



Guide to Gluten-Free Ethnic Dining

Triumph Dining is proud to present this information sheet featuring introductions to five popular ethnic cuisines in the U.S. Ethnic cuisines are an exciting option for Celiacs because many offer far more selection and variety for Celiacs than the bread-based American diet. Also, most ethnic chefs prepare much of their food from scratch, allowing greater visibility into ingredients and a higher level of certainty for safety.

One challenge presented by ethnic cuisines is communicating with the wait staff/chef across a language barrier. However, a quality dining card can quickly bridge that barrier.

The cuisines on this sheet are listed in order from most to least Celiac-friendly. We hope you'll find some appetizing new options to expand your culinary horizons, today! Bon appétit!

Thai Cuisine

Why Thai? Most of the staple ingredients are traditionally gluten free – many items can be ordered gluten free right off the menu!

Thai fare is characterized by fresh ingredients and elegant, subtle flavors, such as kaffir limes, lemongrass, shallots, coconut, basil, and galangal (a milder cousin of ginger). These flavors are masterfully blended to create mild curries or to flavor stir-fries. Most meals will either feature rice noodles or include a side of steamed jasmine rice.

Items to Avoid: Since rice is the staple grain of Thailand, there are only a handful of items to beware: the most notable being oyster sauce. Luckily, most Thai dishes are made to order, so substitutions are easily accommodated! Also, be sure to stay away from deep-fried spring rolls; the wrappers are usually wheat-based.

Items to Verify: Always check to make sure the fish sauce is gluten free. Fish sauce is used to flavor almost every entree, and it is almost always gluten free, but do check. Some manufacturers have taken to adding hydrolyzed wheat protein. Soy sauce is used less often, mostly in stir fries, and you'll be glad to learn that, unlike its Chinese and Japanese counterparts, Thai soy sauce is often gluten free. Be sure to check with the chef.

Recommended dishes:

1. Pad Thai – rice noodles with fresh vegetables and chicken
2. Basil Chicken – chicken stir-fry often served with rice

3. Yellow Curry – a mild turmeric-spiced curry
4. Tom Yum Goong – hot and sour soup with shrimp

Indian Cuisine

Why Indian? Generally speaking, there are two types of Indian cuisine: North and South Indian. The staple grain of South Indian cuisine is rice, and you can even find gluten-free pancakes (dosas) made of lentil and rice flours! In the North, the staple grain is wheat. But while wheat is used to make bread, it is rarely used in entrees. Both cuisines are very Celiac friendly, and the majority of menu options will be safe for Celiacs.

North Indian cuisine is the type most commonly served in the U.S. You will find a variety of spiced vegetarian, chicken, and lamb dishes. Pork and beef are generally eschewed. Dishes are typically stewed in delicious, gluten-free sauces and range from very mild to very spicy. You can order rice with your meal instead of bread. Indians use a variety of rice called basmati, and it is quite tasty.

Items to Avoid: Of course, stay away from all breads. But you will very rarely find wheat flour in entrees, with the notable exceptions of saag paneer (spinach and cheese), which is sometimes thickened with flour, and “kofta,” or dumpling, dishes. Otherwise, dishes are typically thickened using a simple simmer-reduction method. Also, while most spices are pure and gluten free, many Celiacs (and Indian chefs) are shocked to find out that the spice “hing” is often processed with wheat and should be avoided.

Items to Verify: Of course, always make sure your meal is not spiced with hing. Also, be careful ordering Tandoori chicken, which is sometimes cooked in the same oven as some breads.

Recommended Dishes:

1. Chicken Biryani – a delicately spiced rice pilaf
2. Chicken Tikka – chicken in a mild, creamy tomato sauce
3. Chole – spicy chickpea stew
4. Aloo Matar – potatoes and peas simmered in tomato sauce

Mexican Cuisine

Why Mexican? Corn is the staple grain and most staple ingredients, such as fresh cheeses and vegetables, rice, beans, and lard are gluten free. In other words, there are plenty of options for Celiacs!

Mexican food can be as healthy and light or sinful and heavy as you like. Options range from a simple plate of refried beans, rice, and guacamole salad to heavier options like enchiladas, which are corn tortillas stuffed with meats and cheeses and smothered in heavy, rich sauces and melted cheese.

Items to Avoid: Always verify that your tortillas are made with corn, “maiz”, and not wheat. Wheat tortillas are usually larger than the smaller corn tortilla, which may be white or yellow. Wheat tortillas are most often used in burritos and fajitas, though corn tortillas are the most commonly used variety by far.

Items to Verify: Gluten-containing soy sauce and beer are often used to marinate meats, particularly for fajitas. Enchilada sauces are often thickened with wheat. Also, flour tortillas and corn tortillas often cross paths on the same heating surface, and you will

Important Note About Dishes

The dishes recommended here are likely to be gluten free. However, variations in preparation exist across restaurants and there can be a risk of cross-contamination. Therefore, the suitability of a dish for the gluten-free diet should never be assumed. **Always check with the management of a restaurant to determine if their food is prepared appropriately for your individual needs.**

rarely find a dedicated gluten-free fryer. But with clear communication, you should be able to get a delicious, gluten-free meal.

Recommended Dishes:

1. Soft – Shelled Corn Tacos-corn tortillas with a variety of fillings
2. Tamales – shredded meat in a steamed cornmeal “dough”
3. Chilaquiles – corn tortillas baked with cheese and fresh salsa
4. Huevos Rancheros – fried eggs in a zesty tomato sauce

Japanese Cuisine

Why Japanese? Sushi is not only hip and trendy, but also very often gluten free!

Sushi is raw fish or vegetables served with vinegar-flavored rice. While sushi is often gluten free, most other Japanese menu items are breaded, contain soy sauce, or are thickened with wheat flour. Luckily, though, sushi is traditionally prepared in a dedicated sushi bar that is in clear view of patrons. Cross contamination should not be a great worry. If you haven't tried this Japanese delicacy, take a chance and see what makes sushi so popular.

Items to Avoid: Soy sauce is brewed with wheat and is off-limits. Bring your own gluten-free tamari or soy sauce. There are many varieties of sushi, and most are fine, but stay away from “unagi” (eel) sushi and sushi with imitation crab, which can be found in California rolls. Unagi is marinated in soy sauce, and imitation crab is made with wheat flour.

Items to Verify: Some restaurants use “seasoned” rice vinegar, which may sometimes contain gluten-containing food additives, to flavor the sushi rice. Please make sure the establishment uses pure rice vinegar, which is gluten free. (Note: As of 8/1/05, the popular Japanese “seasoned” rice vinegar brand Mitsukan has been confirmed gluten free.) Wasabi and roe, the fish eggs used to top some sushis, may also contain troublesome food additives. Ask to see the container or skip them entirely. Beware that sushi chefs often place a small amount of wasabi between the

rice and fish and may do so out of reflex, even if you ask for no wasabi. So be sure to *explicitly* ask that no wasabi be placed between the rice and fish.

Recommended Dishes:

1. Sushi (except unagi and Cal. rolls) – vinegar-flavored rice topped with a variety of fresh ingredients
2. Sashimi (plain, raw fish) and steamed rice – if the rice vinegar is a problem, choose this route for a safe, similar alternative to sushi
3. Omu raisu – steamed rice topped with a thin egg omelet

Chinese Cuisine

Why Chinese? Chinese restaurants are inexpensive and convenient – it seems like there is one on every other street corner. This is great for Celiacs because you can almost always get a gluten-free meal there. But, unfortunately, while you can eat at most restaurants, your menu choices will probably be limited.

Possible Problems: Chinese soy sauce is not gluten free, and it is used to flavor practically every menu item in a typical American Chinese restaurant. Therefore, your menu choices will be extremely limited, but we've listed a couple of options below. Oyster, hoisin, and plum sauce are also not gluten free. Also, be sure to ask for no MSG. While U.S.-made MSG is gluten free, Chinese restaurants often use imported MSG,

which is not necessarily gluten free (Source: Celiac Sprue Assoc.). Stay clear of “mock meat”, which is made from wheat gluten.

Items to Verify: Always make sure your dish does not contain soy sauce or MSG. Even when ordering plain steamed meats and vegetables, don't assume your dish will be gluten free. Some restaurants marinate meats, especially pork, in soy sauce. Egg drop soup is sometimes gluten free – but always ask about the soup stock ingredients. Chefs will sometimes use gluten-containing bouillon or commercial soup bases to enhance flavor.

Recommended Dishes:

1. Moo Goo Gai Pan – mushrooms and chicken in a corn starch-thickened white sauce
2. Steamed Chicken and Vegetables – often listed in a section called “diet menu”
3. Egg Drop Soup – curdled egg in a rich chicken broth

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