

One World Trade Center Observatory Unveiled



Tim Fleischer has an inside look.

By The Associated Press

From the top of One World Trade Center, the nation's tallest building, it really does seem as if you can "see forever."

Those two words are the motto of the center's new observatory that opens May 29, offering spectacular, wraparound views stretching 50 miles past the Manhattan skyline and Statue of Liberty to the Atlantic Ocean.

But even when the 1,776-foot building disappears into the clouds, as it did on a recent day, there are still plenty of high-tech videos and multimedia displays that reflect the hope and optimism of a building and a city that rose from the ruins of the nation's deadliest terror attack.

"This is a reminder of moving forward," said David Checketts, the CEO of Legends, which operates the \$86 million observatory atop the 104-story skyscraper. "The World Trade Center got knocked down and we built it back up."

Visitors who enter the One World Observatory - its official name - encounter a delicate balance of future and past, with only brief references to the twin towers that were slammed by terrorist-hijacked planes on Sept. 11, 2001, killing more than 2,700 people.



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Just above the street-level entrance, faces of men and women who toiled to erect the mammoth, gleaming tower appear in a jagged tunnel that replicates the trade center's bedrock, their recorded voices filled with both pain and pride.

And during the lightning-fast, 48-second elevator ride up to the 102nd floor, a three-dimensional, time-lapse panorama shows 515 years of history at the tip of Manhattan, with the twin towers appearing for less than four seconds before dissolving out of view.

Stepping from the elevator, visitors are greeted with display panels showing 3-D, bird's eye scenes of the metropolis. The panels then lift to reveal New York City - right now.

There's another display called "City Pulse," a ring of high-definition video monitors marking popular city activities, neighborhoods and "hot spots." A wave of the hand in the direction of any of these subjects opens the latest details on everything from sports and theater to the best pizza locations. For an additional \$15, visitors may use iPads that scan the skyline, popping up imagery and information narrated by novelist Jay McInerney.

There's no need to creep to observatory's edge for a dizzying view of the city about a quarter-mile below. Visitors can stand on a round video platform that shows an actual livestream of the view straight down.

And perhaps the most hair-raising moment of the whole visit is the elevator ride down. LED screens surrounding passengers simulate the flight of a bird or plane high above the site, dipping and soaring around the skyscrapers all the way back to the ground.

The observatory is open to adults for \$32, and less for seniors and children - comparable to Empire State Building fees. Tickets may be purchased online, for a precise time to avoid overcrowding.

Checketts, who expects about 3 million to 4 million visitors a year, said the symbolic importance of the building makes a visit to the observatory a special experience.

"I was just looking out at the Statue of Liberty, and frankly, I got emotional about it," he said of his first visit. "It's this point in New York, in this city that we all love and it's rebuilt. It's back up."