

Traveling? Why Pay for Parking or Limos? Try Taking Tri-Rail

BY BOBBI LEVIN | PHOTOS BY HOWIE SILVER

On Thursday, April 9th, the new Miami Central Station, at Miami International Airport, officially opened for business, serving Tri-Rail, Miami Metrorail and Metrobus customers. The Miami Metrorail Orange Line, which terminates alongside the Tri-Rail platform, now provides convenient connections to many of the Miami attractions and cruise ships, which were once only easily accessible by car.

A group from the *UCO Reporter* arrived at the West Palm Beach Station just in time to catch the 7:36 a.m. southbound train. Parking for as long as you want is free at Tri-Rail stations and is on a first-come, first-serve basis. Depending on the day of the week and the hours of travel, a round-trip ticket between WPB and Miami costs less than \$12 which is a phenomenal bargain! Senior discounts, available only for off-peak travel, make this trip even cheaper. Although we traveled at rush hour on a work day, empty seats were available in all cars. The tri-level train was immaculately clean and each car had a large area designated for passenger luggage and bicycles.

There are no conductors on Tri-Rail trains. Each passenger must purchase a ticket before boarding. The train is patrolled by an armed security guard who may ask to see your ticket. If none is produced, you will have to pay a hefty fine.

The ride to Miami took approximately two hours, giving us plenty of time to look out the windows, to chat with other passengers, and, most importantly, time to check out the bathrooms. I am glad to report that they were large and SPOTLESS!

Tri-Rail trains arrive on the ground level of the new \$92 million station which has been under construction for nearly four years. Escalators move passengers to the air-conditioned concourse, where it is easy to make connections to the MIA people-mover, Metrorail, the Miami-Dade county bus system and, eventually, to Amtrak and Greyhound buses. Adjacent to the station is the Rental Car Center, a large facility that provides customers arriving at the airport with convenient access to participating rental companies. Miami International is a major airline hub which offers nonstop and connecting service to points worldwide, and access from Tri-Rail is easy and stair-free.



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The new Miami Central Station at Miami International Airport is now open.

Southbound Tri-Rail service from WPB begins at about 4 a.m. The opening of the new Miami station means that Century Village travelers going to MIA will no longer have to schlep their luggage off trains at Hialeah Market Station and then onto crowded and slow shuttle buses. Upon arrival at the Miami Airport Station, follow the signs to the FREE 1.25 mile elevated people mover that will bring you to airport terminals in about five minutes. However, be aware that currently the last northbound train leaves Miami at about 9:30 p.m. That is too early for some travelers whose incoming flights don't arrive until after 9 p.m. You will be stuck at MIA waiting for the first northbound Tri-Rail train that departs at about 4 a.m.

The huge central concourse was filled with uniformed employees who were extremely helpful and willing to answer all questions. We did not see any food services anywhere in the terminal so I suggest you carry your own water bottle or snacks with you.

For cruise ship travellers, we were told that the easiest and least expensive way to get to the Port of Miami would be to ride Tri Rail from West Palm Beach to Miami Airport Station, transfer to the Metrorail Orange line (\$2.25) and then go a few stops to Government Center. At Government Center, a short cab ride into the Port for up to 4 people should cost about \$10. If you can manage your luggage, this is a reasonable alternative to hiring a private car service from WPB to the Port.

Although it was only 11 a.m., we were starving and thirsty. Certain that we now understood the transportation system, we boarded a Metrorail train

headed for Bayside Marketplace, the bustling dining/shopping complex situated just outside the Port of Miami. After lunch, our photographer, Howie, wandered about taking photographs and Donald and I boarded a trolley for what we thought was going to be a ten-minute ride to the cruise ship docks. Instead, we got a 2 hour ride through most of downtown Miami and some of the close by residential neighborhoods.

The Orange-Coral Way trolley was like a Hop-On/Hop Off Bus and a wonderful way to get a feel for the working city. Free to all passengers, the driver waited at the designated bus stops until elderly riders, mothers with children, and tourists with luggage could board. The trolley traveled through both upscale commercial neighborhoods as well as working class residential neighborhoods - each filled with ethnic businesses and restaurants that looked intriguing and smelled wonderful. It was easy to imagine that we were in a foreign country as

no one on board spoke English - we heard Spanish, German, French, and Swedish. We saw signs for places that we want to come back to visit - Vizcaya, Museum of Science, Little Havana and Coconut Grove.

At 4 p.m., we found Howie still snapping photos of people, birds and excursion boats. We made our way back to the station and boarded another tri-level train headed to WPB - exhausted but pleased with our excursion to Miami. We found traveling by Tri-Rail was extremely comfortable and reasonably priced. The new Miami Airport Station makes connections to the airport quick and easy. Metrorail, commuter buses and trolleys make moving around the city quick and easy. People were friendly. People were helpful. Streets were clean - no trash on the sidewalks or accumulated in the curbs. Downtown Miami also has a Metromover, an elevated, free of charge monorail system, that makes stops at points all over the downtown area.

Are you planning a plane trip



Incoming train at Miami Central Station.

or cruise? Try using Tri-Rail. Save yourself the expensive cost of parking or hiring a limo. Or if you just want to spend a day seeing the sights of Miami, I suggest that you put on a comfortable pair of walking shoes, grab your camera and take a train ride to Miami. It is an inexpensive way to have an adventure, see new things and meet new people - all without packing a suitcase.



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