

[VP10Transportation.doc, Jeff Borg, 1,130 words]

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Getting Around

With time at a premium, you won't waste any in transit. From Miami International Airport — in the center of all the action — getting around Greater Miami and the Beaches is a breeze, with fleets of modern rental cars and an integrated network of taxis, buses, shuttles and commuter rails.

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*A massive airport-improvement program
pays off for Greater Miami visitors.*

By Jeff Borg

Here you can touch down, check in and be on the beach in an hour, because Miami International Airport sits right in the middle of all the action — less than seven miles from Downtown Miami and 10 miles from Miami Beach. Once on terra firma, getting around Greater Miami and the Beaches is just as easy — by shuttle, taxi, rental car, bus or train.

ALL FLIGHTS LEAD TO M.I.A. Miami International Airport, which welcomes 660,000 travelers each week, ranks among the busiest airports in the United States: first in international takeoffs and landings, third in international passengers. Flights arrive from 150 destinations around the world.

More than 80 airlines serve MIA, including global American Airlines and American Eagle, with more flights here than any other, and major national carriers like Continental Airlines, plus leading regional brands.

A multiyear \$6.2 billion improvement program is now coming on-line. When complete, it will have expanded the number of runways from three to four and the area of the passenger terminal from 3.5 million to 7.4 million square feet, with 101 international gates, 27 domestic gates, 555 ticket counters and 120 self-service kiosks. Federal inspection services will have capacity for 7,400 passengers per hour.

Starting in 2012, all roads — as well as all flights and most trains — will lead to a new Miami Intermodal Center, a massive new transportation hub nearing completion next to the airport. It will connect the passenger terminal to every mode of ground transportation in South Florida, while decongesting nearby streets.

FOLLOW THAT CAB. Meanwhile, catch a convenient taxi from several stands outside the baggage-claim areas to any of the destinations in town. The centrality of MIA keeps taxi trips short and affordable. Reach Brickell Avenue or Coral Gables in about 20 minutes for approximately \$22, South Beach in 25 minutes for a flat rate of \$32. Share a cab for no extra charge.

To save a little more, hop a blue-and-yellow shared-ride shuttle van, which provides door-to-door service, with a limited number of stops, at fixed rates. Group limos (passenger vans) also circulate around the terminal, advertising specific destinations at fixed rates.

RENT A CAR. With so many visitors and so much competition, Greater Miami is a great place to rent a car — economy, luxury or sport utility. At least a dozen rental agencies operate in and around MIA.

Take advantage of the weather to catch some rays in a cute convertible, or play international celebrity in your own flashy bling-mobile. Motor up the coast or out to the Everglades on your own schedule.

Check in at the counters near baggage claim, then hop the next shuttle to pick up your car. Agencies also maintain desks at select hotels, resorts and malls. Mileage is usually free; expressways are wide, flat and well maintained; and surface streets are laid out in an easy-to-navigate grid.

Avenues run north and south, starting at Miami Avenue (Y-axis). Streets run east and west, starting at Flagler Street (X-axis). The exception is Coral Gables, where the shady streets and the Mediterranean architecture make it a beautiful place in which to get lost.

DRIVE IT LIKE A NATIVE. Drivers entering Greater Miami by car get here by Interstate 95 or Florida's Turnpike from the northeast, Interstate 75 from the northwest, the Tamiami Trail (US 41) from the west, or the Overseas Highway (US 1) from the south.

Within Miami-Dade County, Interstate 95 runs south through downtown, merging into South Dixie Highway (US 1), which continues to the Florida Keys. The central east-west highway is the Dolphin Expressway (SR 836), which runs from downtown about 14 miles into the western suburbs. The Palmetto expressway (SR 826) rings the urban core like an inner beltway, while the Turnpike Extension is like an outer beltway.

Other expressways are Gratigny (SR 924) in the northwest, Don Shula (SR 874) and Snapper Creek (SR 878) in the southwest, and Airport (SR 112) in the center. Each has a toll plaza (\$1.25), except Snapper Creek. The lengthy Dolphin Expressway has two. At rental-car agencies, visitors can get a PlatePass or Pass24 to pay tolls electronically.

Seven causeways — up to three miles in length — cross Biscayne Bay to Miami Beach and the northern beaches. Five are free but two charge tolls: the Broad (\$1)

and the Venetian (\$1.50). One causeway, the scenic Rickenbacker, links Miami to Key Biscayne (\$1.50).

METROBUS, METRORAIL, METROMOVER. Public transportation — Metrobus, Metrorail and Metromover — links points of interest all around Greater Miami and the Beaches. Pick up route maps and schedules from the Transit Information Center at concourse E on the baggage level of MIA. A kiosk also connects to the Miami-Dade Transit website, www.miamidade.gov/transit, for up-to-the-minute route information.

Most Metrobus and Metrorail routes cost \$2, and fare boxes accept tokens, dollars, quarters, dimes and nickels. Unlimited seven-day passes for \$19 help visitors navigate like locals. Metromover is free.

Metrobus provides a low-cost alternative to taxis and rental cars, with more than a thousand buses that cover 41 million miles per year; a hundred routes extend north into the next county and south to the Florida Keys. Beaches and other tourist favorites are especially well served. Buses on several routes operate 24 hours a day.

Metrorail, the county's 22-mile, 22-station commuter rail line, runs like a spine from Hialeah in the northwest to Dadeland in the southwest. Stops include the Civic Center, Downtown Miami, Coral Gables and South Miami. Transfer to Tri-Rail to travel up the coast to Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Metromover, the 4.4-mile light-rail line that loops around Downtown Miami, interconnects seamlessly with Metrorail and Metrobus and stretches north to the Omni area and south to Brickell Avenue. Cars run every few minutes, stop every few blocks, and offer a bird's-eye view of the splendid buildings and picturesque Biscayne Bay.

For intercity travel by bus, Greyhound operates from three stations. Amtrak terminates at 8303 NW 37th Avenue in Miami.

SHIP OUT. Many people pass through Greater Miami, literally the cruise capital of the world, on their way to other fabulous destinations around the Caribbean and beyond. The Port of Miami, on huge Dodge Island in the middle of Biscayne Bay, welcomes 3.75 million passengers per year.

With rates at all price points, a cruise makes a terrific add-on for an already great vacation in Greater Miami and the Beaches.