

This Free E-Book is brought to you by [Natural-Aging.com](http://Natural-Aging.com).

**100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment**  
**Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances**  
**Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!**

**Has The Chinatown Bus Phenomenon Evolved?**

**By Violet Sorenson**

In the late 1990s when the first low-fare bus service from Chinatown in New York to Chinatown in

Boston started running, few would have expected the impact it would have had on the bus industry as a whole. This was not a service that was marketed to the general public. It was supposed to appeal to a targeted group of people—recent Chinese immigrants—who needed an inexpensive way to travel between the two cities to visit family, shop, or work. The growth of this phenomenon was organic. The general public heard of the "Chinatown bus" via word of mouth. It caught on quickly and soon the market was flooded with other companies offering similar service on a variety of routes.

It would be incorrect to say that the only reason that these companies succeeded was due to price. Certainly this was the main enticement for travelers. However, it must be said that the service that the traditional bus carriers was offering was ripe for competition. In truth were the 'full service' offerings of the traditional bus companies worth a premium? Hardly. Customer service lacked on every level, bus stations did not offer a comfortable waiting area, buses were often shabby and service was plagued by delays.

Years after the advent of this first New York to Boston route, it is worth examining how it has caused the bus industry to evolve as a whole. Overall, it seems like the independent companies and the traditional carriers are meeting somewhere in the middle. Independent carriers have had to offer more amenities, adhere to more closely to safety standards and regulations, and increase fares. At the same time, the traditional carriers have been forced to offer fiercely competitive pricing and generally tighten up their operations. Greyhound and its partners tend to offer the most competitive pricing on the popular New York-Boston and New York-DC routes. Further, these routes are the only ones for which online customers do not have to pay the hefty \$4 online booking surcharge usually imposed at Greyhound's website. They heavily promote this discounted pricing and it usually requires customers to book in advance online (purchasing tickets at the time of departure can be almost twice as expensive as via their website).

What about safety standards? This is the most contentious point of debate in the industry. There are numerous reports of safety violations and certainly anecdotal accounts of poor safety practices. However, it does not appear that the actual safety records of these companies are really worse than

## Has The Chinatown Bus Phenomenon Evolved?

other bus carriers that are subject to the same federal regulations. Thanks to intense lobbying efforts, in 2004 a special task force was set up by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to step up inspections of "curbside" (Chinatown) bus companies. Despite the increased inspections, the FMCSA reported that curbside carriers had about the same rate of violations as other types of carriers under her agency's authority<sup>3</sup>. This may be a sign that unsafe operators have either stopped running or have improved their level of safety.

Fortunately bus travel is generally an extremely safe mode of transportation, with an average annual fatality rate of only 22 for the past 10 years. No bus fatalities to date have involved Chinatown bus carriers. Mishaps are frequently reported for all segments of the industry—municipal buses, line run carriers, charter and tour companies<sup>1,2</sup>. No concrete research has indicated that Chinatown bus companies have a higher incidence of problems than other operators.

It is important to note that what was once a small niche of the bus industry is now a crowded segment.

To lump all carriers following this low-cost model in the same group would be misguided. The quality of the service offered by the various companies varies greatly. Some are fly-by-night concerns while others have transitioned into sizable companies with many employees and fleets of buses.

Another development is that Chinese immigrants are no longer the only players in this segment of the bus industry. Several so-called "Chinatown" bus companies are owned by Hassidic Jews. In addition many charter bus companies have entered the line-run business using the same low-cost model as Chinatown bus lines.

The Chinatown bus industry has grown from a simple, one-man-operation to an established segment of the bus industry. In all likelihood the evolution of the industry is not complete. We will probably see some regulatory changes which will effect how the Chinatown carriers run their operations. Likewise, as competition within the segment increases, the poorly run operators will most likely be forced out of the game. The traditional carriers will have to continue to offer competitive fares and will also have to find new ways compete. What is abundantly clear is that customers are more than happy to forgo many of the services offered by traditional carriers in order to save money.

<sup>1</sup>Police: Driver fatigue likely factor in fatal bus crash Monday, November 28, 2005; Posted: 7:15 a.m. EST (12:15 GMT)

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/11/27/california.bus/>

<sup>2</sup>T bus catches fire in Everett; blaze is 4th in 5 weeks No riders are hurt; officials seek cause By Lucas Wall, Boston Globe October 6, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of Annette Sandberg, FMCSA administrator, given before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways, Transit and Pipelines. Washington DC, March 2, 2006

Violet Sorenson works for GotoBus.com, the leading online marketplace for bus tickets and tours in the

USA. You can find out more information about the company at:

<http://www.gotobus.com>

## **Chinatown Bus Lines Are A Budget Traveler's Dream**

**By Violet Sorenson**

A guide to the Chinatown Bus

The word is out—the cheapest way to get from one major U.S. city to another is on the "Chinatown bus". In recent years this has become transportation option of choice for budget travelers in New York, Washington DC, and Boston, and more recently on the West Coast. Students, backpackers, and an array of other savvy travelers have long loved the rock bottom prices that these bus companies offer. Despite the popularity of these bus lines it can still be difficult to find information on Chinatown bus service.

What exactly is a "Chinatown Bus"? Read on and you will have the inside track on this great budget travel option.

Chinatown Bus history

The Chinatown bus phenomenon began in the late 1990s when an entrepreneur in New York's Chinatown started running daily bus service from Chinatown in New York to Chinatown in Boston. The service was aimed at Asian immigrants who wanted to shop or visit relatives in either city and needed cheap and convenient transportation. The service was bare bones—no advertising, customer service, or bus stations. Customers simply went to the bus stop, waited for the bus (or van), and paid the driver upon boarding. For those willing to do without frills, they offered virtually the same service as traditional bus companies at a substantially lower price. Before long, the word spread and all kinds of people started using the service. It became especially popular with students, budget travelers, or people for whom the service was simply more convenient.

Soon more bus companies duplicated this model and started offering service in other cities. Now you can find this type of bus service in Philadelphia, Virginia, Baltimore Washington DC, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and San Francisco. At this point the term "Chinatown bus" is used more loosely to describe this sort of low-cost/low-frills service. Many, if not most, of the companies do not have Chinatown as their main location and may not cater to the immigrant population at all. These operators are also sometimes referred to as "curbside" operators.

How can tickets be so cheap?

\$15 between New York to Boston? \$25 from Las Vegas to Los Angeles? It seems hard to fathom. Chinatown bus companies are able to keep prices low because they operate in a fundamentally different way from traditional carriers. Foremost, the service is very basic. There is little in the way of customer service or amenities. Most of these operators do not have formal stations, picking up

## Has The Chinatown Bus Phenomenon Evolved?

passengers at bus stops instead. They eschew traditional advertising in favor of word of mouth. Further, many of the operators play a very hands-on role in the operation—you will not see idle executives at a small independent bus company. Finally, these operators make sure they fill their buses. That is why Chinatown bus operators usually only operate on heavily trafficked routes. Indeed some companies only run buses at peak times.

Are they safe?

When these companies first started operating, concerns were raised about safety standards. There is still controversy within the bus industry about whether these newcomers are complying with the same regulations as the traditional companies. However, a task force set up by the Federal government to look at safety issues found that Chinatown bus companies did not perform better or worse than other types of bus companies (ie. charter, tour buses). All bus companies operating in the U.S. must undergo the same inspection standards and must comply with the same rules. Realistically there is probably a range of quality among Chinatown bus carriers. Some are fly-by-night operators trying to make a fast buck, while others are legitimate entrepreneurs who plan to grow and operate a long term business.

What you should expect

à No frills service—the driver may be the ticket collector; there will not be a lot of customer service.

à Comfortable buses. Despite the low fares buses are usually quite nice. Most buses are comparable to Greyhound and many are actually more deluxe.

à Communication challenges. Drivers are legally required to speak enough English to help passengers in the case of emergency. In reality this is often adhered to rather loosely. At the very least, expect your driver to have an accent.

à Possible delays. Many of these bus routes are on highly congested roads. When the roads are busy, expect delays.

à Rest stops. Buses will have a lavatory on board but there is usually a 10 or 15 minute bathroom break on trips over 4 hours. Don't be late returning to the bus, the driver will not count heads before leaving at the appointed time.

à Full buses. Buses definitely sell out at peak times (weekends and evenings). Book ahead or get there early if you want secure a seat.

à Plastic Bags. An odd little quirk on Chinatown buses is that every aisle seat usually has a plastic grocery bag tied to the arm. I guess they find this is the best way to keep the buses clean.

How do I find the Chinatown Bus?

Again, "Chinatown bus" is a term used to describe a type of operator and not an individual bus company. Many unrelated bus companies fall into this category. Since most Chinatown buses do not

## Has The Chinatown Bus Phenomenon Evolved?

spend money on advertising it can be difficult to find out details about schedules and bus stop locations. Many of the carriers are becoming savvier about the Internet and quite a few have websites with information. Usually an Internet search will yield links to bus service to your destination. There are also several directories, such as chinatown-bus.org that include links for most Chinatown bus companies and the author's employer, GotoBus.com, is a centralized booking site that has schedules and sells tickets online for most Chinatown bus companies.

The Chinatown bus is not for everyone. If you want an orderly system with American style customer service, you should probably stick to traditional carriers. However, if you know what to expect and come prepared with a sense of adventure and humor, you should enjoy the trip just fine. You will also enjoy the money you save!

Violet Sorenson works for

<http://GotoBus.com>

, the leading online marketplace for bus tickets and tours

in the USA. You can find out more information about the company at:

<http://www.gotobus.com/>

. The

author can be reached at marketing at gotobus dot com.

Has The Chinatown Bus Phenomenon Evolved?



This Free E-Book has been brought to you by [Natural-Aging.com](http://Natural-Aging.com).

**[100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment](#)**  
**Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances**  
**Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!**