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Feb 2, 2011

Breaking New Ground

Remarkable makeovers at the world's airports aim to relieve travel stress and congestion.

"This is the missing piece of the puzzle," MIA spokesman Greg Chin told The Miami Herald. "The Skytrain really ties everything together. You can arrive on a flight and, if you are connecting, get to the other end of the terminal in a matter of four minutes." The system is designed to carry 9,000 passengers an hour.



Making the Connection: Miami International's four-month-old Skytrain

photo: Miami International

That should help air travelers de-stress, a goal of airlines and airports around the planet. Few airports help calm people down as smoothly and entertain them as cleverly as Germany's Munich International. MUC, which opened in Bavaria in the 1990s, has burnished its customer service since then and, at its best, has pampering down to a fine art.

MUC offers passengers a last-minute massage near the gates in Terminal 2, hosts a Kempinski Hotel Fit & Fly Health & Spa Club, offers pedicures and manicures in Be Relax spas in both terminals and men's haircuts at a recently opened Brants Barber & Shop. Sleepy? Tumble into one of the two "nap cabs" — sleeping cabins complete with a couch and soothing music, plus a flat-screen TV and Internet work station for insomniacs.

There's more: MAC — the Munich Airport Center, located between the two terminals — stages live polo and volleyball matches, showcases the latest BMW and Audi models and has a beer garden. Travelers can unwind with a stein of Airbräu beer, brewed at the airport since 2003.

It may not have a beer garden, but Toronto's steadily growing Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport (YTZ) boasts a widening range of passenger amenities such as complimentary WiFi and Internet work stations with iMacs. Porter Airlines opened a second lounge last September for customers flying in Canada and to several U.S. cities. "The airport's success is creating the need for infrastructure enhancements such as the new lounge," said Robert Deluce, Porter's president and CEO.

Meanwhile, travelers transiting in Finland can get the chill out in the 1-year-old Via Spa at Helsinki-Vantaa International. Options include paddling about in a mineral-water pool or taking a spruce and stone sauna or a traditional Finnish sauna while overlooking the runways. Treatments at the Finnair facility are short courses designed expressly for travelers transferring between Europe and Asia.

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Break in the Action: Kempinski's Fit & Fly Spa pool at Munich International

photo: Kempinski

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