

Glamor and Romance Roll into LA



By Bill Heard, Editor

(May 29, 2001) The glamour and romance of a bygone era of rail travel arrived in Los Angeles, Friday, when the American Orient Express – featuring historic cars from the 1940s and '50s – rolled into Union Station.

Although the deluxe, 16-car passenger train was in town just long enough to be washed, cleaned and receive passengers for a Pacific Coast tour, there was time to host a group of MTA employees for a quick tour.



The American Orient Express includes club cars originally built for the Union Pacific Railroad and an observation car that served for 20 years on the New York Central's 20th Century Limited.

The Pullman Company built the sleeping carriages between 1948 and 1958 for use on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, the Nickel Plate Railroad and the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads.

\$15 million renovation

All together, some \$15 million was spent in renovating the cars whose interiors now include plush furniture and glisten with polished mahogany and brass. The New York observation car, dedicated by General Dwight Eisenhower in 1948, features a circular bay window.








The ceiling of the Seattle club car is painted to resemble an early morning sky twinkling with 24-karat gold stars, while the ceiling of the Rocky Mountain club car depicts the Milky Way in pure gold leaf.

A 44-member American Orient Express crew includes porters, chefs, serving staff, bartenders and tour guides. The Denver-based company contracts locomotion services from Amtrak, which provides a three- or four-member train crew.

The route of the American Orient Express is a huge circle that encompasses Canada and the United States. The U.S. route covers the Eastern Seaboard, the Old South, Southwest and Pacific Coast. Branch lines take passengers through the national parks of the

western states.

A trip on the American Orient Express is somewhat more pricey than riding Metro Rail. Peak season tours range from about \$3,400 to \$5,800; off-peak tours are \$3,200 to \$5,300.

GALLERY		
	<p>The American Orient Express, which features restored historic rail cars from the 1940s and '50s, tours the United States and Canada year-round.</p>	
	<p>Porter Barbara Navy, left, welcomes passengers aboard the American Orient Express. At right, Chief Purser Carmen Beck describes the train to a tour group of MTA employees seated in a lounge car.</p>	
	<p>Chef Courtney Nguyen displays a sumptuous platter of fresh meats, cheese and vegetables while Roger Chase chops tomatoes. At right, Michelle Caldwell tries to decide where to sit in a lounge car.</p>	
	<p>The table is set with fine china and sterling silver and awaiting the evening's diners. At right, bartender Juan Bermudez stands ready to serve refreshments to thirsty passengers.</p>	
	<p>Warren Morse, at left, imagines taking a sip of champagne in one of the train's Presidential Suites. At right, Lonnie Mitchell, Tom Conner and Gary Spivack take a look at the Zurich dining car.</p>	
		PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD

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