

Viewing Cities From Above: A New Perspective

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I don't know about you, but I love to visit cities around the world. To me, they've all got their own charms and all have wonderful and unique sights to visit. However, some cities are so huge and sprawling that you just can't grasp their sheer size from ground level and perhaps that's why, given a chance, I love to head upwards to see cities from above.

One of the best cities to view from above has to be New York City and there are two main options for getting up high to see the Big Apple. The most well known and probably best loved is the [Empire State Building](#), where you're whisked up to the 86th floor in a matter of seconds for a view across Manhattan and beyond. It's not a cheap experience though, now setting you back \$18.45/adults, \$16.61/seniors and \$12.92/children, plus tax. It's also not a quick visit, with lengthy lines awaiting you, particularly at busier times of the year. To get around that, you can now buy tickets that bypass the queues for a very substantial flat fee of \$41.52 plus tax for everyone, but it does make for a pricey excursion. You'll get some wonderful views of Manhattan and particularly down towards the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge. Despite the high prices and long waits, it is something that every visitor to New York should do at least once. It's almost guaranteed that when you return home, people will ask you if you saw the Statue of Liberty and went up to the top of the Empire State Building.

If you make a return visit to the city though, you may want to consider another option for viewing the city, 30 Rockefeller Plaza also offers some superb views from their three-level viewing platform located between the 67th and 70th floors, which is called [Top of the Rock](#). You'll find that you'll probably be whisked up there much more quickly than at the Empire State Building, but you'll also find that you pay for that privilege, with tickets coming in at \$21/adults, \$19/seniors and \$14/children. If you want to visit at sunset or sunrise, tickets will set you back \$30 or \$15/children.

What we loved from the views up there was that we could actually see the Empire State Building, one of the city's biggest landmarks, and we could also see Central Park. It's only from up here that you can see the huge scale of this park, enveloping a massive area of Manhattan.

Another option in the city is now to climb to the top of the [Statue of Liberty](#). Closed for many years because of security fears, the crown re-opened on July 4, 2009, and for those who are fit and aren't afraid of

small spaces, the view from the top is well worth the climb. It is 354 steps to the top and the last few especially are pretty cramped, but to me, when I did it, it was well worthwhile to be able to gaze across to the famous skyline of Manhattan.

Turning to another of the world's most famous cities, if you want to see London from above, you have a couple of different options. Perhaps the easiest ride is on the [London Eye](#), which offers a 35 minute "flight" in one of the 32 capsules for £17.50/adults and £8.75/children. As with the Empire State Building, you can pay extra to avoid waiting in line, although we've only found the waits to be long during the summer months. From there, you get some superb views of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, just across the River Thames, Buckingham Palace and many other London landmarks, including St. Paul's Cathedral and the city of London with its distinctive skyscrapers.

Further along the River Thames, a more active option is to climb up to the Whispering Gallery, Stone Gallery or even Gold Gallery at [St. Paul's Cathedral](#). Be warned, this is not something for the faint hearted! There are 259 steps to the Whispering Gallery, which looks down at the cathedral below, and you will feel every one of them. I've made this climb on a couple of occasions and each time, I've found it more exhausting than I remembered.

Climb another 100 plus steps and you'll get to the Stone Gallery and the views over London will soon make you forget the exertion to get here, with Tower Bridge, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and the River Thames just some of the sights nearby. The cathedral is located right in the middle of the city. Admission to [St. Paul's Cathedral](#) is £11/adults, £10/seniors, £8.50/students and £3.50/children. St. Paul's is open from Mondays to Saturdays, with church services taking place on Sundays.

Head across the Channel to France and the one monument that always comes to mind whenever anyone mentions Paris is, of course, the [Eiffel Tower](#) and, just like the Empire State Building, it's something that you have to visit on your first time in the city. The lines here can be hideously long and there's no way of buying your tickets in advance, unless you visit as part of a group on a tour package. Once you have purchased your tickets (€8-13/adults and €6.60-9.40/children, depending which level you go up to), then you get a range of different views, with elevators taking you up to first to the second floor, then to the top floor, if you choose to pay extra. The views from each level are different and it's amazing how much things change, the further you get from ground level.

Paris is literally littered with other places where you can get a bird's eye view of Paris. A unique place is the [Arc de Triomphe](#) (Ed: There is currently an error when you try to access the English version of this web site), where you can see all the different roads converging on the arc like a huge star. Seeing the road network like that beneath you is quite something. There's no charge here for children under 18 or for those who are under 26 and EU residents, but for others, the charge is €9 or €5.50 reduced rate.

On a recent trip, we also discovered the [Montparnasse Tower](#), which gave us some beautiful views of the city, and most importantly the Eiffel Tower. If you ever want to go up after dark, make sure you pick a building where you can see the Eiffel Tower, as it puts on a stunning light display every hour after dark and you'll miss that if you're standing on the tower itself. Admission is €10.50/adults, €7.50/students and €4.50/children.

There are many more cities with many more above ground viewing areas, such as the Peak in Hong Kong, Sears Tower or the John Hancock Tower in Chicago, Tokyo Tower in the Japanese capital, the Skywalk Observatory at Boston's Prudential Tower and even the hills that overlook beautiful Florence in Italy. Almost every city in the world offers one way or another of getting above the city, so you can really see it sprawl beneath you. Provided you have a head for heights, then it's something that's well worth seeking out anywhere you go.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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