



News Clip

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Jump in Miami airport passenger traffic exceeds expectations

By Sherri C. Ranta

More domestic travel led Miami International Airport to a 2.8% increase in passengers last year, well above what airport officials had predicted for the year.

About 31 million passengers traveled through the airport in 2005, with increases of 3.6% in domestic travel and 1.8% international, said Chris Mangos, manager of marketing, Miami-Dade Aviation Department.

"We were pleasantly surprised with 2005," he said. "We (predicted) a 1.8% increase in 2005 - the fact that we went over leaves us all very happy. It's been a bumpy road since 9/11."

Aviation officials, Mr. Mangos said, see this year's increase as a turning point for the airport, where passenger counts have not surpassed pre-9/11 levels. In 2000, 33.6 million people traveled through the airport. In 2004, the count dipped to 29.5 million.

Mr. Mangos attributed last year's increases in large part to strategic business moves by American Airlines.

"What American did was take a losing situation," he said, "and turn it around to their benefit and to our benefit."

While restructuring its routes and fees, Mr. Mangos said, the airline carried 1.7 million more passengers in 2005 than in 2004. It boosted boardings 2.5%, he said, while cutting capacity 5%. "For American, it worked out fantastically well."

The increase in airport passengers, Mr. Mangos said, is especially remarkable considering four of the six major carriers serving the airport - Delta Airlines, US Airways, Northwest and United Airlines - are in bankruptcy.

US Airways increased passenger counts at MIA 5% in 2005, he said. "US Airways is always looking at its system, overall routes. They made adjustments and beefed up service in their good markets." US Airways, he said, is expected to be a major low-cost carrier at then airport when it comes out of bankruptcy to merge with Northwest.

Tourism, a huge passenger traffic generator for the airport, saw significant increases last year.

"The visitor industry in Miami-Dade County experienced a 6.5% growth in hotel occupancy last year, more than double the national increase of 2.9%," said William D. Talbert, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"Visitors are returning to the area to vacation, attend conferences, conduct business and see friends and family, and many are using MIA as their arrival point."

Airport officials, Mr. Mangos said, are "cautiously optimistic" for the coming year and expect a 1.8% to 2% increase in passengers.