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Liberty & Ellis are reopening, but not statue

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Liberty Island and Ellis Island, two of the nation's strongest symbols of hope, freedom and new beginnings, are set to reopen Thursday for the first time since Sept. 11.

But tourists won't be allowed to climb the 335 steps to the Statue of Liberty's crown. And visitors to both islands will have to go through strict security checkpoints before boarding ferries at Battery Park and Liberty State Park.

"It's going to be airport-style screening," said Brian Feeney, a spokesman for the National Park Service.

Before boarding ferries to either destination, visitors will walk through metal detectors and their belongings will be passed through X-ray machines. Only small bags will be permitted.

"Before, people brought backpacks and luggage," said Feeney. "They literally would check out of their hotels and show up at the statue on their way to the airport."

"None of that will be permitted and there's no place for storage before you get on the boat," he added.

Feeney said the statue would remain closed until sometime next year.

He said officials wanted to reopen the islands, which normally draw 4 million people annually, in time for the year-end holidays.

He advised visitors to arrive early. The screenings will begin just after 8 a.m., an hour before the first ferries depart.

Schedule and ticket information can be obtained by calling (212) 363-3200, or visit the Web site www.statueoflibertyferry.com.

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