight VR experiences created by game-maker Bandai Namco for HTC's Vive headset. Another entails shooting flying robotic spaceships with a manga-like female character as your co-pilot. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

More information: AP writer Ryan Nakashima rides a VR coaster:
youtu.be/d-uKEC1JWDk

Six Flags' Magic Mountain:
<https://www.sixflags.com/magicmountain/attractions/vr/overview>

Odaiba summer park (in Japanese)
www.fujitv.co.jp/yumetairiku/index.html

Ghostbusters in New York: ghostbusters.madametussauds.com

KT Wiz site (in Korean): www.ktwiz.co.kr

Tokyo's VR Zone (in Japanese): project-ican.com

London reef dive: www.nhm.ac.uk/reefdiveVR

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Citation: Six virtual reality experiences that don't cost too much (2016, November 18) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-virtual-reality-dont.html>

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