

JUST GO – GLUTEN-FREE ABROAD

Guide for coeliacs going abroad

You are thinking about going abroad for your studies, travelling or working abroad – we want to help you to make your decision.

STILL IN DOUBT?

You might be still in doubt about if you should go or not, or where you should go to. You might also consider choosing your second choice, maybe not the country you always dreamed to go to as you think it's too difficult there to cope with the gluten-free diet, but we can only recommend doing this step as you will love it in the end and never regret.

Let's see if we can convince you. 😊

REASONS TO GO ABROAD

There are countless reasons for young people spending some time abroad, think of these:

See the world and broaden your experience.

There are so many amazing things to experience around the world. You can see different natural landscapes and climates that do not exist in your country. There are historical landmarks in every country that helped shape the history of the globe. You can expand your knowledge of the world by actually being there, seeing it, touching it, and experiencing it. Is there a place or landmark you have always wanted to see?



Gain new perspectives.

Spending all your life in one country tends to give you a limited view of your world. Traveling outside the country will show you how your country is seen from other perspectives. Experiencing so many different traditions you will understand the importance of keeping your own traditions alive.

Learn a new language.

The only way to become fluent in a language is to hear it over a long time and just to speak it. If you've studied a language for several years and wish to gain fluency in that language, go abroad. Conversely, if you haven't studied languages at all, remember that almost half of all Study Abroad programs don't require any foreign language. Learning a foreign language will increase your educational development, improve your communication skills, and give you a world of opportunities you might not have otherwise.

Improve your professional and financial potential.

International experience is an important criteria for many jobs, in addition to the personal growth the international and cross-cultural skills you'll develop will certainly expand your employment opportunities and, consequently, your income potential.

Gain new relationships and making friends.

The relationships formed while studying abroad might become some of the deepest friendships you will ever develop. You will have the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and cultures, and some of these people may even become life-long friends. Study abroad returnees often report meeting others with whom they expected to have no common ground, and then discovering that, despite being from different parts of the globe, they have much in common and much to learn from one another. These relationships, insights, and outlooks are a critical part of the study abroad experience.

Fight stereotypes.

There is a distinct challenge everyone face abroad. Many people only have experience with different ethnic groups through the media. Students may become frustrated when the same stereotypes from home follow them overseas. However, this is also a unique opportunity to educate others about who you are as an individual and as a group. This is your chance to be an individual, as well as a representative of your culture, and to encourage positive understanding of global diversity. Going abroad gives you also a chance to break down some of your own stereotypes about other countries and peoples.

Take control of your future.

During your time abroad, you will be exposed to countless different experiences that may influence the rest of your life. You never know who may be impressed by your travels. Studying abroad definitely challenges you on a personal level. Whether you consciously realize it or not, you develop a greater self-confidence, independence, and self-reliance. By the time you return home, you may feel like a super hero: you can do anything!

Don't let coeliac disease hinder making these experiences!

Because something we know is: it's always worth it, even if it might be a bit harder in the beginning, but you always get so much out of it, have great experiences and meetings and you're really learning for life.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS A COELIAC ABROAD

Living in another country probably differs from your life at home, also following the gluten-free diet could be different. Moving abroad in Europe is not so different from moving around in your country. Moving somewhere in a totally another culture (Asia, Africa, South America etc.) is in the beginning maybe more difficult, but in the end maybe more rewarding. Where ever you go, the easier it will be, if you quickly get to know your gluten-free surroundings.

Preparing the stay:

- Previously inform your university, work place, colleagues, etc. about coeliac disease!
- Search online: websites, forums, blogs...
- Communicate with the coeliac youth group, coeliac association, check if there are local contact person.
- See more tips below!

Where to find gluten-free products abroad? Know your surroundings!

- Learn to know the gluten free possibilities of the new city: go around until you know where you can find ingredients for your cooking, flour mixes, breads and so on!
- Gluten-free products might be sold in health stores, pharmacies and/or in supermarkets.
- Make a presence meeting with the contact person.
- Contact the young coeliac group to receive information and participate in their activities!

Gluten-free food in restaurants?

- Ask around in cafes and restaurants to find out gluten free options, previously contact them before going out to eat there.
- The easiest way is to ask everything plain, without sauces and toppings. For example plain fish, chicken or meat could be a good option, or a large salad, if nothing else is available. Don't forget the naturally gluten-free ingredients such as rice, corn, potatoes, buckwheat, fruits, vegetables, milk products.



- Keep on explaining about celiac disease and do not give up! Even if you end up getting just some salad the first time, after third time they may have something else to offer you. There are always possibilities to change some meals into gluten-free. You just have to talk to people and in most cases they are very friendly and try to help you out.
- In some countries you will find gluten-free pizzas and hamburgers in restaurant chains like Mc Donalds, Burger King or Pizza Hut.
- Return to places where you were treated well!
- Search for information in beforehand, check the tips below.
- Smile! ... and you will get better treatment for sure.

Learn the language:

- In the beginning, use a translated dietary explanation to show in the shops and restaurants, these are available in internet.
- Learn at least enough to be able to buy food in a shop (to read the ingredients) and learn at least the things you cannot eat. You could write down the most important information in a booklet.
- Your “food-ledge” will widen as you learn to explain people what you can eat, what not.

Erasmus or other exchange programs:

- If you are sharing a kitchen with someone, let them know about your situation (cross- contamination, bread crumbs etc.).
- Use the knowledge of people from different countries to find out new delicious dishes which are naturally gluten-free.

Surprising gluten!

- In new gluten-free surroundings there might be products, which you are used to consider as gluten-free, but in that country they might contain gluten. Or vice versa. Gluten can surprise you for example in juices, ready-made cacao powder, toothpaste and so on.

The question of wheat starch and oats:

- In some countries (mainly the Northern Europe) many gluten-free products contain wheat starch. If your diet does not include wheat starch, you should always check the ingredients.

- In some countries, mainly in Norway, Sweden, Finland and The Netherlands, special oats is available. This type of oats has been specially produced, prepared and/or processed in a way to avoid contamination by wheat, rye, barley, or their crossbred varieties and the gluten content of such oats must not exceed 20 mg/kg. In other countries it's not usually available or not safe enough. But be aware: only use the special gluten-free oats! And if you're not used to it, start with a small amount because of the fiber.

Special laws:

- There could also be some special laws which are useful to know. For example in Italy there is a law (Legge Quadro sulla Celiachia, Legge 123/05, art. 4 comma 3) which states that "in the canteens of schools, universities and hospitals gluten-free meals must be provided when asked, at the same price that common meals".

WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

When travelling, you can easily find a lot of information in the Internet. Pre-planning is useful; you can find information about the restaurants where you can eat gluten-free, the supermarkets which sell gluten-free products and the common health stores.

There is a lot of information available concerning the coeliac life in other countries. You can visit www.cyeweb.eu where we provide an European Travel Net, where you find gluten-free information from most of the European countries; where to eat, how to contact the local contact person, what's the name of the local coeliac organization and what information do they offer. If the country you are going into is not listed in the Travel Net, you check the Links-list, where also other countries' coeliac organizations are mentioned. It's a good idea to contact the local coeliac organisation – they have the best knowledge.

You can also find some lists of gluten-free producers on the local websites and check out if they deliver to your new home too. In most cases you can pay by credit card or bank account or against invoice. You could also ask your guest family or hostel if it's ok to order the gluten-free products you want.

Internet:

- gluten-free communities all over the world – just google them
- gluten-free cooking blogs
- web shops etc.

HOW TO PREPARE THE POSSIBLE HOST-FAMILY / RECEIVING ORGANIZATION FOR YOUR STAY?

In order to prepare your stay it would be helpful to provide your organization or host family with some information in advance.

For your organization our “Guide for Organizations”, which we created in addition to this guide, might be very useful. So you can forward them the link www.cyeweb.eu.

There they find useful information about Coeliac disease, CYE and the national coeliac societies and contact persons.

Your host family could be thankful for the link to the national societies and options as well.

LOCAL CONTACTS

One idea could also be to get in contact with the local youngsters with coeliac disease. In many countries there are youth boards and local contact persons who organize different events and activities. So maybe you can contact them and meet some of them or join them for an activity. For sure you get many news and ideas concerning gluten-free life and also ideas to spread in your own country. And you could always get some new friends for life!

POSITIVE STORIES

Sometimes we are too scared about going abroad for many reasons: will we find GF foods? Will we be able to communicate what we can eat or not. But everyone should try to get all the best from life, such as travelling, and always be optimistic. You can't imagine what happened to me in Sarajevo two years ago. My friends and I stayed in a small family-run hotel and the owner prepared our breakfast. The first morning she asked me if I would have liked an "omelette"; I answered yes and explained about do's and don'ts concerning coeliac disease. Then she told me that her son, who worked at the reception, was coeliac too. You can't imagine what and how much she cooked for me every morning. Her son is now a friend of mine.

Francesco, Italy

If you are scared of getting wrong food, just think about that it could happen everywhere, not just in another country, also in your home town it could be difficult to get gluten-free products and therefore why not trying it anywhere else?

Anita, The Netherlands

I was diagnosed just before I was supposed to start my Erasmus studies in Finland. When I already was there, I checked the Catalan coeliac youth group website, found the link to the C·Y·E Facebook group and got Miras contact details. After some e-mails we met and went to coeliac meetings and to the a supermarket to check which products she buys and which of the products I was not sure about were glutenfree. I could eat chocolate for the first time since I was diagnosed (for 6 months). Because Mira told me what chocolate I was able to eat! I'm keen on meatballs and I usually don't have much time to do them at home and Mira showed me the place in the supermarket where they were hidden :) I consider myself very lucky for having the possibility of meeting, spending time and sharing things with two Finnish people. For me, before coming to Finland being gluten-free was a handicap because I thought I would have many problems finding things, etc. But finally it has become an advantage because I've met the Finnish culture in a way that my Erasmus friends haven't had the possibility to experience.

Libertad, Catalonia

In Finland the ingredients lists are usually in Finnish and Swedish, so if you don't know these languages, it is difficult to know, if a product is gluten-free and safe or not. Libertad didn't know if is she able to drink all the juices, use all the cacao powder or not. I translated many ingredients lists for her and most of the products were gluten-free. In Libertads opinion it's easy here in Finland as many products have the text "gluten-free" and people understand, what coeliac disease is. And she was happy with the university restaurant, which serves also gluten-free food. Libertad participated in a meeting of the local coeliac society together with Riina, another local young coeliac. I guess she liked buying the fresh bread after the meeting, as in Finland many of the gluten-free breads are in the freezer, so Libertad needed to melt the frozen breads in an oven (she doesn't have a microwave). When we met, Libertad told me she was diagnosed in July and in August she already came here. So she was not well informed in beforehand when coming here, but really happy afterwards as it's rather easy to get gluten-free food here.

Mira, Finland, a local contact person

SUMMARY

Just go!

Don't overthink it, you will survive everywhere and have a great time!

PS: we would be very happy to receive your opinions about this guide and of course a hopefully positive report about your life abroad! You can always send it to cye.board@gmail.com! Thank you!