Voices, faces, images blur the consciousness as I walk into the large hall that introduces visitors to the museum built as a memorial for the victims of the 9/11 tragedy that brought down the Twin Towers in New York.

Built over the 'footprints' of the destroyed buildings, the museum starts at ground level, but drops 70 feet to the base, where the foundations of the towers can still be seen. Seventeen years ago, on a visit to New York, I had watched in horror from my hotel on 42nd Street, as smoke billowed from the Towers far away. Only a lucky coincidence had prevented my being in the vicinity. September 11 being my wedding anniversary, I had waited for a call from home before leaving for Century 21, a department store, a stone's throw from the Towers. The call was delayed and that possibly saved my life.

A large photograph of the Towers engulfed in smoke in the main hall, just before they start crashing down, brings back the need to hold my breath. Faces appear on panels to speak of their experiences on that day.

The exhibition also explains the formation of the attack, from planning to reality. The museum is broadly divided into three sections. The hall holds information of life before 9/11. About how the Twin Towers were built and how they symbolised the pride and glory of America. Which was exactly the reason why the Al Qaeda chose to demolish them, as the panels on the history of the organisation show.

The third section is a tribute to the spirit of America – how people responded to the tragedy, helped in recovering possible survivors and bodies, and rebuilt, not just the destroyed space, but also hope and morale.

A long curving walkway leads down to the Foundation Hall.

At the 9/11 Museum, life and death stand face to face, and the impermanence of man and his creations is recorded in no uncertain terms.

On D-day The second part covers September 11, 2001. It includes details from the Pentagon, the hijacked planes and reactions from people from all over the world. The third section is a tribute to the spirit of America – how people responded to the tragedy, helped in recovering possible survivors and bodies, and rebuilt, not just the destroyed space, but also hope and morale.

Mangled giant iron beams and other remains of the buildings evoke a sense of regret. One particularly poignant exhibit is of the stairway that connected the northern edge of WTC's Austin Plaza to Vesey Street below. Along with an adjoining escalator, the stairs survived the blasts, and helped many to escape to safety, following the directions given by David Brink, Lieutenant, NYPD, to “Get down this set of stairs and run, just run as fast as you can.”

One side of the Foundation Hall is marked by a high wall, with protrusions. The Slurry Wall, as it is called, was built to keep the water from the Hudson from pooling into the building site during excavation for laying the deep foundations of the Towers. The Slurry Wall withstood the attack, and by holding its ground, prevented further disasters like the flooding of train and underground lines. It stands today as a ‘historic asset’ of the World Trade Centre.

Other aspects of the museum include the wall of photographs of the nearly 3,000 victims who perished in the attack. Sparing no effort, authorities ensured photographs of all but 10 victims were procured from surviving family members and put up in 250 columns and 12 rows. Of the 10, three names and pictures have been withheld by the families concerned. For now, an oak leaf stands in for the missing portraits.

Recorded voices of families talking about their loved ones mingle with the whispers of those around me. Temporary exhibitions showcase the rebuilding, the rescue, and there are exhibits that include a motor from a lift, a fire truck that half melted in the heat during rescue operations, details of the Al Qaeda teams in all attacks, and a live time line of events linked to 9/11 across the globe. It takes two hours to take in the museum. More, if one decides to join the lines waiting to watch the short films being screened every 15 minutes.

There is a repository that quotes Virgil saying ‘No day shall erase you from the memory of time’. Sifting the dust and debris had yielded 8,354 unidentified human remains, which are held here, until forensic science reaches a level where the microscopic pieces can be linked with specific individuals who died in the attack. Family members visit a room behind the wall that protects them from public gaze.

Outside is a large rectangular memorial fountain that forms one of the two Reflection Pools. I realise that there are names cut into the metal rim all around, 3,000 names accounted for between the two pools. A notice asks visitors to touch the names and establish contact. I trace my fingers along a few. Hoping the owners will know they were remembered at least briefly, by someone unknown.

**FACTFILE**

The 9/11 Memorial Museum is open daily.

**TIMINGS ARE:**
- **SUNDAY TO THURSDAY:** 9 am – 8 pm with last entry at 6 pm
- **FRIDAY AND SATURDAY:** 9 am – 9 pm with last entry at 7 pm

There are extended hours on holidays.

**TICKET COSTS** $24 for adults, $20 for senior citizens (above 65 years), $18 for students, and $15 for children (7-17).

The New York City Pass provides general admission to the museum as part of a package deal.

**The Tribute in Light** shines two beams of blue into the night sky to represent the loss of the Towers but, more importantly, what the loss of those towers meant to the victims, families and the nation as a whole. This tribute is the most powerful light projection on earth.