

WHAT'S ON TAP

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List: Best gluten-free dining in and around Chapel Hill

Tags: Chapel Hill, Durham, Outside the Triangle, Restaurants and Bars

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CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Rachel Ruvo has celiac disease and blogs about her journey at [agonyofde wheat.com](#). From date nights to family outings, here are her picks for gluten-free dining in and around Chapel Hill:

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

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and is so decadent you don't miss the 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 bunless burger. They do offer a GF bun, but I prefer to leave it off. Another huge check in the pro column for Al's are French fries! Generally, places don't have a fryer that is dedicated to gluten-free foods, but Al's does. For me, French fries are the holy grail of comfort food and something I never knew I'd miss (but I do).

VENABLE ROTISSERIE BISTRO

We often go here for brunch as a family and the staff is top-notch. They are kind to my kids (which goes a long way) and careful with my order (which goes even further). It has such a neat atmosphere that somehow strikes a balance between minimalist and still warm. My favorite dish, hands down, is the Cobb Salad with Rotisserie Chicken. The only menu items that might sway me from my precious Cobb are the herb-roasted eggs, which are so rich and decadent that I almost feel gluttonous eating it (almost), and the shrimp & grits, which are special.

THE FEARRINGTON HOUSE RESTAURANT

When the time comes to really dress up and celebrate an occasion, like a big anniversary or birthday, our go-to is The Fearington 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 non-kid 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.

Editor's Note: This story originally appeared in Chapel Hill Magazine.

On April 21, Chef Tim Lyons from **Primal Food & Spirits** and Blu seafood will serve an **Ultimate Gluten-Free Dinner**, combined with cider pairings curated by Mattie Beason of **Black Twig Cider House** and desserts by Joe Parker of **JP's Pastry**, as part of **TASTE 2017**. The four-day event is sponsored by Chapel Hill Magazine and Durham Magazine, and brought to you by Johnson Lexus. The dinner will be held at Primal from 6-9 p.m. Want more gluten free goodness? Check out a **Cider Class** led by Mattie Beason at Black Twig from 4-6 p.m. the same day. Buy tickets to both events at [tastetheevent.com](#). WRAL Out and About is a sponsor of Taste 2017.



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