

A Symbol of Opportunity and Optimism

An Interview with Keith M. Douglas,
Managing Director, One World Observatory



A family enjoying One World Observatory

EDITORS' NOTE Keith Douglas was named to his current post in 2017. Before joining One World Observatory, Douglas was the President and Managing Director at KD&CO after having served for 10 years as the Managing Director of Rockefeller Center and Top of the Rock Observation Deck for Tishman Speyer. He also spent over a decade as a senior executive responsible for overseeing sales, marketing and general managerial roles for several leading hotel franchises including W Hotels, Omni Hotels and Doubletree. Douglas is a graduate of the Johnson and Wales University, where he received his B.S. in hospitality management.



Keith M. Douglas

ORGANIZATION BRIEF One World Observatory (oneworldobservatory.com), located at the top of One World Trade Center, is the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere and offers unparalleled panoramic views of New York and three floors of immersive, interactive experiences.

What was the vision and mission for creating One World Observatory and how has the building evolved?

It has become even more than what we imagined. One World Trade Center is the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere, and I personally think it has become an icon for the skyline of New York.

The Observatory opened in June 2015, and we're now going into our fourth full year of operation. We have a truly global audience based on the unique appeal of New York as a destination.

The building itself is an interesting symbol to people around the world of both opportunity and optimism, and it's very aspirational. As part of a group that gets to welcome visitors from around the world who have made the journey to New York, it is special to be able to help create memories from what is often a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

How do you describe the One World Observatory experience?

Downtown has become a prime New York City destination, and One World Trade Center is connected to regional transportation via the Westfield and Brookfield buildings, and the beautiful new Oculus, so it is easy to visit.

The Observatory experience is accessible via our main entrance on West Street, flanked by Vesey and Fulton. Our guests have the opportunity to walk through the 9/11 Memorial, which is adjacent to the building itself, and then make their way into the West Plaza.

The Observatory covers 125,000 square feet, so it's very expansive. Guests can pace themselves and enjoy the experience at their leisure. Most guests stay for at least an hour.

From an experiential standpoint, it's a destination that includes restaurants and shopping, but the Observatory is the crown jewel in that experience.

How are guests engaged when they first arrive at One World Observatory?

When guests arrive at the building, they come into the Global Welcome Center. The majority of our guests book their tickets online, which allows us to know the countries they're visiting from. When they come into the Welcome Center and we scan their tickets, we will know how many miles people have traveled to be here, which gives us a point of engagement.

Guests then make their way to the SkyPod elevators, where they experience the history of New York over the past 500 years, starting from when the settlers first experienced New York, all in just 47 seconds as they are whisked to the 102nd floor.

Is part of the mission of One World Observatory to enhance cultural understanding?

For us, "One World" is a concept that we take very seriously and we work to create a sense of global welcome at the observation deck. We enhance that by offering all of our services in a variety of languages and making it very easy for groups and families of all nationalities to visit.

We also host a series of tours that can be customized based on the language the guests speak. Our VIP tour guides can show people around and communicate with them in the major languages. We can even customize this for guests who might be particularly interested in architecture or learning about the art and culture in this magnificent city.

Will you discuss your approach to the food and beverage offering?

One Mix and One Dine are two options available to visitors for lunch and dinner. In the morning, we offer a more casual cafe concept.

The space has become very popular for corporate events – we are using it frequently for group and corporate outings. They often want to combine the food and beverage experience at One Dine with the Observatory experience. Our tour ambassadors have designed an architectural scavenger hunt that can be used as a team-building exercise. The participants can then go to One Mix and One Dine for cocktails and a beautiful dinner overlooking the city.

Will you highlight the capabilities of the private event space?

Aspire is our event space on the 102nd floor, which is the top of the building – it's absolutely breathtaking. The guests are greeted by expansive views of Midtown.

We host a variety of events, primarily corporate functions and meetings, but we also do weddings and baby showers. We can do receptions for up to 400 people and seated events for 220.

How important have corporate partnerships been in helping to drive the mission and growth of One World Observatory?

MasterCard is one of our biggest and most successful partnerships. All of the guests who are Masterpass card holders have exclusive VIP access through a welcome portal at the arrival entrance.

We also do MasterCard VIP tours that can be scheduled through their VIP services.

How critical has it been to find and retain the right talent to deliver the One World Observatory experience?

I come from the world of hospitality and have worked in hotels for many years. One of our top priorities is keeping the guest experience and guest service at the highest level. To that end, we invest quite a bit in employee and associate training programs as well as those for our management team.

When the opportunity presented itself for you to lead One World Observatory, what made you feel it would be the right fit?

The organization is a collection of very smart, thoughtful individuals with a passion for hospitality, which was a big part of it. It was also a tremendous opportunity for me to lead the growth of one of the most iconic attractions in New York and the world. One World Observatory holds such special meaning for a global audience and it is a symbol of aspiration. To have the opportunity to be a part of this group was a once-in-a-lifetime moment. ●