

'Hotel Transylvania 3' Review: Another Sharp Sequel Reminds Humanity Not to Be Monstrous

Adam Sandler and his spooky pals take a "Summer Vacation" and remind us all of the power of acceptance and understanding.



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Even on a good day, it's easy to feel like America has turned into a horror movie, where the terrors of "The Purge" franchise feel all too real outside of the theater. The need to escape to the movies looms large this summer, not just to beat the heat, but to feel good again. "[Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation](#)" delivers this and more, promising a great time for children, parents, and fans of the funny franchise. But it also holds a timely message — one of acceptance, love, and tolerance of those different from us — that is especially needed right now.

Director Genndy Tartakovsky returns to the "Hotel Transylvania" franchise for the third time, despite initial reports that he would be moving on to new projects. Tartakovsky brings back all the threads that have made the first two entries so loved, but the animation feels even more stunning than ever, thanks in part to the film's aquatic locales. But be forewarned, "Hotel Transylvania 3" takes a very decided stance on whether or not "La Macarena" is evil, and the summer dance craze of yesteryear just might make a comeback. Or maybe not. Kids have short-term memories these days, right?

"Summer Vacation" kicks off with a short prequel, which introduces Dracula's ([Adam Sandler](#)) long-time nemesis, Abraham Van Helsing (Jim Gaffigan), whose mission has long been to wipe out Dracula and his monster friends from the planet. Of course, Van Helsing doesn't prevail, and as Dracula easily disposes of him once again, he imagines what it would be like for monsters to be able to take a vacation somewhere nice.

Back in the present day, that place has become Hotel Transylvania, which Dracula and his beloved daughter Mavis ([Selena Gomez](#)) have turned into the premier spot for monsters to vacation and get married. But wedding planning and attending to everyone else's relaxation needs gets tiring, and most of all, Dracula is lonely. He longs to meet someone new, but as he explains to his friends, monsters only "zing," or find true love, once. With Mavis' mother now gone, Dracula believes he's destined to be alone forever.

Mavis, misinterpreting her father's loneliness for exhaustion, books the entire family onto a monster cruise as a chance to relax and spend some quality time together. Once on the ship, Dracula is enamored with the ship's captain, Ericka ([Kathryn Hahn](#)), and much to his surprise, he "zings" and is completely unable to speak, turning his speech into classic Sandler gobbledygook that Ericka tries to imitate, mistaking it for Transylvanian. It's just one funny moment in a film filled with laughs for parents and kids alike.

Naturally, Ericka is harboring a dark secret: She is really the great-granddaughter of Dracula's nemesis, Van Helsing, and the two are scheming to steer the entire ship full of monsters towards their doom, to the lost city of Atlantis, where a secret weapon awaits in the ocean's depths. But Mavis isn't quite comfortable with the idea of her father finding romance, and her suspicions of Ericka, paired with the fact that a "zing" never lies, could throw a few wrenches into the sinister plans.

Even in a franchise with two solid films under its belt, "Hotel Transylvania 3" might be the best of the bunch. For his part, Sandler always seems to be having fun making the films, which have now become a family affair with the voice work of his daughter, Sadie, as the adorable werewolf Winnie. While Sandler is undoubtedly a gifted serious actor who makes audiences long for more roles like last year's "The Meyerowitz Stories," the truth is when Sandler actually wants to make you laugh, he'll easily succeed. "Hotel Transylvania 3" is another reminder of why Sandler became a star in the first place. Even when the jokes aren't laugh-out loud funny, they always make you smile.

In a time when lighthearted happiness seems hard to come by, "Summer Vacation" feels like another welcome entry in [what IndieWire's Senior Film Critic David Ehrlich has termed "nicecore" films](#): movies like "Paddington 2" and "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" that have popped up during the Age of Trump and inspire audiences to choose kindness over conflict.

From the very beginning, the "Hotel Transylvania" franchise has espoused the "nicecore" philosophy, as Dracula overcomes centuries of hatred and prejudice against humans, who murdered his wife due to their own misconceptions about monsters. This initially leads him to accept Mavis' love for Johnny (Andy Samberg), but throughout the franchise Dracula and those around him have chosen tolerance, empathy, and understanding when it comes to humans. In the second film, Dracula's father Vlad (Mel Brooks) learns this lesson, and it's once again front and center in "Summer Vacation."

To be sure, this recurring theme means the plot of "Hotel Transylvania 3" is predictable, but that's not really the point of the film. With plenty of laughs, truly dazzling animation, and some more of the franchise's signature dance sequences, "Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation" is a summer treat worth savoring, and a reminder that if we can see past our differences, we'll find we're not that different after all.

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