

# Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island

## Introduction

Hi! I'm Katherine with Free Tours by Foot, here to take you on a tour of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Our tour will begin at Castle Clinton in Battery Park. The nearest subways are the 4 and 5 trains at Bowling Green, the 1 train at South Ferry, and the R train at Whitehall Street. Listen to the "Things to Know clip prior to leaving for the Statue. Feel free to listen to the history of the Statue of Liberty Clip before you go as well, or while you wait on line for the ferry. Doing this entire tour should take between 3-4 hours.

## Things To Know

There are just a few things you should know in advance, to make your trip go as smoothly as possible. First, you should consider purchasing your tickets in advance, which can be done online. This is especially important if you wish to enter the pedestal or the crown of the statue, as these tickets are in more limited supply. Tickets for crown access can sell out weeks in advance, so best to plan ahead!

Buying a ticket for a specific date and time will also allow you to wait in the Reserve Ticketing line rather than the Flex Ticketing line, which moves faster. You can show reserved tickets right on a Smartphone, so no need to print them out or wait in ticketing lines at Castle Clinton.

You should consider stopping to use the restrooms at Castle Clinton before getting in line. There are restrooms on the ferry and on both islands, but depending on the season, you may wait in line for a bit.

Be prepared to go through airport-style security before getting on the ferry. You will not be allowed to bring open beverages through security, so finish up your coffee before you enter! Large bags are not permitted in the Statue pedestal or in the Ellis Island museum, so try to travel as lightly as you can if you want to avoid having to put things in a locker.

Once you are past security, the line to wait for the ferry is outdoors and uncovered, so dress for the weather. The ferry goes to both islands- first stop, The Statue of Liberty!

## A Brief History

The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from the people of France. It is said to have been inspired by conversations between Eduoard Rene de Laboulaye, a French political figure, and Sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi. Laboulaye was a staunch abolitionist who was cheered by the union Victory in the American Civil War- bringing them one step closer the promises of freedom and democracy. He is said to have commented that if a monument to liberty in the United States were ever to be erected, it would only be natural that it be a joint venture of the United States and France. He hoped it would inspire the French to throw off their current oppressive monarchy in favor of democracy. Bartholdi would later recount these conversations as his inspiration. Bartholdi was fascinated by the idea of massive statues- modern day

incarnations of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. He had previously made a proposal to Egypt for a massive structure called Egypt Bringing the Light to Asia, but it was declined due to cost. He decided to turn his attention to the idea of a statue for the United States, and, along with Laboulaye, sailed to New York to discuss the project with influential Americans. It was on this journey that he spotted what was then called Bedloe's Island. He was struck by the fact that you had to sail by it to get to New York, almost like a gateway. He then learned that it was owned by the US government, and the plan began to take shape. He met with President Ulysses S Grant on that trip, who assured him that he could secure the site for the statue. Bartholdi crisscrossed the country on that trip, trying to gauge potential interest in the project. When he returned to France, he began to make models- the first was made in 1870. He had discussed with Laboulaye the two female figures commonly used to represent the United States in the early years of the country- Columbia, and Liberty- who was derived from the Roman goddess Libertas- the goddess of freedom. The figure of Liberty was a common sight to many Americans in this time period. Her image adorned everything from civic buildings to currency, making her an ideal choice for Bartholdi's vision. Every incarnation of the design had some similarities- a woman in flowing robes, holding a torch aloft. It is said that the statue's eventual face is that of the sculptor's mother, though this has never been confirmed. As support for the project began to grow, Bartholdi decided to officially announce it in 1875- ahead of the Centennial Exposition World's fair in 1876, which was to be held in Philadelphia. The statue was then given its name. though she is almost always called the Statue of Liberty, her official name is Liberty Enlightening the World.

Bartholdi focused on getting the arm and torch assembled, so that it could be put on display at the exposition in Philadelphia. Bartholdi traveled to the US with the completed piece of the statue, and worked during his trip to urge people to form the committees to join the Franco-American Union, the joint venture that would build that statue. When the fair was over, the arm and torch were moved to Madison Square Park in NYC, where it remained for several years. On his last day in office in 1877, President Grant signed a resolution saying the US President would accept the statue when it was finished and offered.

Bartholdi returned to France and continued to work. He finished the head of the statue in time to display it at the Paris World's Fair in 1878. Fundraising began to pick up in France, as the project gained popularity. Selling small models of the statue was a common fundraising method. The image of the statue was commercially licensed and used all over France. Though he had initially hired another engineer, Bartholdi eventually turned to a man who would later become very famous to help design the statue's interior frame- Gustave Eiffel. We will talk more about his contribution once we get to Liberty Island. The statue continued its progress as it was fully assembled in Paris- becoming a well loved sight for locals. It was formally presented upon completion to the US ambassador to France in 1884, but was not sent to New York immediately. The United States was not yet ready to deliver on their end of the project, because the pedestal was not completed. The statue stood in Paris until the pedestal was far enough along. Then it was disassembled, packed into wooden crates, and shipped across the Atlantic. The statue arrived in June 1885, but had to wait in crates until April 1886 because the pedestal was not done. Re-assembly began and moved very quickly, with Eiffel's frame going up, and the copper skin of the statue then hammered into place. Because of the pedestal design, no scaffolding could be used- works had to dangle from ropes to hammer in the thin copper. The statue was completed and officially dedicated October 28, 1886. The dedication ceremony was a massive event, presided over by president Grover Cleveland. The crowds lining the shores and attending the parade going through lower Manhattan were estimated to be about a million people. The statue became a powerful symbol in New York harbor, particularly for arriving immigrants, who were greeted by the statue and her golden torch.

## **Arrival At Liberty Island and Pedestal**

When you exit the ferry, enter straight onto Liberty Island. Go through the Main entrance gates and walk towards the large flagpole straight ahead (this is on the back side of the statue)

The entrance for the pedestal is straight to your right. If you have a ticket for pedestal access, check the upper right-hand corner of your ticket. There may be a specific time listed on it. That is your time window for pedestal entry.

Be prepared to go through another security screening, and remember, no large bags inside the pedestal. There are lockers inside if you need to rent one. Once past security, there is a detailed exhibit inside, including the plaque with the famous Emma Lazarus poem, as well as access to the pedestal viewing platform itself.

There are two options to access the actual viewing platform - elevator or stairs. There are 195 steps to get up there, but if you are physically up for it, I recommend it. The line to wait for the elevator gets pretty long!

The stairs you will walk up are modern, but there is an example of the original cast iron stairs from the 19th-century just at the top of the current stairs.

The pedestal walkway itself is very narrow. Be patient walking around it, especially if it is crowded that day. There may be a wait for some of the best photo spots, but it is absolutely worth it! There are wonderful views of the harbor and the Manhattan skyline up there!

## **Start Liberty Island at Flagpole (Walk and Listen)**

From the flagpole, you will make your way in a clockwise direction around the island. Walk along the path at the edge of Liberty island, enjoying the skyline and harbor views, until you come to a plaque on your right detailing the history of the island itself.

This island was called one of the Oyster islands by the early Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, a reference to the vast oyster beds here and on the surrounding islands, including Ellis Island. The oysters here had been a major food source for local Native American tribes, and continued to feed Dutch and English settlers for many years to come.

In 1667, it was sold to Isaac Bedloe, and became known as Bedloe's Island. Even though the Bedloe estate has not owned the island since 1732, it was officially named Bedloes Island until 1956, when the US Congress renamed it Liberty Island.

After the early Bedloe ownership, the island was used as a private summer residence by a wealthy English colonist and was commandeered to use as a smallpox quarantine zone.

The city of New York bought the island for 1000 pounds in 1756, officially for use as a pest house, where people with infectious diseases such as smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis, and typhus could be housed.

Prior to the American Revolution, housing was built on the island meant for Loyalist refugees who had fled other colonies. This housing burned to the ground in April of 1776, before the war even began.

In 1800, New York officially deeded Bedloes Island to the Federal Government for use as a military fortification.

Continue ahead to the plaque about Fort Wood for more information about the island's military use.

## **Fort Wood**

In 1808, construction began on a granite fort built in the shape of an 11 point star. This fortification could mount 24 guns and was considered a vital part of the defensive fortifications of New York Harbor for the war of 1812.

It turned out that the War of 1812 never came to New York, but the fort remained and was named Fort Wood in 1814, after Lt Colonel Eleazer Derby Wood, who had been killed in a major battle of the recent war.

Plans were made to expand the fort on Bedloes Island, but they were never carried out. By the time the statue of Liberty was gifted to the United States, Fort Wood was out of date and out of use as a military fortification.

But the original 11 point star shape of Fort Wood serves as the foundation for the pedestal and Statue to this day. It was supported as the location for the statue by the artist, Bartholdi himself. He saw potential in this unused fort as a dramatic base for his masterpiece.

Now continue walking around the statue, heading for the spot where you can get a view of the statue straight on. Along the way, you will pass binocular machines on your left, they cost 50 cents if you have some change and want a closer look at anything.

Listen to the next clip with some statistics about the statue while you walk.

## **Stats (Walk and Listen)**

The Statue of Liberty is 151 ft (46m) tall, standing on an 87 ft (26.5m) pedestal. The statue weighs 225 tons.

Each ray of her crown is 9 ft (2.7m) long. The entire statue is covered with thin copper sheets, hammered into place over a metal frame.

Even though the statue looks incredibly solid, the copper is just 3mm thick. If you have any pennies on you, take them out. The copper of the statue is about the thickness of two pennies stacked.

The waist of the statue measures 35ft (10.6m) around, and each of her fingernails is a little larger than an average sheet of computer printer paper. If she were a real woman, she would wear a size 879 in US women's shoe sizes.

## **Statue Viewed from the Front**

From where you are standing now, you can get a perfect view of both the statue and the pedestal. Though the statue was designed by Bartholdi, the pedestal was designed by an American architect Richard Morris Hunt. He was given the commission by the American Committee of the Statue of Liberty, and spent about two years working on the design.

He wanted something that would be harmonious with the statue, but beautiful in its own right. Early design ideas were inspired by the Lighthouse at Alexandria (one of the 7 wonders of the ancients world), and by a medieval castle. Eventually Hunt settled on the tapered, classical design.

Hunt wanted the pedestal to be 114 feet (34.7m) tall, but budget restrictions forced him to scale down a bit. The pedestal was built at 87 feet (26.5 m). Even with scaling it down, the cost of the pedestal was \$270,000. This would be over 6 million today.

Though the statue itself was a gift from France, it was up to the United States to finance the pedestal. By 1885, Fundraising had fallen short of the amount needed, so Joseph Pulitzer did a fundraising drive through his newspaper, the New York World. He promised to print the name of every single donor, even if they gave 1 penny.

This effort raised a little over \$100,000 from 120,000 contributors, and provided the rest of the money needed for the pedestal. The average donation given for the World's fundraising drive was less than 1\$. A kindergarten class from Iowa sent in \$1.35.

Another group of children pooled the money they had saved to go to the circus and sent a dollar. An office errand boy gave 5 cents. This was a true crowdfunding effort.

## Inner Frame

From this spot, you can also get a better appreciation for just how large the statue is. The statue itself is 150 ft tall atop the 87 ft pedestal.

Such a large statue requires a lightweight construction, which was accomplished here using a technique called repousse, which is derived from the French word meaning "to push forward." To do this, very thin sheets of metal are hammered into place over an interior iron skeleton.

Though the statue was designed by Bartholdi, the inner skeleton was created by the famous engineer, Gustave Eiffel. Eiffel began the framework in 1881, and the work took two and a half years.

As famous as Eiffel became because of his later tower, he wasn't Bartholdi's first choice for this project.

Another Frenchman, Eugene Viollet Le Duc was originally hired. Viollet Le Duc was well known at the time and had restored Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. He died just as the project was getting underway, and so they turned to Eiffel.

The statue is very different because of it. Viollet Le Duc's design was on the more old-fashioned side and relied on massive weight to hold the statue up. The inside would have been heavy stone masonry.

The forward-thinking Eiffel designed this combination of central pylon with cross-braced iron bars. He also designed short iron bars to further support the statue's copper skin, while allowing it to move slightly due to changes in temperature and wind.

This support is crucial. Though the copper covering the statue is just 3mm thick, the total weight of it is 62,000 pounds or 28.12 metric tons.

When the inner frame went up during construction, it was said to look like an oil derrick out in New York harbor. The design does work to withstand the winds in the harbor- in high winds, the statue can move up to 3 inches (7.6cm), and the torch moves up to 6 inches (15.2cm).

## **Statues Symbols**

From here you can get a good view of the many symbols of the Statue of Liberty. If you look at the statue's feet, you will see broken shackles. These represent freedom from tyranny.

In her left arm, she holds a tablet bearing the date July 4, 1776, in Roman numerals. This is the date that independence was declared in the United States.

The crown on her head has seven rays in a sunburst pattern, representing the spread of enlightenment and reason in the world. It is also said to represent the 7 seas and the 7 continents. There are 25 windows in the crown, which can be accessed with a specific ticket.

When people think of the symbols of the statue, though, they usually immediately think of the statue's golden torch, of "Liberty Enlightening the World" the original name of the statue.

The torch you see today is actually not the original, it was replaced in 1984 with new copper covered in thin 24 kt gold leaf, giving it the shine you can see now. There is a balcony around the torch, but it has not been opened to visitors since 1916.

Of all of the many artistic works about the Statue of Liberty, none so best encapsulate all of these symbols as "The New Colossus," by Emma Lazarus.

People all across the globe are now familiar with the lines "Give Me Your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The full sonnet is 14 lines long and was written by Lazarus to aid in the effort to raise funds for the statue's pedestal. The sonnet was later inscribed on a plaque and hung inside the pedestal of the statue.

Now continue walking in a clockwise direction, moving back around toward where you began.

## **Why is She Green? (Walk + Listen)**

Though we have talked about the copper skin of the statue, as you are making your way around, you may be wondering- why is it green?

When copper is exposed to oxygen, it undergoes a process called oxidization. A fine crust begins to form, to protect the metal underneath- typically this crust is green when it forms on copper or bronze. That is why some older rooftops- like the domes you will see at Ellis Island- appear green.

This is a slow process. The Statue of Liberty began to appear green about 30 years after it was completed. Most New Yorkers and visitors now couldn't picture her any other way!

When you have finished on Liberty Island, make your way back to the ferry dock.

The next stop on every ferry from Liberty Island will be Ellis Island. You can listen to a brief history of Ellis Island while you are waiting for and riding the ferry.

## Ellis Island Background

**Directions: Listen to this clip as you wait for the ferry from Liberty Island to Ellis Island or while aboard said ferry.**

Immigration into the United States was not officially recorded until the 1850s. Processing for new arrivals in those days occurred at Castle Clinton, where you got on the ferry at Battery Park. New arrivals were processed there until 1892 when Ellis Island was opened as the first federal Immigration processing center.

The island in New York Harbor was a popular spot for gathering oysters in the days when Native American tribes lived in New York. For this reason, this island other like it were called the Oyster Islands when Dutch settlers arrived in the 17th century.

During the British colonial period, the island was purchased by Samuel Ellis, leading to its current name.

After the American Revolution, ownership of the island passed to New York State, and eventually to the federal government, who used it for military purposes in the early 1800's much like Liberty Island.

Over the years, the island was built out by landfill- the original size was just over 3 acres. It remained in military use for over 80 years, until it was repurposed for immigration.

The first processing depot opened January 1, 1892. It is said that the first immigrant processed there was a teenager from Ireland named Annie Moore. 700 people were processed on the very first day.

The entire original structure was made of wood and was entirely destroyed in a fire just 5 years later, along with many immigration records. The new Ellis Island processing depot opened in 1900, and the buildings were touted as being fireproof.

Though the design was acclaimed, the biggest issue ended up being the size. The building was created to accommodate 500,000 people per year. But this was the beginning of a massive influx of immigrants into the United States. From 1905- 1914, an average of 1 million people per year arrived.

Ellis Island was constantly overcrowded. In 1901, the island was expanded again, and Island No. 2 was created. The Ellis Island Immigration Hospital opened on Island No 2 in 1902. Built originally for just 125 beds, they often needed to accommodate 200 patients or more every day.

The busiest year recorded at Ellis Island was 1907- 1,004,756 arrivals. The peak day was April 17 of that year, with 11,747 arrivals.

Immigration through Ellis Island slowed dramatically with the passage of the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, followed by the National Origins Act of 1924, which created immigration quotas based on country of origin.

This was the end of the open immigration era into the United States and led to the eventual disuse of Ellis Island. It was primarily used for detention and deportation cases after 1924.

During WW2, it was designated a permanent holding facility for foreign nationals, and up to 7,000 Germans, Italians, and Japanese were held there during the war.

Ellis Island officially closed in 1954. The last person to pass through was a Norwegian man named Arne Petersen. The buildings fell into disrepair until Ellis Island was made a part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and added to the national register of Historic Places in 1966. Years later, \$150 million was spent restoring the buildings, and the museum was opened in 1990.

Though some famous Americans came through Ellis Island, such as Bob Hope (who has a library named for him on site), Ellis Island's real legacy is the United States population itself. From 1892 to 1954, over 12 million immigrant arrivals were processed here- that's nearly half of the total people that immigrated to the US during that time frame.

It is estimated that anywhere from 30-40% of people currently living in the United States are related to someone who came through Ellis Island.

## **Steerage Class**

Once you are off the ferry, take a minute to look at the outside of the building while you listen to this clip.

Millions of people made their way to this building over the years, most of them fleeing political or religious persecution, or seeking economic opportunity.

It was a long, hard journey to this spot, however. Most immigrants could only afford to travel in Steerage class- a third class ticket. Steerage class cost an average of \$30 at the turn of the 20th century, an enormous amount for many people.

Often, families did not emigrate all at once, because they could not afford for everyone to go. It was common for one family member to be sent, and then for them to earn money to pay for the rest of the family's passage.

Steerage class was extremely unpleasant. It was in the dark, poorly ventilated hold of the ship. Larger ships sometimes had over 1,000 people in steerage. The tickets were not sold as reserved space, so it was often crammed with more people than could really fit comfortably. The hold was usually highly unsanitary, and many people got sick on the ships.

After a long hard journey, sometimes up to several weeks, the ship stopped at the narrows leading into New York Harbor. It was boarded by officials, who gave all first and second class passengers a cursory inspection. This was the sum total of their processing experience- only steerage class was subjected to Ellis Island screenings.

The ship then proceeded into the harbor, where immigrants stood on the deck to get their first glance at the Statue of Liberty, an ecstatic moment for many of them. Passengers disembarked at the dock- first and second class on to their new life, and steerage class packed tightly onto ferries to go to Ellis Island.

Now go ahead and go inside. One of the first things you will see is the baggage area. Upon arrival, immigrants had to leave all the belongings they had in the world behind to go through their processing.

When you are finished looking at the luggage display, go up the stairs you see to your right. The next stop is at the top of the stairs.

## 6 Second Medical Exams

If you were a newly arrived immigrant coming up the stairs to the Registry Room, after leaving your luggage downstairs, your examination would have actually already begun.

Medical doctors watched people coming up these stairs as a way of expediting examination time. Because they had so many people that needed to be processed in a given day, time-saving measures were important. By watching people come up the stairs, they could easily see who was short of breath, or unable to walk up the stairs unaided. The doctors could then see, before any official examination had begun, who might have health issues.

Once immigrants made it to the top, each person was given what became known as the “6 second physical.” Doctors quickly examined each person’s hair, face, and hands, looking for signs of contagious disease. They also noted which people seemed to have trouble following directions so that they could be checked later for a possible mental defect.

The most dreaded part of the initial examination was the check for trachoma- a highly contagious and dangerous eye disease with no cure at the time. Doctors used a metal buttonhook to turn eyelids up, a very quick, but painful process.

Doctors carried pieces of chalk with them and made markings on the sleeves of coats so that officials would know who needed further examination. TC stood for trachoma, L stood for Lameness, X was suspected mental defect, and so on.

The number of doctors was increased over the years to meet the ever-increasing flow of people coming through Ellis Island. By 1916, there were 25 doctors in this spot, and 4 lines running simultaneously.

Now you are going to make your way across the registry room, towards the desks. Along the way, you will see small tables off to your right. These are small interactive exhibits, demonstrating parts of the Ellis Island experience, such as advertisements for train tickets to various US cities, and a wooden puzzle like those used here to test mental capabilities.

Stop and take a look, and then continue to the Registry Desks.

## Registry Room

Once you finished your 6 second physical, you would have made your way further into the registry room to await your turn with the officials. The dark wooden benches that you see on your left, if you are facing the registry desk, are original benches from this waiting area.

Now go behind one of the registry desks. You will see an example of a passenger manifest from a ship. Passenger manifests are how they kept track of who was coming through.

When you arrived at Ellis Island, a paper tag was pinned to your clothes, with the page and line number that officials could find your passenger record on the manifest. The names recorded on the manifest were the names used for all official purposes at Ellis Island.

Even though you will occasionally hear people in the United States reference their family name being changed by Ellis Island officials, officials here only went off of what was put on the passenger manifest- well before anyone actually set foot on Ellis Island!

During the time with officials at this desk, immigrants were given a 29 question interview. Most of the questions were very simple: Name (to check that it matched the passenger record), age, occupation, who paid for your passage, did you have relatives in the United States? They asked if you were a polygamist or an anarchist (things that would have made an immigrant “morally unfit” to enter the country).

The question “do you have a job waiting for you?” was really a trick question. Though many new arrivals had family members secure employment for them prior to arrival, it was actually illegal, due to a law passed in 1885 meant to prevent employers importing cheap labor.

Another question was “how much money do you have with you?” This was very important. In the early days of Ellis Island, there was no minimum required amount, you just had to be able to show that you had something, and it was up to the individual inspector to decide if it was enough.

In 1909, a rule was passed saying it had to be a minimum of \$25, plus money for their train tickets (if applicable). That number would be over \$600 dollars today. This rule was withdrawn quickly due to pressure from immigrant aid societies, but the result was still that most people arrived with \$25 dollars, for fear of being told they didn’t have enough.

Many immigrants did not speak English fluently enough to do the interview, so translators were employed. It sometimes took a few attempts at different dialects to find which one was effective for the interview.

More letters could be added to your coat after this portion of processing, such as LPC, or Liable to Become a Public Charge. If you had passed the initial medical exam and the interview had gone smoothly, this could be the end of the inspection process for you.

Though the time in front of officials amounted to only a few minutes, you would have probably spent 3 - 5 hours at Ellis Island.

Now head to the stairs directly behind the desks.

## **The Stairs of Separation**

These are called the Stairs of Separation. You will notice they are divided into three sections. Which way you got sent down the stairs could be a source of joy or anguish.

The left side of the stairs was for New York City. Though many people left for various cities throughout the United States, several of immigrants stayed in New York. At the bottom of the these stairs, is the Kissing Post, where new arrivals were greeted by loved ones waiting for them in New York City.

Having relatives to greet you was not just a happy reunion. For some, it was a necessity to leave the island. Children had to be greeted by adult relatives. Women traveling alone were not permitted to leave Ellis Island without a male relative. If no one came to greet you, you would be detained. If a woman was met by a fiancée, they often got married right on the spot, so that they would be permitted to leave with their now-husband.

If you went down the right side of the staircase, you were leaving for other points throughout the United States. Down the stairs, you would be able to change your native money into US currency and to purchase a train ticket to your destination.

Traveling beyond Ellis Island through this vast country was daunting for many immigrants, particularly if they did not speak English. To ensure passengers ended up in the right place, a tag would be pinned to their clothing. It would inform the conductor that the passenger did not speak English, and to ensure that they made all connections needed for their destination. It also usually included contact information for whoever was waiting for them.

This simple system was surprisingly effective. It is said that in all of the years that they did this, only two people got switched and ended up in the wrong place.

Getting sent down the center stairs meant that your time on Ellis Island was not yet over. You were being detained for medical or legal reasons and would be subject to an immigration hearing, or further medical evaluation and treatment.

It could also mean that you would eventually be sent back to your home country. About 10% of arrivals were detained, but only about 2% of them were actually rejected.

2 % sounds very low, but if you factor in the sheer numbers of people coming through here, in peak immigration years, that would equal about 20,000 people being rejected annually. If people were sent back, it was at the expense of the shipping company, for failure to have properly vetted people before sailing.

For many detainees, from here they would be heading to the hospital. From where you are standing, looking at the stairs, turn left. You should see some windows over on the side of the registry room. Go over to them. Looking out those windows, you can see straight across to the hospital.

## **Hospital**

The Ellis Island Immigrant Hospital was the first public health hospital in the United States. It opened in 1902 originally but was built out in phases over the years. There was the main hospital and a contagious disease hospital.

When a new arrival did not pass their 6-second exam, they were taken for further medical examination. About 1 in 5 immigrants required further screening- of these, about half were for legal reasons pertaining to their interview, and half were for medical reasons. If the doctors determined that an arrival needed medical care, they were brought from the Main Building to the Hospital. They were treated, and then either released or sent back to their home country.

The treatment was not free of charge- like the food for the detainees, this was billed to the steamship companies. The reason was that the companies were supposed to inspect passengers for illnesses before they boarded, so if they had made it here, it was on them.

The hospital was considered one of the finest public health achievements of its day. The doctors treated an incredibly broad range of diseases, from measles and diphtheria to rare tropical diseases. The contagious disease hospital was comprised of 17 pavilions that could be completely sealed off from one another to prevent the spread of disease.

The Immigrant Hospital employed one of the first full-time female physicians in the country and had advanced equipment and technology, such as x-ray machines, and an autoclave that could sterilize an entire mattress.

Though they were receiving cutting edge care for the time, the machines and processes were unfamiliar and often scary for the new arrivals. Many procedures involved getting completely naked, an unfamiliar experience and a source of extreme discomfort for many. Most didn't know what an x-ray machine did, and were fearful of it.

Some had been detained because of suspected mental illness and were placed in the psychiatric ward. Many weren't actually mentally ill- they were frustrated, in unfamiliar surrounding, and were dealing with language barriers. A doctor at Ellis Island helped develop more objective testing methods to determine mental capacity so that fewer were detained unnecessarily.

There were some happy moments at the hospital. Some of the women were detained because they were about to give birth- about 350 babies were born at Ellis Island over the years.

The hospital treated thousands of people over the years, 10,000 in the year 1914 alone. Cures for common diseases such as conjunctivitis were discovered there.

The hospital shut down in 1930 after tightened immigration regulations led to a decline in traffic through Ellis Island. For many years, the hospital was not open to visitors. It is now accessible through a special "Hard Hat Tour," led by national park rangers. You can ask about the schedule and pricing for these on the ground floor of this building.

## **America's Gate Exhibit**

From where you are looking at the window, turn right. You will see some doors leading to the America's Gate exhibit.

Take some time to walk through here to get a feel of the step by step process of the immigrant experience at Ellis Island. You can hear first-hand accounts from immigrants who experienced Ellis Island, see a room where a legal hearing would have been held, get detailed information on medical exams, and even use a touch screen to conduct your own immigration interview, see if you would have been given the green light at Ellis Island!

America's Gate is in a horseshoe shape. When you exit and re-enter the Registry Room, there will be a door leading to stairs on your left. Go upstairs.

## **Dormitories**

When you walk along the balconies above the registration room today, there are numerous rooms along the sides. From 1900 to 1908, there were just two, very long, narrow rooms- one along each balcony. These were the dormitories for those detained at Ellis Island.

Each room held about 300 people, who slept on triple tired bunks. If you walk along the balcony, you will find rooms off to the side with examples of these hanging bunks. The bunks were hung from the ceiling and could be raised during the day to create waiting area space. At night, blankets were distributed to those who had to stay. The large rooms were subdivided in 1908, to create the smaller dormitories that are displayed today.

Many detained immigrants were helped by immigrant aid societies. There were very few government-run programs for new arrivals, so these charitable foundations helped with money, locating and notifying relatives waiting for the detainees in the United States, and helping detainees navigate the bureaucracy of Ellis Island and their immigration hearings. Some provided food, like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, who ad kosher meals for Jewish detainees.

If a woman was being detained for not having a male relative collect her, she could possibly be released to an immigrant aids society- many had homes in New York City where new arrival could temporarily live. There were representatives from about 40 aids societies at Ellis Island daily.

Detainment could last days, weeks, or even months. Most spent the day sitting on hard wooden benches, waiting. People took breaks to go outside to the roof garden or to take their children to the playgrounds on the island.

The dining room at Ellis Island served hundreds of detainees a day. It was run by a private restaurant concession. The detainees did not have to pay for their food though. It was charged to the steamship companies that had brought them over. They were legally responsible for providing their food until they were cleared to enter the country.

For some detainees, the Ellis Island dining room was a place to try favorite foods of their new country, such as bananas and ice cream.

For many, the detainment experience ended with entering the United States and reuniting with family. For some, it ended it bitter disappointment and a return to their home country. Many had spent a year or more saving for passage traveled for many weeks in cramped steerage class and were detained on the island, only to be sent back. For these people, this was known as the Isle of Tears.

When you are finished looking a the dormitories, walk to the other end of the balcony for a great view of the registry room from above. There are photos on display there, showing what the room looked like in its peak usage.

## **Exhibits Upstairs**

Here on the third floor you will also find the Treasures from Home Exhibit, and an Ellis Island Chronicles exhibit, detailing the history of the island itself. Treasures from home will show clothing and belongings that immigrants brought with them to the United States during peak immigration years in the early 20th century. It gives you a unique perspective into what immigrants were expecting in their new life, based on what they packed and carried. It is also an amazing visual of the diverse backgrounds that make up the United States. Chronicles of Ellis Island will show you the development of the island itself, from an uninhabited oyster bed to the place you see today. It has scale models showing the growth of the island and the creation of the various buildings, including a model of the original Ellis Island building that burned down.

Whenever you are finished on the 3rd floor, head back down to the ground floor, where you entered the building.

## **Peopling of America Exhibit, and Immigrant Wall of honor**

On the ground floor, you will find the Peopling of America exhibit. This details the history of immigration to this country prior to Ellis Island opening in 1892 and after it closed in 1954, all the way through the present day. It shows a more complete picture of how this country had expanded and changed over the years.

Outside the building, you can also see the Immigrant Wall of Honor, a permanent exhibit of family names, placed there by people wishing to honor their ancestors who immigrated here. The wall currently has about 775,000 names.

## **Records Library**

On the ground floor is the American Family Immigration History Center. For a small fee, you can access passenger manifests and search for ancestors who may have come through Ellis Island.

If you decide to make this a stop on your visit for Ellis Island, I recommend that you gather a small amount of information before you get started. If you have a first and last name, it is helpful. Most beneficial is a year of arrival in the United States.

If your family name is a relatively common one, you may find many people with the same name, so it helps to have a time window to refine your search.

The fee pays for 30 minutes on the computer, but you can always add time if you need to!

## **Closing**

When you are finished on Ellis Island, you can go back outside to the ferry. Make sure you check which ferry you are boarding, some go to Battery Park, and some go to New Jersey.

When you arrive back at Battery Park, consider making a stop at Castle Clinton. Just by the front entrance, there is a small exhibit showing models of Castle Clinton over the years, in all its different incarnations.

When you exit, check out the bronze statue you will see to your right. This is called the Immigrants and was placed here to specifically commemorate the immigrants who passed through Castle Clinton, before Ellis Island was opened.

Because of the fire at Ellis Island, many immigration records dating back to the 1850s were lost, so it is not known exactly how many people were processed here.

When you are ready, you can head out of Battery Park.

Thank you for joining me! I hope you'll consider taking one of our other audio tours, such as Lower Manhattan, The World Trade Center, or the Brooklyn Bridge. Or sign up for one of our

group pay what you wish walking tours! Check out [www.freetoursbyfoot.com](http://www.freetoursbyfoot.com) for more information.

See you next time!