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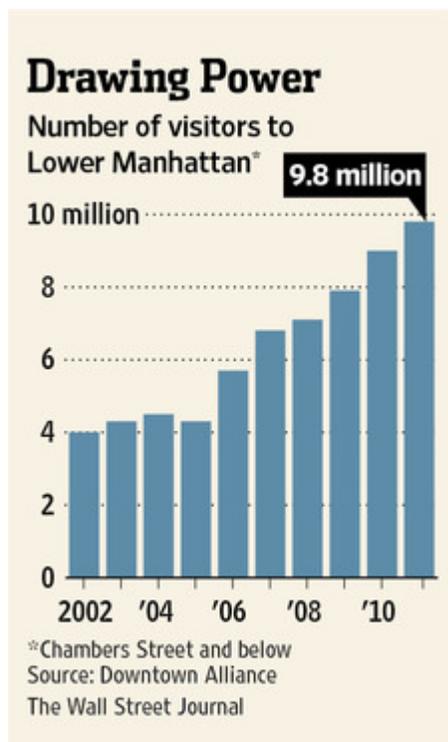
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Tourist Surge Brings Calls For Services

By MICHAEL HOWARD SAUL And MIKE VILENSKY

Decimated after the 2001 terrorist attacks, Lower Manhattan has bounced back so dramatically, city tourism officials say the neighborhood now is second only to Times Square on the must-do list of the millions of visitors who pour into the city's borders every year.

International tourists spent nearly \$1 billion in the area below Canal Street last year, NYC & Company, the city tourism bureau, is set to report Friday. The 9/11 memorial, which opened last year, draws most of the curious, but other popular spots include Zuccotti Park, site of the Occupy Wall Street protests; the Brooklyn Bridge; a Century 21 discount store; and the historic cobblestone streets near the southern tip of Manhattan.



But along with the resurgence have come headaches. Residents complain that their once-quiet enclave has been overwhelmed. Most say they are excited about the area's revival, but they say they have paid a price in streets that can be a cacophonous, chaotic mix of traffic jams, congested sidewalks and overflowing trash bins.

Community Board 1, which represents Lower Manhattan, unanimously passed a resolution last week calling on the city to increase mass-transit service on weekends, to encourage buses to use ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel and to take steps to prevent tourist bottlenecks on sidewalks. On Friday, a City Council committee will take up the issue amid a push for more help from City Hall.

"It's been difficult," said Julie Menin, the board's former longtime chairwoman and a candidate for Manhattan borough president.

To be sure, the number of people living in Lower Manhattan has also jumped. Adding 26,800 residents over the past decade, the area has nearly doubled in population since 2000, according to U.S. Census data. Another 310,000 people work there, according to the nonprofit Alliance for Downtown New York.

Those numbers, though, are small compared with the explosion in tourism. Last year, roughly 9.8 million people visited Lower Manhattan, about a 9% increase over the previous year and a 24% leap from 2009, the alliance reports.

Although visitors have flocked to the World Trade Center site since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the opening of the National September 11 Memorial on the 10th anniversary last year made the spot a formal attraction. Many tourists have said they consider a stop there to be almost a patriotic duty.

In its first year, the 9/11 memorial drew more than 4.7 million visitors, far more than the 3.7 million who visited the Statue of Liberty in 2011. Although neighborhood numbers are harder to nail down, Lower Manhattan is believed to be the city's second-most-popular tourist destination after Times Square, said NYC & Company CEO George Fertitta.

It is a significant change for a neighborhood that not long ago felt near-desolate after dark.

Tammy Keller, 49 years old, said the crowds have swelled since she moved into her West Street building more than three years ago. Walking her dog has become like maneuvering through a pinball machine.

"I feel like I have to escape my own building," Ms. Keller said. "The crowds are enormous, just hordes of people."

Harvey Molotch, an author and metropolitan studies professor at New York University, said the area surrounding the memorial is unique because a "residential neighborhood is developing simultaneous with a national monument and Boy Scout troops of tourists."

"The neighborhood will soon be unrecognizable," he said.

A spokeswoman for Mayor Michael Bloomberg called the tourism boom a significant accomplishment. "Any adverse impacts are certainly problems of success," said spokeswoman Julie Wood, who added that the city is working with local officials to address problems.



Michael Nagle/Getty Images

International tourists spent nearly \$1 billion in the area below Canal Street last year. Above, tourists stop to take pictures in front of the New York Stock Exchange in August 2011.

Mr. Fertitta acknowledged that life has been a "little bit more difficult" for residents and workers but said overall, the city has handled the influx of tourists well. He said the city has heard the concerns of residents and, among other efforts, has been trying to lure crowds to explore all of Lower Manhattan, not just the memorial. Mr. Fertitta said he would be at the hearing to assess the complaints.

Council Member Margaret Chin, a Manhattan Democrat and chairwoman of the committee holding Friday's oversight hearing, said she supports efforts to boost tourism. But more resources are needed to accommodate the masses, she said.

"Money's got to be put back into the neighborhood that's hosting the tourists," she said.

Ms. Chin said there needs to be better signs and maps for tourists, more public bathrooms, more sanitation workers to deal with the garbage and increased enforcement of illegal vendors.

Lower Manhattan has 18 hotels with a total 4,092 rooms with an average 85% occupancy rate last year. The number of rooms is triple those in 2001; by 2014, there are expected to be 23 hotels with more than 5,100 rooms.

"We have so many of the attractions that visitors from the state, the region, the nation, the world come to see," said Elizabeth Berger, the alliance's president. Ms. Berger, who has lived downtown for three decades, said her organization wants to increase visitors' lengths of stay and ensure they see more than the memorial. As for the quality-of-life complaints, she said: "More people, more challenges."

Across from Zuccotti Park, at the intersection of Liberty and Church streets, Burger King franchise owner Robert Powell, 48, has doubled his staff and altered his business model: instead of being a typical fast-food joint, his restaurant employs a "guest ambassador" to monitor the doors and provide maps, and directions to the memorial. Customers are also ushered to and from their seats and offered table service. He has further plans to expand, adding another floor to his two-story restaurant, increasing capacity by 250 seats.

"The memorial has brought us a tremendous amount of customers," Mr. Powell said.

They are likely to keep coming as long as New York remains a popular destination. A recent deal between the city and state cleared the path for the 9/11 museum to open, creating another draw.

Rex Sorgatz, an Internet entrepreneur, moved to the Financial District five years ago to escape the tourists and crowds that populate much of Manhattan. Mr. Sorgatz said he saw a tip on Foursquare to patronize the neighborhood Shake Shack only on weekends, "when there is no line."

"It was only written a couple of months ago, but it's completely laughable now," he said. "The lines are insane." Still, Mr. Sorgatz recently renewed his lease because, he said, "I want to see how the neighborhood turns out."

—Eric Zerkel contributed to this article.

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