

## Get on the Bus

Written by Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer - BT Contributor  
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### Our correspondent goes the mass transportation route in Aventura

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hen I lived in Manhattan, taking public transportation was as commonplace as breathing. It was part of the daily routine: Get up, brush teeth, shower, get dressed, leave rent-controlled apartment, and head for work via subway or the bus.

And then I moved to Florida. Everything was different. Sure, there are buses and trains here, but it's not the same. What is a way of life in one place simply isn't cool someplace else.

As a matter of fact, since moving down more than 11 years ago, I've lived in Boca, Fort Lauderdale, Sunrise, and Aventura, and have not set foot on a bus anywhere. Until today.

It started with my walking to places whenever possible. But there really aren't many places you can get to from my condo. Well, actually there are plenty of places to go, but not within a reasonable walking distance.

People in Aventura drive. They drive Maseratis, Aston Martins, Bentleys, Range Rovers, and... you get the drift. They drive *really* nice vehicles. They don't think about using public

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transportation.

Anyway, my difficulty in walking anywhere got me to thinking about how the people who don't drive get from here to there in this town (or anywhere else in South Florida).

I knew of the Aventura Express. I've watched the buses pull into Mystic Pointe (when I used to live there) and have seen them at Publix, but I never thought much about them. As far as I knew, it was a service for the elderly and handicapped -- neither of which applies to me -- so it was irrelevant.

But you never know. To be forewarned is forearmed. I decided to check it out.

I went to Aventura's Website to see what the deal was, and you know what I found? Not only does the City of Excellence have its own police force and firefighters, but there's a bus service dedicated to shuttling the town's residents *wherever* they want to go, as long as it is within city limits.

The Aventura Express consists of multiple lines: blue, green, red, purple, yellow, and the Saturday Night North and South expresses. Blue buses serve northern Aventura, purple and yellow service southern, and green and red lines cover central. Each runs hourly.

The buses run year-round except for Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. And the best part is, it's free. That is, as long as you don't need to leave the city. If you do, that's another story -- and another bus -- altogether. You can connect to Miami-Dade and Broward Transit buses via various stops.

Each line of the Aventura Express is designed to pick up and drop off passengers at the town's popular condos. The buses service the most frequented places in town, including government buildings, Loehmann's, Publix, Walgreens, Pier 1, the Promenade Shops, Aventura Commons, Waterways, Mount Sinai, and more. The different lines can be sort of confusing, but for those who need a ride, it's worth the effort.

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On my first attempt to crack the route code, I discovered that purple and yellow are my main lines, but I couldn't decipher whether the front or rear of Publix would put me where I needed to be to catch my very first bus -- so I made my husband drive me, just to be safe. (Which defeats the whole point, I know.)

After reading the bus signs and hoping for the best, I chose the front of the store and sent hubby home. If I was ever going to do this, I had to venture forth alone. There was a lady waiting at the stop. She had her groceries in a cart. "Is this the bus stop?" I asked.

"It is."

She seemed willing to chat. This was my chance. "Do you take the bus often?" I asked her.

"I do," said Ava, the first of many folks I met during my day of exploration. She was already warming up to me. "I take it every day. It's wonderful -- clean, on time, convenient. I don't drive, so it takes me everywhere I need to go."

"Oh, wow," I said. "Do you know if it will take me to the mall? This is my first time."

"Ever?" she cooed. "Oh, you're going to love it. Everybody rides it. There are buses to take you everywhere. No matter where you live, you can get to where you want to go."

"That's within Aventura, though, right?"

"Where else would you need to go?" she asked, truly surprised.

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And with that, the bus pulled up.

I have to admit, taking the bus felt a little strange. It's quite a change from hopping in my car and just zooming off to where I want to go, when I want to go. Using the system takes some learning, planning, and patience (the latter two not being specialties of mine). There's a lot of waiting, finding the right bus, deciding which is the easiest stop to use, finding the correct times (especially if you want to transfer to another bus), and most of all, being *on time*, because the bus is not going to wait for anyone.

The "mini" bus, which held perhaps 20 people, was immaculate. Like most things in Aventura, the bus was so well cared for it looked brand-new. Our driver, Sam, welcomed me on while helping Ava with her groceries; he remained chatty the whole ride. The mix of riders -- young, old, kind, snooty, African-American, Latino, Caucasian, Jewish -- covered all the bases. I saw diversity at its finest. Seriously.

Before I knew it, 13 minutes had flown by and I was at the mall.

Sam told me he'd be back at 1:45 p.m. and every 45 minutes after that. And with that, I shopped for two hours before returning to the bus stop. At 1:45 p.m. sharp, Sam was there, just as he'd promised.

The Publix was the first stop on the yellow line, but the 15th stop on the purple line. (Just part of the learning experience.) I got off there and, while I walked home, I thought about the day. And the bus.

It's an excellent resource for those who can't, don't, or won't drive. It's also ideal for teens who want their first taste of independence and older folks who want to keep theirs. And of course, it's perfect for those who may not have a car.

Aventura really does take good care of its residents. And while it was fun experimenting, for now, I think I'll leave the bus to those who really need it.

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