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### ***Hitting the Gluten-Free Open Road***

Traveling as a Celiac or with a food allergy (or in my case both) can seem very challenging but doesn't necessarily have to be that way. I remember shortly after my diagnosis feeling like I was set adrift in a sea of uncertainty and wondered how it would impact my love of travel. You have to remember that I was diagnosed more than ten years ago and I had not heard of Celiac disease until I was diagnosed. The product landscape was also a very, very different place with limited gluten-free replacement options on the market.

Perhaps one of the most asked questions I get from both new and long-time Celians is how to you travel so frequently without getting glutened? My answer: Research, Pack, and Go. Words I truly live by when traveling.

### **Research**

This step actually consists of a few different types of research. First, I always do a bit of gluten-free research on any destination I am heading to whether for business or pleasure. I try to identify local health food stores or supermarkets to visit and sometimes local products (particularly on international jaunts) that I can reference when at my destination. Get a lay of the land in and around where you'll be staying. I also look for restaurants (both independent and chain) that either cater to a gluten-free audience or have gluten-free options on their menu. If I cannot find any gluten-free/friendly places I look at the menus for general restaurants that catch my eye and try to get a feel for what may or may not work as an option for me. Remember, I am also hyper-allergic to shellfish so if I see a place that skews heavy on the shellfish I simply cross it off my list. The same goes for Celiac – if a place focuses on gluten-filled delicacies – it is probably not the best choice.

There also seems to have been a recent explosion of gluten-free travel and dining sites that span the globe. These are always a great place to identify prospective locales and read fellow Celians comments about their experiences. I have also found local chapters of Celiac groups and organizations Web sites to be a treasure trove of information when it comes to finding dining options and tips. Also social media tools like Facebook and Twitter provide a wealth of information via users with similar conditions – just do a search to find fellow Celians or gluten-free companies to follow.

You also need to consider your means of travel. If going by air – not all airlines are created equally. While some U.S. airlines such as American, Continental (United), and Delta offer gluten-free meals in all classes for intercontinental travel – scoring a gluten-free option (or meal of any type) domestically is becoming a thing of the past so Pack (next step) accordingly. If flying international in a premium cabin I will review the flight's menu (usually available on the airline's Web site) for my route and see if there are any safe options. If nothing takes my fancy, I'll order the gluten-free option (which can often vary in

quality based on location and airline). As a rule on ultra long-haul flights of 14+ nonstop hours I will order the gluten-free option regardless. Again, hit your carrier's Web site and check out what options are available. If a snack flight or food for sale-type flight see what's on offer before. I can typically find something that is safe. Sure, it may not be what I want exactly but if in a pinch you sometimes need to be flexible.

Doing this research prior to departure saves you a huge amount of time at your destination because you are not going to have to waste time walking around trying to find suitable places to dine. At the very least you'll have identified a few places that are definite options. Don't be shy. If a restaurant looks good to you but you are just not sure after your initial pass – give them a call. Talk to them and explain your needs and ask whether they are able to accommodate. You'd be surprised how far some restaurants are willing to go to gain new customers. Vacation-time should not be work time and the more you can get done before you go – the more enjoyable your trip will be.

You can do a lot of leg work prior to departure but continue once at your destination. Talk to the hotel front desk and concierge and see if they have any local recommendations. Hotel concierges can be a tremendous source of information to get a handle on the lay of the local land. Walk around. While you should always have at least a couple of options at your destination – get out there and look for yourself. I cannot count the number of times that I walked past a place that had gluten-free– something or other on a sign in the window. Despite the leaps that Celiac and gluten-free dining have made – some places still do not put their gluten-free options in the spotlight so you just have to find them on your own.

## **Pack**

So you've done your research and now comes the time to pack. At this stage I always make sure that whether traveling by car, train, plane, or boat that I pack what I like to refer to as my gluten-free contingency pack. Depending on where I am going and how long it will take me to get there dictates what goes into my pack. For shorter trips it can be as simple as a few gluten-free granola bars or pretzels. On longer trips – particularly by air – I might bulk up my snack selections to include a shelf-stable or just-add-liquid type dry meal like noodles or soup. If I am going to an area that might not have easy access to a supermarket I will throw in some snacks in my checked luggage to snack on at the hotel. Where you stay sometimes makes a difference. Fairmont Hotels earlier this year introduced a new Lifestyle Cuisine Plus program that caters to a range of food allergies and preferences – gluten-free being one of them – available at its entire portfolio of hotels on menus featuring local ingredients. Hopefully more hotels will follow their lead with similar offerings in the near future.

## **Go**

With a bit of research and planning you can take control of Celiac and not let it limit your travels. Is it initially easy to jump right in after diagnosis – absolutely not. But I am here to tell you that it does get easier and will eventually become second nature. Remember, you can only do your best and there will be hiccups along the way – we all still hit them no matter how long we've been gluten-free.