

Niagara Falls National Park Tour – New York Side

Introduction

Hi. Welcome to iziTRAVEL's Historic Niagara Falls Walking Tour, presented by ListenUp Audio. We're so glad you'll be joining us today! I'm _____ and I'll be your guide. A few notes before we get started. This tour takes approximately an hour and a half to complete. You can stop at any time and start again at the same spot later. If you'd like, you can put your phone in your pocket and just listen from here. I'll be giving you clear directions and the audio will automatically start playing when you get close to the next point of interest. If a site is closed or your path is blocked, don't worry. Just go around it. The tour will pick up at the next location. And this is important: PLEASE make sure you stay aware of your surroundings at *all* times and obey *all* traffic signals.

(pause)

Welcome to Historic Niagara Falls National Park. Established in the mid-1880s, this beautiful region between the borders of Canada and North America has the distinct honor of being the nation's oldest State Park, as well as home to one of America's premiere landmarks and oldest tourist attractions. On our tour through its lush and vibrant pathways, we'll visit a number of the region's more memorable observation locations, taking in some of the most breathtaking views America has to offer. **Whenever you're ready to begin, make your way to the parking lot and entrance to the Top of the Falls Restaurant. This two-story restaurant above Terrapin Point marks our first destination.**

Top of the Falls Restaurant

We begin our tour of Niagara Falls National Park with a visit to the beautiful and exciting Top of the Falls Restaurant. Operated by Delaware North Parks and Resorts, this two-story dining establishment has quickly become an icon of the park, catering some of the finest cuisines New York has to offer. Using only the best locally grown, sustainable products, the restaurant continues to serve both the community and the environment around it, always taking part in the protection of Niagara Falls' natural beauty and resources.

Adding to this, the restaurant's menu is incredibly diverse. Gluten-Free, Vegetarian, Vegan, and Dairy-Free options are readily available, and the restaurant prides itself on prominently displaying calorie counts and other healthy information for each dish. If that weren't enough, guests of the restaurant have the option to have their meals specially prepared. Special accommodations can be made based on dietary needs, and this feature alone has earned Top of the Falls countless accolades from critics and visitors alike.

Despite these culinary perks, visits to the Top of the Falls Restaurant are made even more memorable due to its signature, panoramic views. Floor-to-ceiling windows and spacious, outdoor dining decks add to the experience, and guests can dine in awe as they gaze out towards breathtaking Horseshoe Falls. With such a grand experience packed into one place, it's no wonder that Top of the Falls is so often regarded as Niagara Falls' premiere dining destination.

Leaving the top of the Falls restaurant, head down the path towards Terrapin Point below. This wide lookout point above the Niagara River marks our next destination.

Terrapin Point

Moving right along, we find ourselves at one of Niagara Falls' oldest lookout points. Established just before the second half of the 20th century, Terrapin Point was once just a collection of rocks, so named because the rocks resembled a collection of giant tortoises. As one of two major observation areas overlooking the falls and lower Niagara Gorge on the New York side, Terrapin Point has quickly become a staple of the park, attracting thousands of visitors each year.

In truth, this lookout point was also home to several other features of the park, though no one alive today would be able to recall them. Going all the way back to 19th century, history shows that from the 1830s through the mid-1880s, Terrapin Point was also home to Terrapin Tower. Built just beyond the tip of Horseshoe Falls, this lighthouse-type structure was connected by a series of footbridges, each of which once connected to a now defunct boardwalk along the rocks. Deemed unsafe in the 1880s by park officials, the boardwalk and tower were similarly dismantled, undergoing several renovation projects in the coming years. Reopened in the 1980s with a brand-new look, Terrapin Point continues to cater to those seeking some of the better views of the river, gorge, and Canada beyond.

Whenever you're ready to continue, take the path north from Terrapin Path. As you wrap around the western side of Top of the Falls Restaurant, bear north through the parking lot, turning right onto Goat Island Rd to head towards the large statue ahead. This large statue of a sitting man marks our next destination.

Nikola Tesla Monument

Just up the way from Terrapin Point, we find ourselves at the Nikola Tesla Monument. Gifted from Yugoslavia to the United States in the mid-1970s, this dedication to the renowned inventor and scientist honors Tesla's timeless contributions to society, making special

note of his contributions to the state of New York. Highlighting his extraordinary accomplishment with his now-famous Alternating Current, the monument serves to remind visitors of just *how* important Tesla's work was, chronicling his invention and utilization of the world's first major hydroelectric power plant. Widely regarded as Tesla's greatest achievement, this power plant put Niagara on map, forever signifying the city as "the birthplace of the electrification of the world."

Indeed, history shows that the project was one of the largest undertakings the Western World had ever seen, and documents, photographs, newspaper articles, and more showcase the extraordinary manpower that went into turning this dream into a reality. Built with the aid of Tesla's partner and fellow engineer George Westinghouse, the original building housing the hydroelectric power plant still survives to this day. Located just along Buffalo Avenue, it sits quietly unused since the 1960s, though plans to turn the facility into a museum have long since been discussed. For the time being, this dedication to Tesla, depicting him sitting in deep reflection, is one of the greater dedications to his legacy. Engraved with the names of the ones who helped build it, it will surely be here for years to come; silently honoring the man who helped shape Niagara Falls into what it is today.

Leaving the monument, head directly north. The ticket booth for Niagara's Cave of the Winds Tour marks our next destination.

Cave of the Winds Tour

While *looking* at beautiful Niagara Falls is one thing, no tour would be complete without actually exploring the Falls themselves. To this end, we find ourselves at the ticket booth for Niagara's Cave of the Winds Tour. Operated by the New York Park Service, this spectacular tour to the base of one of Niagara's former natural caves is truly one of the park's greatest experiences. Beginning with a short elevator ride, guests descend down, down, down into the Niagara Gorge, dropping over 170 feet in the process. Clad in bright yellow ponchos, they then follow the tour guide through a series of wooden walkways, finally stopping at the now famous Hurricane Deck.

It is here that the phrase "soaking up the experience" takes on a whole new meaning, and looking high above Hurricane Deck, the view is nothing short of breathtaking. Bridal Falls cascades and mists all around you, and the experience is said to rival that of a tropical storm, winds and all. Indeed, it is because of this that the Cave of the Winds is so named. Originally named for Aeolus, Greek God of the Wind, the Cave was discovered in the 1830s and remained a natural site of exploration until the 1920s. Blocked off by a rock fall and deemed unsafe, it was later demolished. Though the cave itself no longer exists, it does little to lessen the

experience. The tour up to Bridal Falls is just as amazing as the previous ones behind it, and guests are encouraged to visit at the earliest convenience.

After visiting or taking the Cave of the Winds Tour, head east along the path paralleling Goat Island Rd. Continue to follow the path eastward, taking note as it winds somewhat north. As you continue down the path, we'll learn more about Goat Island.

Goat Island

Making our way to the other side of the park, we take some time to learn more about Goat Island itself. Established in the 1770s, it was named following a series of events, beginning with the journey of a man named John Stedman. The 1770s were an extraordinary time in America's history, and explorations throughout the region were happening at a rapid pace. As was the case with many other states, lands and regions within New York were constantly being discovered, and with this came certain provisions and tasks from those in higher offices. Named "Master of the Portage" by his commanding general, Stedman's task during this period was to reorganize the transporting of materials along the Niagara River. This naturally included extreme conditions and difficult climbs throughout, and records of similar trips were wrought with misadventure and misfortune.

Despite these difficulties, Stedman and his crew were eventually able to complete their task, though not without their own share of misfortune. Traveling along the area now known as Devil's Hole, Stedman's crew was soon attacked by a band of Indians from the Seneca tribe. Over eighty citizens and many more British soldiers were killed, and the attack would later come to be known as the "Devil's Hole Massacre." Following the massacre and subsequent treaty with the Seneca Indians, Stedman claimed Goat Island for himself, naming the island for the many goats he herded along the rocky cliffs and falls. To this day, it remains one of the most recognizable names in the region.

As you continue down the path, bear left at 1st St, and cross the bridge, turning left as you come to Buffalo Ave. You'll soon see NO ENTRY signs on your left, followed by a White Building just ahead. Take the crossing there to the left, branching onto the pathways alongside the river. Bear north on the path, taking the right at the fork. The Maid of the Mist Boat Tour marks our next destination. Feel free to purchase a ticket at this time or later. Bear in mind that our 7th destination is also tied to the tower housing the tour's entrance elevators.

Maid of the Mist Boat Tour

Hailed as North America's oldest tourist attraction, we come now to Niagara Falls' Maid of the Mist Boat Tour. First established in the 1840s, this one-of-a-kind boat ride up to the Falls operates every 30 min, ferrying passengers to and from the loading dock just south of Rainbow Bridge. Sister Ride to the Canadian Hornblower Cruises offered just across the river, the Maid of the Mist has long since become a staple of the entire region. Taking you first past the base of the American Falls, its powerful, diesel engine slowly pushes its way downstream, right up to the basin of the magnificent Canadian Horseshoe Falls just a little ways further. Sitting stoic in the water, guests experience firsthand the sheer power of the Niagara, listening to the roar of the Falls as it bounces between the rocks and cliff-face around them.

Despite the boat tour being the nation's oldest, records indicate that it was actually the Maid's second purpose. Built originally for transport rather than sightseeing, the Maid began its first journeys as a ferry from New York City and York (Toronto), Canada. When a suspension bridge opened to bridge the gap between the two countries a few years later, ferry traffic was subsequently cut, and the Maid was christened for its new purpose. Carrying thousands of eager tourists to the Falls and back each year, the Maid of the Mist continues to be one of the most popular thrills Niagara Falls has ever offered.

Having purchased a ticket for the Maid of the Mist Boat Tour, ascend the tower housing the tour's entrance elevators. This large observation tower marks our next destination.

Niagara Falls Observation Tower

Having seen Niagara Falls from below twice now, it only makes sense that we explore it from high up above as well. To this end, we take a moment to ascend the Niagara Falls Observation Tower, reveling in the panoramic view of the river and region around it. Often dubbed the "American Falls' Crow's Nest," this architectural wonder extends out dramatically over the Niagara Gorge, offering visitors the chance to feel as if they're "floating" over the Falls themselves.

Acting as a gateway to and from the Maid of the Mist Boat Tour, the Tower's location even offers it an advantage unique to other observation areas in the Park. Jutting out so dramatically over the Gorge, it remains the only place in the Park to offer views of both the American and Horseshoe Falls at the same time. Though this alone makes it a popular attraction among tourists, other features give it a unique twist as well. True to its nickname as a "Crow's Nest," bird watching is even a popular pastime at the Tower, and if

one were to look carefully enough, they might even spot a number of peregrine falcons, bald eagles and even a few gull species native to the Gorge. Taking all this into account, it's no wonder that the Tower remains such a treasured stop for tourists of all ages. After all, one's never too old to enjoy the freedom that comes with such a view.

Leaving the area for the Maid of the Mist Boat Tour and the Observation Tower, head north along the path crossing under Rainbow Bridge. When you see signs for the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, turn left towards the small observational deck just below it. This view of Rainbow Bridge marks our next destination.

Rainbow Bridge

Making our way further north along the river, we come to a very special observation area. Located just south of the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, it affords us one of the very best views of the famous Rainbow Bridge. Bridging the gap between the American and Canadian cities of Niagara Falls, this magnificent arch-bridge has been in operation since the early 1940s, bringing thousands of passengers to and from the twin cities every year. As an added bonus, the bridge's design was even chosen by Britain's King and Queen during this time, proving so popular that it was imitated for other bridges in later years.

Standing a little over 200 feet above the water, with a span of just under 1000 feet in length, views from the Rainbow Bridge are reminiscent of those found in the Niagara Falls Observation Tower. Estimations show that roughly six billion pounds of water cross under the bridge each year, and the rising mist makes for some of the most amazing photos found along the river itself. This goes especially for Friday nights, when fireworks light the night sky high above the Park. Though the Park has many other bridges, each special in their own right, no other remains quite so famous. Should you wish to traverse it for yourself, fares are relatively cheap, offering the chance to traverse the bridge at \$3.50 per car, or \$0.50 per pedestrian. From here, we'll go back up the hill, making our way towards the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center. **Niagara Gorge Discovery Center**

Showcasing the local and natural history of Niagara Gorge and the Falls below, we come now to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center. Acting primarily as the center for the gorge's fascinating geology, guests are first treated to an exciting study of the gorge's ancient rock layers. Adding to this, further explorations into the gorge's local minerals and fossils can be found, with each yielding their own bits of history surrounding this incredible region. If that weren't enough, interactive displays provide an even more hands-on experience for the whole family, while a presentation on the Center's 180-degree multi-screen theater showcases how the Niagara River carved the gorge all those years ago.

Even better still, The Discovery Center is home to information regarding several of Niagara's best hiking trails. Here visitors can plan future hikes or further bolster their current trip, and if biking is more to your liking, the Center has you covered there too. Miles of these trails are laid out in vivid detail, and the fees associated with the hikes and explorations are laid out just as clearly. Though the Center remains a smaller attraction among the more popular here at the Park, it continues to attract droves of curious minds each year.

Leaving the Discovery Center, follow the pathway that goes over Robert Moses Parkway. You'll find yourself at the Aquarium of Niagara. This aquarium marks our next destination.

Aquarium of Niagara

Being so close to all this water, it seems appropriate that we take some extra time to learn about Niagara's aquatic community. Here at the Aquarium of Niagara, we can do that and much more, relishing in the scientific exploration of the region's most interesting underwater creatures. First established in the mid-1960s, the Aquarium was originally founded by a small group of chemists and scientists, the result of a desire to introduce an artificial seawater exhibit to the region. As luck would have it, the project turned out to be a great success, and the aquarium soon became a model for other inland aquariums like it. Adding to the facility's list of accomplishments, much of the technology used in the preparation and management of its synthetic seawater was revolutionary. Handling of the technology was seen as rather extraordinary, and the aquarium's residents were certainly pleased.

Speaking of residents, the aquarium hosts quite the collection. Split into several exhibits, creatures at the Aquarium of Niagara include everything from seals, to sturgeons, to starfish, and even the tiniest seahorse. If that weren't enough, a number of the exhibits prominently feature a few of these creatures in great detail. The facility's *Aquarium Stars* exhibit for example showcases all manner of sea stars, while penguins and California sea lions also swim and play among the many tanks. Likewise, the aquarium's *Touch Tanks* exhibit even allows parents and theirs to literally touch a number of these animals, making the experience that much more fun and hands on. As part of special guided tours, guests are even able to tour the aquarium in its entirety, getting an inside look as to what goes on behind the scenes to keep the facility running smoothly. With attractive rates, flexible hours, and a host of other special events like sleepovers and birthday parties available for booking, the Aquarium of Niagara remains a favorite spot for residents and tourists alike.

Whenever you're ready to continue, head south on Whirlpool St. towards Main St. Turn right on Main St. Turn right on Rainbow Blvd. Turn right on Niagara St. Turn left on Prospect St. The wax museum just past the Hard Rock Café marks our next destination.

Niagara Wax Museum of History

Nearing the end of our tour, we come to perhaps one of the most interesting attractions at the Park, the Niagara Wax Museum of History. Established in the late 1960s, this quirky museum on the corner of Prospect and Old Falls has quickly become a park icon, offering a somewhat different view of the Niagara region's past. Spanning forty-six galleries in all, each exhibit at the museum has a special connection to the Falls themselves, modeled particularly after historical events or celebrities linked to the region. Its bloody, wax dummies showcase how the Devil's Hole Massacre might have looked all those years ago, while a special chair marks the time when President Abraham Lincoln so famously got his hair cut right here in Niagara Falls.

Adding a sense of adventure, the museum even features a replica of the first barrel to tumble over the Falls, calling back to the time when Barrel Riding was a popular form of daredevilry. Likewise, a replica of the first big, rubber ball to do the same thing is prominently displayed, while replicas of the contraptions' dazed occupants are showcased as well. All in all, the Niagara Wax Museum is an attraction that often attracts mixed feelings. While some visitors simply find it too bizarre, others appreciate it all the more for its other-worldliness. Varied reception aside, the museum continues to attract thousands each year, and all signs point towards the trend continuing for many years to come. Open weekdays from 10 AM to 10 PM, with similar weekend hours, it's a site not to be missed on any Niagara tour.

Whenever you're ready to continue, head south along Prospect St., continuing as it winds around to become Buffalo Ave. and 1st St. As this is our longest trek yet, we'll be crossing the bridge at 1st St. back onto Goat Island, bearing left/east towards the other side of the island. Continue East along the pathway. Bear right continue on pathway south. Bear right again and continue westward. Up ahead, you should see signs for our final destination, the Three Sisters Islands. This collection of islands marks the end of our tour.

Three Sisters Islands

Finishing our tour of Niagara Falls National Park, we arrive at the Three Sisters Islands. Connected by three equally historic walking bridges, these islands just off the southeastern side of Goat Island are named after Celinda, Angelina, and Asenath Whitney, three

sisters within the prominent Whitney family of early 19th century New York. As daughters to General Parkhurst Whitney, himself a commanding officer during the War of 1812, Celinda, Angelina, and Asenath are most known for their original visit to the islands.

It was here that they and their father first set out to visit three of the four islands, a task made difficult by the fact that no bridges existed during this time. Instead, ice jams upstream from the Falls created a dangerous but traversable sheet of ice, and the trek by the girls and their father proved to be a legendary one. Having successfully crossed the frozen river to the distant third island, General Whitney became so impressed with his daughters that he asked the owners of the islands to rename them in their honor. As a special request, the General even asked for the area's fourth island to be named after his infant son, and this tiny patch of land, often called the "Little Brother Island," was soon renamed to Solon.

Delving back into the past, history shows that the islands once played host to a number of ancient Native American rituals. Iroquois shamans were said to have made sacrifices of food and gifts here, while communication with He-No, an Iroquois God of Thunder is also said to have taken place. Given this history, modern-day psychics have sworn that the islands are also home to spectral voices, though many of these claims have never been scientifically proven. Nonetheless, the favorite aspect of the islands has always been their grand views. Given the present-day bridges and open space between the three primary land masses, grand views of the Niagara River, its rapids, and even the Falls downstream are never in short supply. As one of the best locations for a family photo, or even a selfie or two, the Three Sisters Islands mark the perfect bookend to our tour of historic Niagara Falls.

This concludes our tour of historic Niagara Falls National Park. We hope you've enjoyed yourself. Should you wish to return to where we started, simply follow the Goat Island Rd. pathway westward towards Terrapin Point. You'll soon find yourself just south of the Top of the Falls Restaurant, right back where we began.