

One World Trade Center Observation Deck Offers Incredible Views, Emotional Historical Journey (VIDEO)

By Barry Paddock

When the observation deck of One World Trade Center opens next week, the public is in store for more than just an elevator ride up the city's tallest building.

Visitors to the 104-story skyscraper will be greeted by emotional recorded testimony from construction workers who built the tower along with spectacular views.

Guests will also be offered a virtual recreation of 500 years of Manhattan topography, complete with a journey through replicated bedrock.

"We use technology to make your visit here that much more interesting," said David Checketts, chairman and CEO of Legends, the company that created the observatory experience on the 100th to 102nd floors, the highest in the Western Hemisphere.

The high-tech bedazzlement will start the moment visitors' tickets are scanned on opening day, May 29.

The country or state they're visiting from will pop up on a globe that fills a giant wall-sized lobby video screen along with some fast facts: How many other visitors have come from that country or state, how many different countries visitors hail from and the most popular country of origin of the day.

Another video screen offers welcome greetings in the native language of each visitor, and even shows images of Chinatown to tourists from China, Little Italy to those from Italy and so on.

After this, visitors enter a corridor covered with dozens more video screens displaying the faces of people who designed and built the skyscraper, surrounded by images of it going up, being ravaged by Hurricane Sandy and even the spire being lowered into place.

"It was the job of a lifetime," one worker beams.

"A piece of me is in this building," another says.

"My kids can tell their kids, 'My daddy did that,' " one tough-looking construction worker adds.

The destruction of the twin towers is the obvious context for much of what is said — but not overtly mentioned.

"This is about looking forward and moving forward — with courage and resilience," Checketts said.

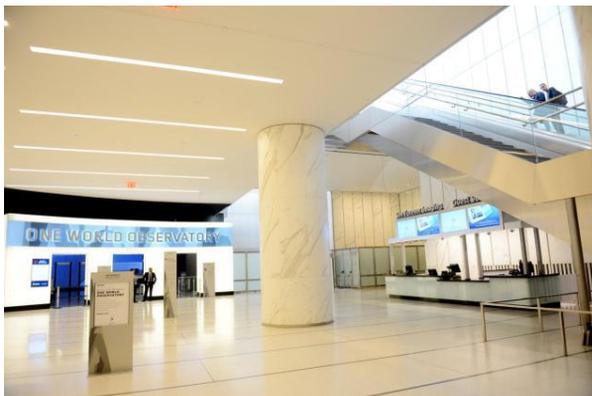
Guests exit the hallway and enter what looks like a cave — a winding tunnel through simulated Manhattan schist, the bedrock of the tower.



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS The experience opens to the public on May 29.

The tunnel opens to a sleek elevator lobby where visitors take a 47-second ride up 1,250 feet. During the brief, ear-popping ride, video screens that make up the walls of each of the six elevators show Manhattan evolving over 500 years — from wilderness through the rise and fall of the Twin Towers and the completion of One World Trade Center.

The building welcomed its first commercial tenant in November, after 13 years of torturous delays and stop-and-start construction.



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS The observatory experience stretches from the 100th to the 102nd floors.

When the doors open on the Freedom Tower's 102nd floor, there is no view in sight.

Instead visitors enter the See Forever Theater, where on a massive multi-paneled video screen molded into the shape of a skyline and filling an entire corridor wall they watch yet another brief video. This one offers an impressionistic view of the city, a head-spinning blur of familiar city landmarks and scenes of everyday life, like two elderly men sitting on a brownstone stoop and kids playing in a fountain.



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Visitors can easily explore the observation deck's three floors.

Thundering music reaches a crescendo and the screen panels lift into the ceiling to reveal floor-to-ceiling glass windows and — at last — the actual view uptown.

"When it's revealed to that music, we have a lot of people get emotional," Checketts said about early guests. "We want to move people."

Between now and the public opening, schoolchildren and workers who toiled on the tower will be given special tours.

On the day the Daily News got a sneak peek, clouds were heavy and visibility was zero.

The widows revealed nothing but white haze. There are no outdoor balconies like at the Empire State Building.

But the clouds eventually thinned and a dramatic view gradually revealed itself. Traffic zipping across the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. The Woolworth Building, once the tallest building in the world, was now dwarfed by the Freedom Tower.

"On a clear day you can see beyond New Jersey to Pennsylvania," Checketts said.

"Some say they can see the curvature of the earth."



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS The "conciierge" stands in a ring of interactive video screens, filled with tweets, Instagram photos and listings of city events.

Tickets, \$32 for adults, come with specific entry times — but once inside visitors can linger as long as they wish.

Sightseers can wander the rest of the observatory, which stretches sleekly over three floors and features a casual grab-and-go cafe, a bar and a high-end steakhouse — all with stunning views.

If visitors somehow tire of the views, there are still more technological features to explore.

Greeting tourists, a "conciierge" stands in a ring of interactive video screens filled with live tweets, Instagram photos and listings of events from around the city.



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Tickets come with specific entry times, but visitors can linger as long as they wish.

A nearby 14-foot circle in the floor, dubbed the Sky Portal, shows live video taken from cameras on the roof looking down the side of the tower.

"You can walk on it as if you're walking on steel beams and looking down," Checketts said. "This is to address the people who want to stick their head out of a tall building and look down."

The observatory will be open 365 days a year. Advance tickets are on sale at oneworldobservatory.com or by calling (844) 696-1776. Tickets can also be purchased at the One World Trade Center lobby box office, open daily from 8 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.