Crossing the Atlantic

Inspection at Ellis Island

First- and second-class passengers were not required to undergo the inspection process at Ellis Island. Instead, these passengers underwent a cursory inspection aboard ship. The federal government felt that these more affluent passengers would not end up in institutions, hospitals or become a burden to the state. However, first- and second-class passengers were sent to Ellis Island for further inspection if they were sick or had legal problems. The inspection process took approximately 3–7 hours.

Excluded from entry

Only two per cent of the arriving immigrants were excluded from entry. The two main reasons why an immigrant would be excluded were if a doctor diagnosed that the immigrant had a contagious disease that would endanger the public health or if a legal inspector thought the immigrant was likely to become a public charge or an illegal contract laborer.

Ports of arrival

Most of the emigrants arrived in North America via Ellis Island, New York. Other important ports were Boston, Philadelphia, Quebec and Halifax. From the port, the journey usually continued to the final destination by train.

"On Tuesday it was stormy all day long. The ship was like a small woodchip on waves. Passengers in bow and stern cabins fell from their beds and if you tried to stand up you hit your head on the wall.
In the morning I stayed on the deck for a while but returned in soon after. Only few people were up. Even some of the men were so weak that they understood nothing of this world. I wasn't very sick but weak enough to think it was best to stay in bed. I had to hold on to stay on my bed. Once I threw up a little.
Thursday was quite windy again, but it didn't matter at all. We stayed on the deck almost all day. On Friday morning we landed at 9. Then we waited all day until we finally left for Ellis Island on Saturday morning." – Hilda’s Diary

"At 3 pm the doctor checked us up. The check-up was delayed due to the storm. They only checked for the vaccination marks on our arms, and if they found them, no vaccination was given. I wasn't vaccinated although they only found one small mark." – Hilda’s Diary

From 1855 to 1890, the Castle Garden in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan was America's first official immigration center. Approximately eight million immigrants, mostly from Northern and Western Europe, passed through its doors. From 1892 to 1924, Ellis Island was America's largest and most active immigration station, where more than 12 million immigrants were processed.

Ellis Island – “The Island of Hope and Tears”.

Institute of Migration

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Mulberry Street, New York in 1900.

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