

Travel—New York City

by Brigitte Clarke



My husband and I spent a fantastic week in New York at the end of April, taking in the sights and sounds of the city. Everything you've heard about the Big Apple is true: it's non-stop, 24/7, and truly never sleeps. And I'm delighted to report that NYC is A-OK for celiacs!

There are two things to be prepared for when you travel to New York. First, it's expensive. Although there are exemptions, purchases are subject to both city and state sales taxes, which are almost never included on your bill. Second, Manhattan may not be a large island, but it's densely populated and traffic is constant. Don't be afraid to use the subway; it's not that complicated and it'll get you where you need to go much faster than ground transport.

And of course, if you're celiac, it's important do a bit of research before travel. To that end, I found a blog called "Gluten Free Globetrotter" (glutenfreeglobetrotter.com/), which contains some great tools to help visitors eat gluten-free in NYC. Especially useful was the list of grocery stores; I used Google Maps to figure out where the nearest one was situated in relation to my Lower East Side accommodation. As luck would have it, there were two within walking distance, both stocking familiar brands like Kinnikinnick and Udi's. That took care of most of our breakfasts and snacks. Even if they hadn't been there, I needn't have worried. There are independent grocery stores on almost every street corner, so I could grab some fruit or energy bars when I needed to.

The Gluten Free Globetrotter also listed a number gluten-free restaurants and bakeries in Manhattan; unfortunately, I can't report on many of them because our jam-packed itinerary had us wandering far and wide. Thus, my dining recommendations are relegated to establishments that we tried near our accommodation or on-the-go. I hope they'll still give the prospective traveler a rough idea of what's available, though.



Rosa Mexicano (1063 – 1st Avenue) has a gluten-free menu which the staff take seriously. For the appetizer, we had had Guacamole en Molcayete which really could have been a meal in itself. Mountains of salsa and guacamole are prepared at your table, with corn chips, of course. From the gluten-free menu we shared the Enchiladas Suizas (chicken enchiladas in tomato cream sauce).

Bella Roma Pizza is a take-out chain, and I was a bit leery to try it. Luckily, at the restaurant we ordered from (401 East 57th Street), I could watch the preparations while we waited and was pleased to see the care taken to avoid cross-contamination. The pre-packaged frozen crust was cooked in its own pie plate on a separate shelf and the chef changed gloves before adding the gluten-free toppings. It was also one of the cheaper meals we had in New York and we enjoyed the take-out so much we had it twice.

Rare Burger Bar and Grill, another New York chain, serves burgers with gluten-free buns and condiments. Sweet-potato fries are cooked in a dedicated gluten-free fryer. The turkey burger I had was fine. Toppings were extra though, and quickly added up.

Speaking of burgers, one disappointment I had was at the café at Ellis Island Immigration Museum. It was advertised that gluten-free buns were available for hamburgers; however, when I quizzed the gentlemen taking my order, I found out that the burger patties were not gluten-free. There was a quinoa salad in the cooler but it didn't look very fresh. I ended up finishing my snacks and supplementing with a rather expensive cookie.

The best thing about our trip to New York was that we got to share it with our brother and sister-in-law and their three kids. Those youngsters walked miles with us through museums and art galleries, around Central Park (several times), and even across the Brooklyn Bridge without complaint. They deserve kudos for their fortitude. They are also adventurous eaters. While they enjoyed glutenous fare at Luscious Thai (1099 1st Avenue) I had salad rolls and shrimp Pad Thai. The Indian food we tried the next night at Agra (807 Lexington Ave) was authentic and the service attentive and friendly.

For the Sweet Tooth, Sprinkles Cupcakes (780 Lexington Ave) offers two gluten-free varieties. They are topped with a candy letter "G" for gluten-free. The Red Velvet cupcake was dense but not overly-sweet. I did not check if the GF varieties were available at the store's cupcake ATM.



Finally, Trend Diner (1382 2nd Avenue) was a surprise on our last morning in New York. We'd walked by it a few times on our treks but hadn't checked out the menu previously. To my delight, I could order gluten-free pancakes. The portion was generous, to say the least.

Sadly, I never did get to try the ultimate gluten-free New York bagel, which apparently awaits the hungry celiac somewhere in the East Village. I guess that gives me an excuse to return to New York. As if I needed one! If anyone else in Calgary Chapter makes it there in the meantime, I'd love to hear a report!