

The Roosevelt Island Walking Tour

ISLAND HISTORY

With six designated landmarks on the National Historic Register, Roosevelt Island is an integral part of New York City’s history. From the 1600’s to the 1800’s, ownership passed from the Canarsie Indians to the Dutch, then to English farmer Robert Blackwell, and finally to the City of New York. In the 1800’s, the City built eight hospitals and “asylums” on the Island, which became home to the chronically ill, mentally disabled and destitute. However, by the 1950’s, with notions of treatment changing, most of the City’s institutions were abandoned.

In 1969, New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) was granted a 99-year lease by the City to develop and operate the Island. The Island was re-imagined when architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, joined with UDC and others to design an innovative, mixed income, traffic limited, residential community with visual access to the water. In 1973, the Island was renamed in honor of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1984, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) was created as a state public benefit corporation, succeeding UDC in operating and developing the Island.

For more on the island’s history, visit www.rioc.ny.gov/history.htm

Roosevelt Island’s Main Street retail corridor is home to a variety of restaurants, shops and other businesses that meet the needs of residents and visitors alike. For a listing of the names, descriptions and locations for businesses on the island, please visit <http://rioc.ny.gov/businesslistings.htm>

EVENTS

From outdoor movie screenings to theatrical productions, recreational activities to festivals, RIOC sponsors events for the public all year round. For more information on upcoming events on the Island, please visit <http://rioc.ny.gov/upcomingevents.htm>.

LANDMARKS

The two-mile-long Island boasts a rich history and 6 amazing landmarks.

Lighthouse

Above the waters of the East River at the northernmost stretch of Roosevelt Island, shines the fifty-foot-high Lighthouse. Designed by James Renwick, Jr., the Lighthouse was built in 1872 by inmates of the penitentiary with stone quarried on the Island.



Octagon

In 1839 the New York Lunatic Asylum, which featured the Octagon Tower, was built with granite mined from the Island. It was one of the first institutions for the treatment of the mentally ill in America. Today, the landmark is housed in a luxury residential complex that features the largest solar panel in the City and the first fuel cell to power a residential building in New York. The site is open to visitors.



Good Shepherd Community Center

Good Shepherd Community Center is a historic chapel that is characterized by a multicolor effect produced by mixed use of

brick and stone and stained-glass windows. Frederick Clarke Withers built the chapel in 1889 to serve the residents of the many Welfare Island almshouses that were constructed for New York’s destitute in the 1850s. The chapel was restored in 1975 and now serves as a community center.



Blackwell House

Built in 1796 for the Blackwell family who owned the Island for many generations, the Blackwell House is one of the oldest farmhouses in New York City. The exterior of the modest colonial home has been refurbished, and there are plans to renovate the interior. Once complete, Blackwell House will be used as a community center as well as for periodic historical tours.



Strecker Laboratory

Built in 1892, the Strecker Laboratory was the first laboratory in the country devoted exclusively to pathological and bacteriological research. Currently, the building serves as the power conversion station for the E and V subway lines.



Smallpox Hospital (Renwick Ruin)

Designed by James Renwick, Jr., the Smallpox Hospital was built in 1856 and was the first hospital in the country to receive smallpox patients. Once a successful vaccine was implemented in the late 1800s, the hospital was closed. The hospital’s ivy-colored medieval-type ruin is located in Southpoint Park.



TRANSPORTATION:

Getting To And From The Island

TRAM:

The most modern aerial tramway in the world, providing breath-taking, runs every 15 minutes from 59th Street and Second Avenue in Manhattan to Roosevelt Island. Metrocards are accepted.

SUBWAY:

The **F** line links Roosevelt Island with Manhattan and Queens.

CITY BUSES:

The Q102 MTA bus circles the Island and connects passengers to Queens.

RED BUS:

The Red Bus, which costs a \$0.25, and makes stops throughout the Island.

CAR:

The Roosevelt Island Bridge can be accessed at 36th Avenue and Vernon Boulevard in Queens. Visitor parking is available at the Motorgate Garage.

OTHER VISITOR INFORMATION

Visitors Center: Roosevelt Island Historical Society Kiosk, at the foot of Tram, Island side: [http:// www.rihs.us](http://www.rihs.us), (212) 688-4836.

Emergencies: Roosevelt Island Public Safety Office is located at 552 Main Street, (212) 832-4545, and is open 24 hours a day.

Public Restrooms: Located at the Roosevelt Island Tram, Southpoint Park, Octagon Park and Lighthouse Park.

OTHER SITES TO VISIT

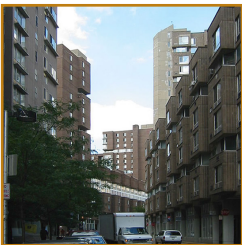
Western Promenade, Pier and the Meditation Steps

The Pier, the Promenade and the Meditation Steps north of the Pier, offer a peaceful setting to watch boats in the East River and the Manhattan skyline.



Main Street

Main Street was designed as the “spine” of the original Roosevelt Island residential community, providing retail and community space. Designed to maximize river views from the buildings, it echoes a walled medieval city.



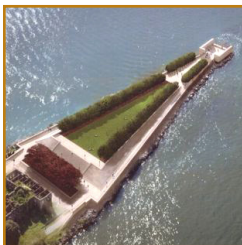
Southpoint Park

Southpoint Park surrounds the Smallpox Hospital (Renwick Ruin). Located at the southern end of the Island, it offers an ideal spot to view Manhattan, Queens and the East River, and serves as the gateway to the Four Freedoms Park.

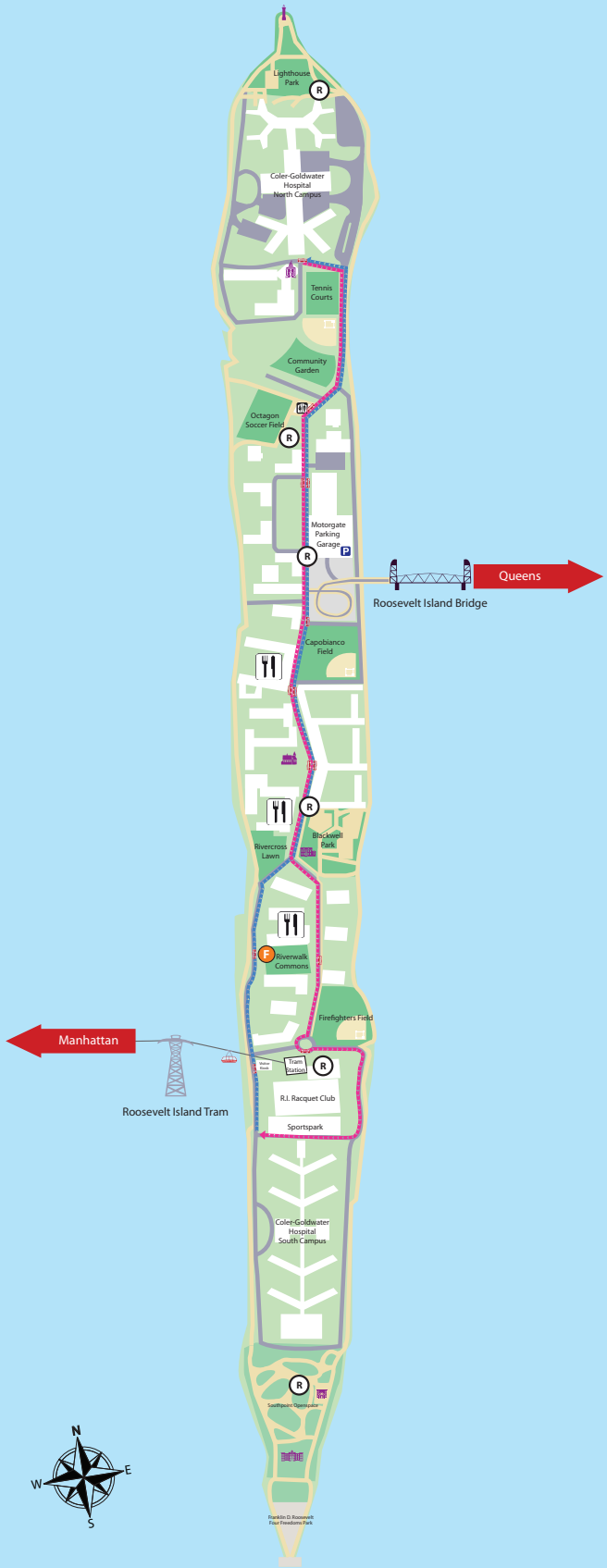


Four Freedoms Park

The Island’s southern-most tip is the site of Four Freedoms Park and a memorial to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Opened in October 2012, the Park is one of the last works designed by the famed architect Louis I. Kahn.



For more information visit www.rioc.ny.gov



R
Restrooms

F
Food

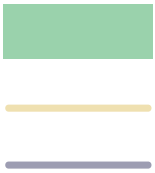
Landmarks

Transportation

- The Lighthouse
- The Octagon
- The Church of the Good Shepherd
- Blackwell House
- Strecker Laboratory
- The Renwick Ruins

- Roosevelt Island Tram
- RIOC Red Bus
- Bus Route - Southbound
- Bus Route - Northbound
- F Subway Stop
- Roosevelt Island Bridge

Roads & Parks



Roosevelt Island NYC



MAP AND SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Brought to you by the
Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
of the State of New York

591 Main Street
Visit us online at rioc.ny.gov
or call (212) 832-4540