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City tourists: Why worry?

Come 'for N.Y.' – no fear of terror

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Terrorist threats, anthrax, fear of flying — none of that stopped Margaret Heraty, 72, a retired real estate broker from Vancouver, from visiting New York last week.

"I lived through World War II and the blitz. The Germans were bombing us all the time," said Heraty, who grew up in Staffordshire, in the industrial Midlands of England.

"So none of this bothers me," she said, as she waited on line along with her daughter and granddaughter for a closeup view of the Christmas windows at Saks Fifth Avenue.

"Before I left, my friends were saying, 'Aren't you afraid *to go to New York City, huh?*'" she huffed. "And I told them, 'Well, I could stay here and get hit by a car, couldn't I?'"

Heraty is one of thousands of die-hard tourists visiting the city this holiday season despite the doomsayers.

Not much stops them, and to a man, woman and child, they said New York is where they wanted to be at this time of year.

They are bucking the trend, however, for tourism is down — way down — since the Sept. 11 attacks. The drop is having a devastating effect on the city's economy.

Tourism and travel revenue *for the fourth quarter is expect*ed to fall by as much as $3 billion, or 28%, from the same quarter a year ago, according to an analysis by the New York City Partnership.

Hotel occupancy has slumped to 62% this month, compared with 77% last December, according to NYC & Co., the city's convention and visitors bureau.

But the die-hards are here, the tough tourists with allegiance to the city, although more than a few are lured by low airfares and hotel rates, down by as much as 30%.

'Not scared'

"I'm not worried about terrorists. We think they're through," said 10-year-old Rachel Horne of King George, Va. She was gazing up at the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center one morning last week along with her sister Charlotte and their mother, Stacy Horne.

"I know all about it," said Rachel, a fifth-grader. "My parents are stuck to the TV screen all the time watching it, but I'm not scared to be in New York."

"Me neither," said 8-year-old Charlotte.

"Doesn't bother me at all. We didn't give it a thought," Horne said. "We didn't book way in advance, we just decided to *come," she added, noting that* she is paying just $140 a night for a midtown hotel room.

Near the skating rink, Arlene Neale of Vienna, Va., said she came here with some friends to support New York City.

"Do I have fear? Well ...," she paused, "you have to accept it, and we can't live in fear and I'm here for New York."

Her husband, Col. John Neale, works at the Pentagon, she said, and was in the building Sept. 11 when a hijacked plane struck.

"We all suffered, but not like you in New York. That's why we're here," she said.

Even with some city landmarks like the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island still closed, dozens of groups have come to the city in a show of support since the attacks. The outpouring began with a group of more than 200 from Oregon who stayed at the Waldorf-Astoria — all of them sporting "Oregon Loves NY" buttons.

The Rudy appeal

Two weeks ago, a couple from the Netherlands walked over to Mayor Giuliani while he was dining in a midtown restaurant to say, "We saw you on television, you told us to visit New York and we came."

Just after the attacks, Giuliani made several broadcast appeals for tourists to visit, saying there was no reason to avoid the city.

Strolling along Fifth Ave., Heinz and Astrid Michel from Bad Honnef, Germany, agreed with the mayor.

"People where we are from were saying, 'You're crazy to fly to New York,' but we just laughed and said we're not worried about the bombs," said Heinz, whose business is selling eyeglass frames to opticians.

"Our first time in Manhattan," Astrid said. "We went to the Empire State Building, went around Manhattan by bus. Oh, *it's nice. We had it all planned.*"

Others came on impulse.

In front of FAO Schwarz, at 59th St. and Fifth Ave., a group of 40 women, all nurses who work at Holy Redeemer Hospital in Meadowbrook, Pa., said they decided two weeks ago to charter a bus and come to the city for the day.

"Twenty dollars each, round-trip, for the day, and the driver dropped us off in Times Square," said Mary Crawford. "Afraid? Not at all. Well, going through the Lincoln Tunnel we saw police, and somebody said, 'What's going on?' but that was it."

They were off to see the Broadway show "The Tale of the Allergist's Wife" and then planned to visit the World Trade Center site.

"I think it's a piece of American history," said Kathy Jarrett, a coordinator for preadmission testing at the hospital.

Joy Bennett, who laughed as she described herself as a nursery nurse, said she wasn't going downtown. "I'm here to enjoy New York at Christmastime. What could be better?"

Others also were avoiding the Trade Center wreckage.

"*Don't want to go,*" said Diane Kwolek, 29, of Scranton, Pa. "I just want to enjoy the spirit of Christmas."

"It's not like we're afraid," said her companion, Bill Genello, also of Scranton. "No. Like the President says, we have to live our lives."



PHOTOS ROBERT ROSAMILIO DAILY NEWS

An unidentified tourist takes her best shot at the city — as do visitors (in middle photo) Rachel Horne, 10 (L), mother, Stacy, and sister Charlotte, 6, of King George, Va., and (in top photo) Kathryn Stack (L) and mother, Margaret Heraty, of Vancouver.

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