



explore

# All-Inclusive & Gluten-Free Friendly

One of my jobs as a travel writer is reviewing resorts and cruises.

Over the past four years, I have learned a lot about how capable they are (or aren't) at handling gluten-free guests. Many claim to have gluten-free options or understanding, but often don't – and, worst of all, don't understand the danger in such claims.

My criteria for inclusion in this piece was that it had to be a typical, large all-inclusive resort in a destination popular for all-inclusive vacations, and it had to *safely* cater to celiacs via training, a program, special kitchen practices, or all three.

The final test was a three-night stay by yours truly; I was up for the challenge, even if most hotels were not.

## BREEZES RESORT & SPA BAHAMAS

Nassau, Bahamas ★★ ★

While it's not the sexiest hotel on the beach – the 391 rooms are dated and facilities are simple – Breezes Resort & Spa Bahamas has a true beachfront location right on Nassau's famed **Cable Beach** and a welcomed laid-back vibe. It's a favorite among young couples and friend groups looking for a quick holiday with a good bang for their buck.

It's also great for gluten-free. Executive Chef Nigel Clark has taken the time and interest to self-educate on celiac disease, gluten-free products, and safe kitchen practices – and boy does he know his stuff. He's proud to say that, so far during his five-year tenure at Breezes, no gluten-free guests have reported getting sick. I'll eat to that!

## WHERE TO EAT

The main **Banana Boat** buffet is small with a decent amount of (sometimes) marked gluten-free items. Expect several entrée dishes, made-to-order pancakes and waffles (request the dedicated waffle iron), and a DIY salad

bar with many safe dressings. While bonuses like the build-your-own nachos and Asian barbecue pork are safe, the breakfast potatoes, hash browns, fries, and desserts are a no-go. Better buffet labeling and adding gluten-free options on the late-night buffet are in the works.

For a quick bite, the **Poolside Grille** serves up fries from a dedicated fryer and gluten-free hamburger patties, though they sometimes share the flattop with the buns. The set menu at **Munasan** has gluten-free and soy sauce-free alternatives, like white miso soup with real crab, vegetarian and shrimp sushi rolls, and rice noodles. For a more romantic setting, **Garden of Eden** has live music, outdoor seating, and plenty of a la carte gluten-free options, including a tasty carrot cake. **Martino's** may be the resort's most average offering, but its set menu is roughly 80 percent adaptable, there's gluten-free corkscrew pasta on hand, and the antipasto bar is marked. (The seasonal, beachfront spot **Reggae Cafe** was closed during my visit.)

#### WHAT TO DO

The beauty of Breezes is that nearly all restaurants, bars, entertainment, and activities are included. The resort offers fun activities, from flying trapeze, tennis, and a rock climbing wall, to kayaking, sumo wrestling, and sailing. Plus, the sizzling entertainment staff will have you grooving to nightly live performances and sweating on the dance floor.



## OASIS OF THE SEAS

Orlando, FL ★★★★★

Oasis of the Seas, a Royal Caribbean Cruise, is one of the largest cruise ships in the world and has a maximum capacity of more than 6,200 passengers. Practically a floating mall-amusement park hybrid, the ship features the first Tiffany's boutique and onboard park with more than 12,000 live plants. Comprised of seven different "neighborhoods," there's a lot to explore. And, with several gluten-free options onboard, there's a lot to eat, too.

### WHERE TO EAT

There seems to be food at every corner here, though not all gluten-free options are celiac safe.

Surprisingly, there's a dedicated gluten-free station for all three meals at **The Windjammer** main buffet, and several of the main buffet items are made with no gluten ingredients (though prepared in a common kitchen). Dinner in the main dining rooms is a cinch thanks to attentive staff, gluten-free-marked menu items – think escargot, shrimp cocktail, *duck à l'orange*, and warm gluten-free bread – and a flexible kitchen that can prepare nearly any menu item gluten-free on request. All specialty restaurants (extra fee) have marked menus, including delicious steaks at **Chops Grille**, decent Italian at **Giovanni's Table** and a gourmet menu at **150 Central Park**. Quick options include mediocre pizza at **Sorrento's**, the dessert case at **Café Promenade**, and build-your-own salads at **Park Café**.



Avoid **Johnny Rockets**, **Cups & Scoops**, and the snack buffet by the sports courts.

### WHAT TO DO

This ship is jam packed with activities, many not usually seen at sea. Go for a short zipline ride, do a moonlit scramble up the rock climbing wall, learn to surf on the FlowRiders, get scuba certified, and challenge someone at mini-golf. There are also art shows, trivia, karaoke, a vintage carousel, shopping, a glitzy casino, Broadway productions, and an AquaTheater.



## THE GRAND AT MOON PALACE

Cancun, Mexico ★★★★★

The Grand at Moon Palace is perfect for family-friendly vacations or a romantic getaway. All 1,316 rooms have in-room whirlpools, 24-hour room service (with a marked gluten-free menu), aromatherapy menus, stocked minibars and full-sized liquor bottle dispensers.

The resort is well-prepared for celiacs, or anyone with a nut-free, dairy-free, kosher, or vegan diet, for that matter. To keep confidence high and the possibility of cross contamination low, kitchens have chefs with mandatory dietary restriction training, clearly posted ingredient lists, separate prep space, and color-coded cooking kits. Restaurant staff are trained to ask about dietary restrictions, chefs make table visits, nearly all menus are marked, and orders are taken on color-coded pads and overseen by a trained chef.

### WHERE TO EAT

There are more than a dozen eateries at The Grand – though not all are gluten-free-friendly – and you may find yourself double booking dinner to try them all. If you're more conservative in your carnage, here are my must-eat recommendations.



Plan ahead if you want to eat at the popular **JC Steakhouse**, where the high-quality cuts, heavy appetizers, and rich desserts aim to fill. At **Le Chateau**, contemporary French plates range from salads with apple foam, scallops in squid ink polenta, and gluten-free bread with raspberry truffle butter. **Habibi** serves up Lebanese food all day, with an exceptional breakfast selection including *shakshuka* and *shanklish*. Future plans for the **Grand Buffet** include a dedicated GF section. For now, there are several gluten-free dishes (and a tiny gluten-free baked goods section), though the kitchen prefers to make plates on request to avoid cross-contamination. That said, after being shown around by a sous chef, I used my own judgment on the buffet and never had an issue.

Avoid **Tapas + Vino**, poolside **Los Tacos**, **Le Boulangerie**, and the pizza-heavy **Tavola**.

### WHAT TO DO

This large resort is a smorgasbord of fun. Roll out at the bowling alley, relax in the 76,000-square-foot spa's hydrotherapy circuit, sweat it out in the fitness center, or take a swing at the 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course. There's also a free waterpark with slides, lazy river, FlowRiders, and wave pool; supervised kids area with ropes course, laser maze, state-of-the-art games, padded playroom, blacklight mini-golf, and bumper cars; and high-tech teen space with TVs, video games, and snacks. This is all in addition to its nine pools, free bike rentals, and organized activities and nighttime shows.

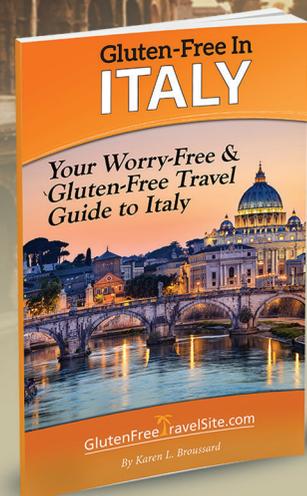
**Note:** All Palace Resorts properties follow these same safe handling and training guidelines. These include *Moon Palace Jamaica*, *Moon Palace Cancun*, *Le Blanc Spa Resort (Cancun)*, and *Le Blanc Spa Resort Los Cabos*. 



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Katherine Alex Beaven** is a travel and food writer and photographer. Whether on assignment or on vacation, Alex can usually be found at the nearest food cart or restaurant sniffing out the local gluten-free goodies. Her photography site, [katherinealex.com](http://katherinealex.com), features some of the wildlife, landscapes, and portraits she's photographed along the way.

# You can safely dine GLUTEN FREE in Italy



This guide to gluten free dining in Italy includes dozens of restaurant recommendations near major sites in Rome, Florence, and Venice.

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