

New York Celebrates Opening Of World Trade Center Deck

By Agence France-Presse

Testament to the regeneration of New York, 15 years after the 9/11 attacks, is the new observation deck at the World Trade Center, offering spectacular views across the city.

"We are back, 100 percent," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio told CBS television in a special program broadcast atop the observation deck that covers the 100th, 101st and 102nd floors of the gleaming glass tower.

"It's a great moment, it really says that we have turned the corner once and for all, and those that sought to attack us, lost once again."

The observation deck opens to the general public next Friday. The tallest office building in the Western hemisphere, the Trade Center, also known as Freedom Tower, welcomed its first tenants last year.

Built on the site of buildings destroyed in the September 11, 2001 attacks, it was constructed to a total height, antenna included, of 1,776 feet, to honor the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Operators expect three to four million visitors a year will take in the 360-degree views at 1,250 feet (380 meters) from the Statue of Liberty, to Central Park, Brooklyn Bridge and New Jersey to the west.

On a clear day, you can see for 50 miles (80 kilometers) says David Checketts, chairman and chief executive officer of Legends, the company which operates the observatory.

"We can start to see the curve of the earth on a clear day," he told AFP during a visit to the deck Wednesday.

It was a panorama that many never expected to see again, and which Checketts said is testament to the resilience of New Yorkers.

"This is like a fist bump, saying we put it back up and the construction and restoration of neighborhoods around downtown make it really feel like New York is back," he told AFP.

- 3D view –

The elevator -- one of the quickest in the world -- takes 47 seconds to reach the 102nd floor and is a journey in itself.

Floor-to-ceiling LED technology provides visitors with a virtual time-lapse that recreates the development of the city's skyline from the 1600s to present day.

Once in the observatory, visitors are welcomed with a two-minute video that combines time-lapse shots with abstract textures and patterns to present the rhythm and pulse of the city in 3D.

On the 101st floor there is a restaurant, a grill and a cafe, and a place to have photographs taken against the backdrop.

Those who don't get queasy with vertigo can step out onto a sky portal -- a 14-foot wide disc that uses real-time, high-definition footage to give a view of the streets below.

Visitors are subject to tough security measures similar to those at airports, or indeed at other public buildings in New York.

"It is the strongest and most secure building perhaps on the earth," said Checketts. The observatory will compete with two other popular viewing sites in the city: the Empire State Building, which stays open until 2 am and which last year welcomed more than three million visitors, and the Rockefeller Center, visited by 2.5 million and open until midnight.

Standard entry is \$32 for adults, \$30 for seniors and \$26 for children. The observatory will be open seven days a week from 9am to midnight until September 7, and from 9am to 8pm until May 5.

It is free for relatives of the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks and to first responders to the disaster.

In total 2,753 people were killed at the World Trade Center site when Al-Qaeda hijacked two passenger jets and flew them into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.