

The Railroad Report

21 January 2011

Aboard Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*

*Why I like waking up
on the train*

Passing Mount Shasta at dawn on Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*

Getting there's half the fun

I like waking up on a train because you wake up to a different world from the one you were in when your eyelids surrendered.

You may be climbing through snow-capped mountains, racing along a deserted coast line or crossing through

someone's back yard. But you are not where you were when you got off work, packed the bags and called for a taxi to the station.

And you got to this new place in a dream. There's no better way to do it.

– ***Continued overleaf***

Getting there's half the fun



- Internet photo

Crossing the Salt Creek trestle in the Oregon Cascades

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Emily and I are on a weekend trip to the Columbia River Gorge, the border between Washington and Oregon, with the first two friends we made when we moved to California in 1985, David and Rodica Claudino.

Rodica and Emily were colleagues at Emily's first job. Born and raised in Bucharest, Romania, she defected to the United States while a student at UC Berkeley. David is an Intel engineer, Napa Valley wine kid and makes a mean cedar plank salmon.

We have traveled together many times, from Disneyland to the beach, and we have ridden Amtrak's *California Zephyr* to ski in the Colorado Rockies.

As I write this, we are stopped in the snow in the Oregon Cascades while the crew swaps the position of our two engines because the windshield wipers failed on the original lead unit. But we are still on schedule to arrive in Portland just after dark on the beginning of a special trip.

We will fly home Monday night, but unless we get caught carrying too much mouthwash through security, no one will remember that part of the trip.



Route of the Coast Starlight

Traveling on the *Coast Starlight*

The *Coast Starlight* between Los Angeles and Seattle is one of the rare Amtrak trains that is not a direct descendant of a private railroad's passenger service before Amtrak's creation in 1971.

But its name has antecedents from the Southern Pacific Railroad, which once owned the tracks from L.A. to Portland, Ore. (The Southern Pacific no longer exists, having been acquired by Union Pacific. The Portland-Seattle tracks belong to BNSF).

SP operated a daytime passenger service between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area called the *Morning Daylight* as well as daytime passenger service between Oakland and Portland called the *Shasta Daylight*. But until Amtrak created the *Coast Starlight*, rail passengers could not do the entire 1,377-mile L.A.-Seattle run on a single train.

The *Starlight* is one of 14 Amtrak trains that operates overnight with sleeper cars for first class passengers as well as coaches. Like all overnight trains west of the Mississippi River, it uses two-level Superliner equipment that allows passengers to walk the length of the train on the upper level only. Boarding is on the lower level where most restrooms, showers (in sleepers), the kitchen and café are located.

East Coast overnight trains use single-level equipment because of low clearances in tunnels and beneath the catenary that provides power to the electric trains on the Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington, D.C.

Passengers in sleepers pay an accommodation charge in addition to the rail fare. The accommodation charge is per room and includes all meals in the dining car.

Just as with airline fares, Amtrak prices are not set but vary with demand. For example, shortly after New Year's when we purchased our tickets for this trip, we paid \$82 each for our rail fare plus \$192

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Coast Starlight			
(This is a temporary schedule to accommodate track work. In April, all times revert to normal which are 2 hours earlier.)			
11	Train Number		14
Read Down	Miles		Read Up
Lv 11:45 am	0	Seattle, Wash.	Ar 10:45 pm
12:31 pm	39	Tacoma	9:11 pm
1:21 pm	75	Olympia-Lacey	8:22 pm
1:45 pm	94	Centralia	7:57 pm
2:29 pm	137	Kelso-Longview	7:14 pm
3:08 pm	177	Vancouver, Wash.	6:36 pm
Ar 3:50 pm Lv 4:26 pm	187 767	Portland, Ore.	Lv 6:20 pm Ar 5:40 pm
5:37 pm	239 715	Salem	4:03 pm
6:10 pm	267 687	Albany	3:30 pm
7:10 pm	310 644	Eugene-Springfield	2:44 pm
10:08 pm	432 522	Chemult	11:40 am
11:50 pm	505 449	Klamath Falls, Ore.	10:25 am
2:35 pm	610 344	Dunsmuir, Calif.	7:04 am
4:21 am	665 289	Redding	5:14 am
5:50 am	739 215	Chico	3:55 am
8:35 am	824 130	Sacramento	2:19 am
8:50 am	837 117	Davis	1:28 am
9:34 am	881 73	Martinez	12:49 am
10:04 am	901 53	Richmond	
Ar 10:15 am Lv 10:25 am	908 46	Emeryville	Lv 11:59 pm Ar 11:57 pm
Ar 10:40 am Lv 10:50 am	913 41	Oakland	Lv 11:42 pm Ar 11:32 pm
Ar 11:55 am Lv 12:07 pm	954 0	San Jose	Lv 10:39 pm Ar 10:27 pm
1:48 pm	1021	Salinas	8:36 pm
3:38 pm	1119	Paso Robles	6:45 pm
5:20 pm	1157	San Luis Obispo	5:43 pm
8:17 pm	1274	Santa Barbara	2:48 pm
9:05 pm	1310	Oxnard	1:55 pm
9:38 pm	1341	Simi Valley	1:23 pm
10:05 pm	1358	Van Nuys	12:52 pm
10:15 pm	1363	Burbank	12:42 pm
Ar 11:00 pm	1377	Los Angeles, Calif.	Lv 12:15 pm
Coast Starlight winter consist			
Locomotive or car	Description		
2 GE P42DC diesel-electric locomotives	4,250 horsepower each		
Baggage car			
Transition sleeper	Sleeping space for onboard service crew (cooks, waiters, sleeping and coach car attendants)		
2 Superliner sleepers	Upper level: 5 bedrooms, 10 roomettes; Lower level: 1 accessible bedroom, 1 family bedroom (2 adults, 2 children), 4 roomettes (Max capacity: 44), restrooms, shower		
Pacific Parlour Car	Upper level: Bar, lounge, booth seating; Lower level: 19-seat movie theater		
Superliner diner	Upper level: 18 tables for 4 (Max capacity: 72); Lower level: Kitchen		
Superliner lounge	Upper level: Observation seating for 50; Lower level: Snack bar, lounge, booth seating		
3 Superliner coaches	Upper level: 62 coach seats; Lower level: 12 coach seats, restrooms (1 car has video arcade instead of lower level seating)		

Traveling on the *Coast Starlight*

Amtrak's overnight trains (Trains are listed by annual ridership in Fiscal Year 2010 ending Oct. 31)		
Train Service endpoints	Trip distance Nights out	2010 ridership Change from 2009
Empire Builder Chicago-Seattle/Portland <i>(Westbound train divides, and eastbound train combines, in Spokane)</i>	2,205 miles (Seattle section) 2,255 miles (Portland section) 2 nights	533,493 +3.5%
Coast Starlight Seattle-Los Angeles	1,377 miles 1 night	444,205 +2.7%
Silver Star New York-Miami	1,522 miles 1 night	393,586 +6.0%
California Zephyr Chicago-S.F. Bay Area	2,438 miles 2 nights	377,876 +9.4%
Lake Shore Limited New York-Chicago	959 miles 1 night	364,460 +9.0%
Silver Meteor New York-Miami	1,389 miles 1 night	352,286 +6.5%
Southwest Chief Chicago-Los Angeles	2,256 miles 2 nights	342,403 +7.7%
Crescent New York-New Orleans	1,377 miles 1 night	298,688 +4.2%
Texas Eagle Chicago-San Antonio <i>(Continues to Los Angeles 3 days / week as part of Sunset Limited)</i>	1,306 miles 1 night	287,164 +10.2%
Auto Train Lorton, Va.-Sanford, Fla.	855 miles 1 night	244,252 +4.8%
City of New Orleans Chicago-New Orleans	934 miles 1 night	229,270 +16.6%
Capitol Limited Washington, DC-Chicago	764 miles 1 night	218,956 +1.7%
Cardinal New York-Chicago <i>(Runs 3 days / week)</i>	1,146 miles 1 night	107,053 -1.4%
Sunset Limited New Orleans-Los Angeles <i>(Runs 3 days / week)</i>	1,995 miles 2 nights	91,684 +16.4%

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for each of the two roomettes we needed. A few days before, the roomettes had been \$148 each (the charge is the same whether one or two people occupy the room). The day before our trip a roomette on our train cost \$236. During the same period, a bedroom, the deluxe two-person room that includes a private toilet and shower, rose from \$510 to \$720.

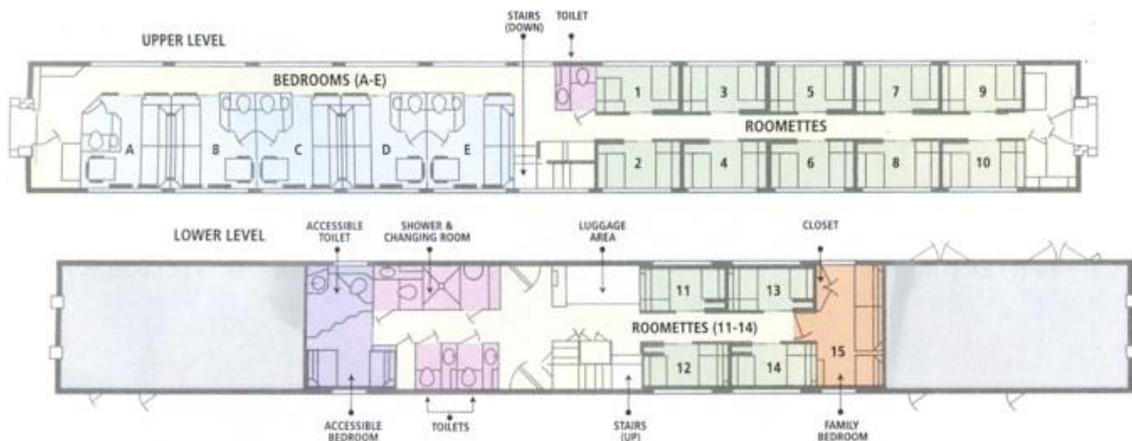
Four types of Amtrak rooms:

Bedroom: Long couch and one chair by day, upper and lower berths at night. Private toilet, shower and sink. There's room for a child to sleep with an adult in the lower berth.

Roomette: Facing individual seats by day, upper and lower berths at night. Common restroom and shower facilities down the hall or downstairs.

Accessible bedroom: Accommodates one wheelchair passenger, private toilet, two berths.

Family bedroom (Superliner trains only): Couch running the full car width plus chair by day, two adult and two children's berths at night.



Today's picture pages



When we boarded the *Coast Starlight* Thursday night, our room had already been made down for the night. The right picture shows one of the facing seats in the daytime room configuration. The gray thing by the window is a table that folds out between the seats.



Emily and Luis Martinez, the attendant for the *Maryland*, our sleeping car. Luis makes as many as 42 berths down each night and up each morning, brings meals from the dining car for passengers who request them, serves champagne to boarding passengers, keeps the coffee pot for the car fresh and monitors the showers and restrooms.



Exterior of the lounge car for sleeping car passengers at Klamath Falls, Ore.



The *Coast Starlight* provides champagne to all sleeping car passengers. We accepted.

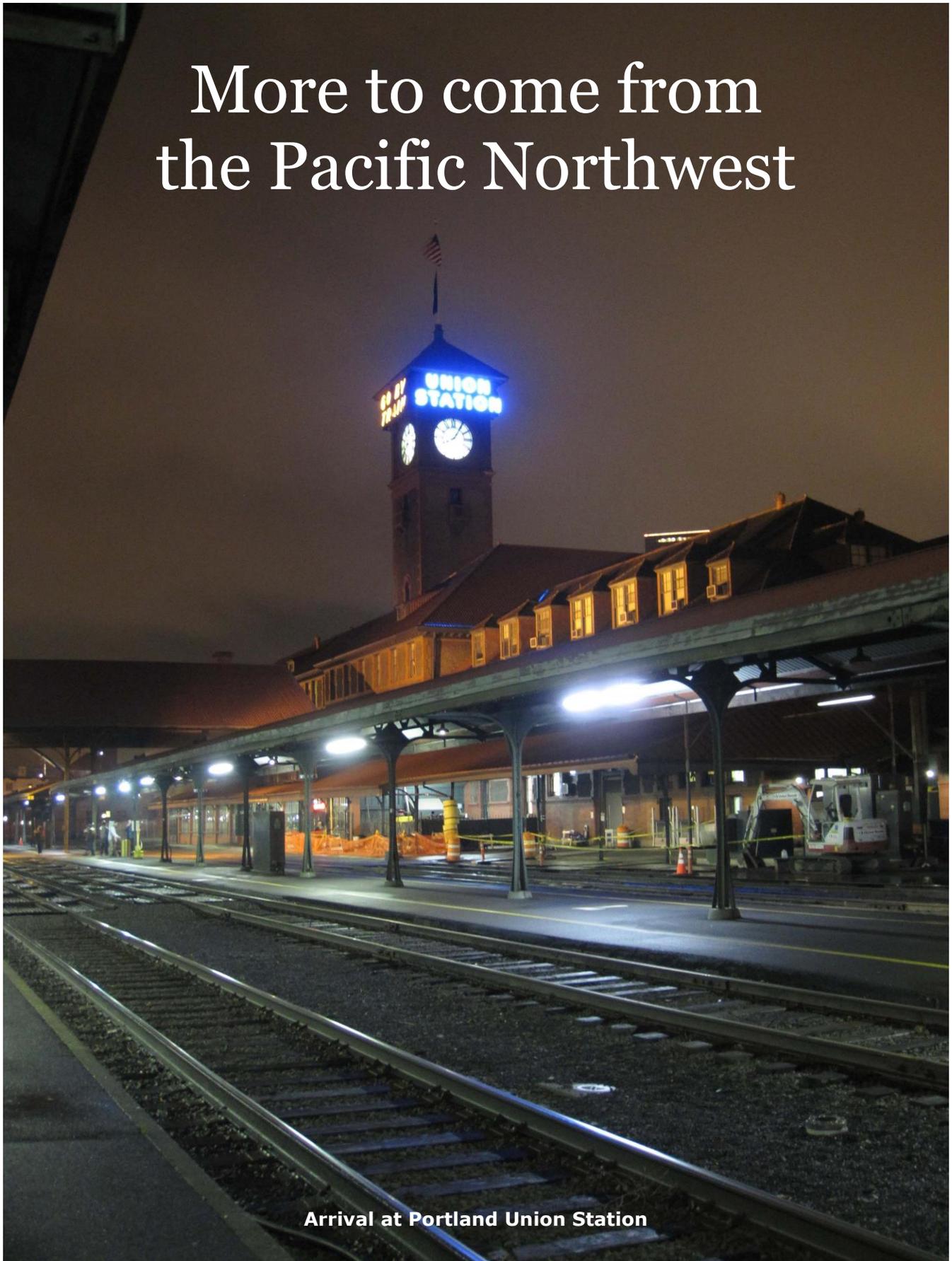


Breakfast in the diner. In addition to this mushroom, tomato and cheese omelet, our table also had a continental breakfast of cold cereal and fruit and a French toast breakfast. At lunch we had three vegetable and cold salmon salads and a chicken cacciatore. For a coach passenger, this omelet with coffee and juice runs about \$10.



Stopping at Klamath Falls, Ore. Most Amtrak overnight trains segregate first class (sleeper) and coach passengers by placing their cars at opposite ends of the train, separated by the dining car and lounge car. The *Coast Starlight* is the only train in the system with separate lounge cars for first class and coach.

More to come from the Pacific Northwest



Arrival at Portland Union Station