

# GLUTEN-FREE GEMS AROUND TOWN

ONE FOODIE'S SAFE PICKS FOR HEALTHY EATING

BY RACHEL RUVO | PHOTOS BY SARAH ARNESON

## THERE ARE NO ADEQUATE WORDS

to describe how much I love food. As a little girl I only ate cold chicken and carrot sticks, but somewhere between pigtails and my first car, we fell in deep, deep love. I learned to bake at my grandmother's knee and while in college learned to cook from



The golden beet risotto at City Kitchen can even be made vegan on request.

hours of watching the nascent Food Network before it was all cupcake wars and reality shows. My best memories share the stage with perfect New York pizza, chewy sesame seed bagels, homemade challah bread and most recently, cooking with and for my four daughters. For many years, Sunday night was pizza night. I made fresh sauce and pizza dough, the girls helped with the toppings and my husband cooked the pizzas on our Big Green Egg.

When I was diagnosed with celiac disease in 2014, it stopped me in my tracks that the only treatment is a gluten-free (GF) diet. I needed to start from scratch and learn how to shop, cook and eat again. For this food fangirl, it was both devastating and a huge relief. Devastating to know that I'd have to bid farewell to the foods I have loved for a lifetime and begin worrying about every morsel I put in my mouth. But, it was a huge relief because I had not felt "right" for over 10 years and I finally had a name for it and the ability to help heal myself. Food continues to play a major role in my life. Nothing can change that. I am still a mom to four amazing and always hungry kids (ranging in age from 7 to 14), therapeutic baker, home cook, self-proclaimed restaurant groupie and oh yeah, a food blogger ([agonyofdewheat.com](http://agonyofdewheat.com)). As parents, my husband and I long ago realized that a weekly date night is the most delicious way to support our marriage. Celiac disease was not going to derail any of these touchstones of my daily life both at home and eating in some of our wonderful restaurants nearby.

It's important for chefs and their staff to fully understand dietary restrictions and to take the request for zero gluten so seriously. Every celiac reacts differently to a gluten exposure (which can be as small as a crumb - yes, really) and it can

range from severe abdominal pain, GI distress, brain fog, extreme fatigue, joint aches and skin reactions. Some even require hospitalization. I can only speak for myself when I say that a single exposure can result in about three weeks of recovery that makes it hard to carry on my normal life. The kitchen staff will need to wash their hands and change gloves, use different utensils and cutting boards and protect

the cooking surface from cross-contamination. It was hard for me to believe that this was the case until I had to live it. Unfortunately, simply pulling out the croutons does not a gluten-free salad make. You'd be surprised to know that gluten often hides in certain vinegars and soy sauce.

OK, back to the fun stuff - food! Below are some of the places where our family chooses to eat. Factors that go into where we eat include a knowledgeable and friendly staff, a good variety of GF

choices, fresh and interesting food, my seven-year-old's approval (yes, really) and oh, did I mention a knowledgeable and friendly staff?

### CITY KITCHEN

This is our place that we pick for special family occasions. They have something for everyone and always bend over backward to help me with GF options. The main appeal for my family is the magical sushi. Four of the six of us generally go for that. For me, it's almost always the grilled hanger steak salad. It is perfectly cooked steak that is sliced and served with lettuce and balanced with creamy blue cheese - most American producers have removed gluten from theirs, some small French makers have not - and hearts of palm. Their risotto dish is also a great vegetarian option that changes seasonally and is so decadent you don't miss the

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Glasshalfull's Mexican chocolate budino with horchata anglaise and toasted almonds.

gluten or the meat. Our meals are consistently delicious and the staff is attentive and alert to my food restrictions.

**GLASSHALFULL**

This tends to be our on-the-fly place to go for a quick date night or a nicer family meal. Without fail, we start with the Brussels sprouts – trust me when I tell you that this dish is transcendent (too much for a veggie? All right, we can go with simply delicious). Their menu changes seasonally, but they keep some of the staples including the sprouts. One of my favorites is the lobster rolls – they prepare them in an adorable lettuce cup and you really don't miss the big hunk of bread. I feel the need to also mention their cocktail list –

they have a great margarita and several others that we have enjoyed. The bartenders are good about subbing in celiac-safe spirits (I'm looking at you, Tito's and Hendrick's). They too have a dedicated fryer and they usually have several GF desserts to choose from.

**AL'S BURGER SHACK**

To put it simply, we think this is the best burger joint in the area. They stick to what they are good at – burgers and dogs with pasture-raised meat. Even though it is always bustling and busy, the staff at the counter takes the time to make sure everyone in the small space knows that they are handling an "allergy order" and they happily make my



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City Kitchen's executive chef Jessie Flores.

The Ferrington House Restaurant. In a time when we have become our own bank tellers, supermarket checkout clerks and gas station attendants, it harkens back to a time when civility and finery ruled and stellar service was a way of life. They are so careful with each dish and its preparation that I know I can safely enjoy each bite. The food is as beautiful as it is delicious and the meal is always a truly immersive experience.

**OAKLEAF**

Moving on to date night! This is the place that my husband and I go to when we want a slow meal where we can enjoy a cocktail, catch up on nonkid conversation and really savor the food, the atmosphere and our time together. Their knowledge of and concern for dietary restrictions from the hostess to the chef and everyone in between is so reassuring it makes the whole meal easy and stress-free. Their creative use of local ingredients and commitment to fresh, in-season, sustainable food shines through each dish. If a restaurant were a warm hug, it would be Oakleaf. **CHM**

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