



Billy Joel at Madison Square Garden

by Jim Becker

Everyone loves to visit Manhattan, and it's easier than ever these days to get into that "New York State of Mind". I was very fortunate on a recent visit to the "Big Apple" to be able to see and hear in person the man who made that line a household phrase: Billy Joel. Joel rocked Madison Square Garden on a warm, muggy night in April, and sang "State of Mind" with a true New York spirit. It was as if Billy had come home to play where he had performed the most concerts over the years. At one point, the entire building was shaking to the beat of one of his classic hits,

"Mr. Big Shot".

I arrived the same day as the concert and was booked for business into the Marriot in Lower Manhattan -- one block from "Ground Zero", where the World Trade Center disaster of September 11, 2001, occurred. I was invited by top money managers, who selected this location so I could be near the business meetings they had set up.

I was curious to see how much progress had occurred since my visit a few years back. To my surprise there was little change. Ground Zero looked much the same as it had right after the original efforts to remove debris. Nevertheless, I was moved by the open space surrounded by buildings of 50 or more stories. There were still mounds of debris and

TRAVEL

A New York State Of Mind

concrete, with dirt roadways extending from the street surface into the huge hole. Every morning I got up early and walked the perimeter of Ground Zero to experience the void that has affected all of our lives.

Located in the heart of this big city, Ground Zero remains a very sobering and somewhat quiet place. A major building next to Ground Zero is being dismantled piece by piece, and body parts are still being found. I visited just a few times, but the area has been a daily reminder to New Yorkers for several years now.

There's wire fence where the World Trade Center Towers used to be. On it are some words that reflect the soul and true feeling surrounding this humble memorial.

Here's what is written:

"NO HISTORY IS WITHOUT ITS HEART-ACHE. For New York City, the single most destructive moment since its founding came in the form of the two unimaginable impacts that were simultaneously instant and infinite.

"The years The World

Trade Center Towers stood were glorious -- decades marked with incredible change and a renewed economy in Lower Manhattan. The Towers were the centerpieces and most highly recognized icons of a thriving city, fast moving toward and into a new century.

"Now gone, The World Trade Center Towers represent something more. Still the dynamic, thriving soul of this city -- but even more, the enduring strength that will define New York City for centuries to come."

Everyone who visits New York City should visit this site.

Whether in the Subway, in Yankee Stadium, asking directions in Central Park or just being in Times Square, New Yorkers were very helpful to me. At no time did I feel like crime was an issue or that I was being threatened. Don't get me wrong. Somebody is trying to sell you something or get you to donate to their cause or presenting some kind of sales pitch. On the whole, though, I found New Yorkers

to be a nice group of people.

One of the best reasons to go to New York City is the Theater District. It has the most talent and best variety of shows in the nation. I saw "The Odd Couple", starring Nathan Lane and Mathew Broderick, and "Beauty and the Beast". Both are up for a number of Tony Awards. Throw in Billy Joel to a sell-out crowd at Madison Square Garden and you have an unbelievable weekend of entertainment. On top of that, I got front row seats to all events without paying an arm and a leg. If you don't know about Half-off Ticket Sales, you should. It's located at 47th and Broadway, right in Times Square, and sells tickets on the same day of the event at -- you guessed it -- half off regular prices. You have to be flexible, but I have never regretted standing in line for 30-plus minutes to score great seats at half off prices.

If you're in New York in summer or early fall, then you can't forget to visit the most

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Views of Ground Zero

