

SIMPLY GLUTEN FREE

ALLERGEN FREE MADE SIMPLE
also including vegetarian, vegan, and paleo diets

& more

SUMMER FAVORITES

grilling
picnics
pasta salads
birthday desserts
& more

GLUTEN & ANXIETY

SUMMER
SKIN CARE
MYTHS
DEBUNKED

*the
summer
issue*

Grilled Veggies with
Maple Peanut
Dipping Sauce
Gluten-free, Grain-free, Dairy-free,
Egg-free, Vegetarian, Vegan,
optionally Soy-free and
Refined Sugar-free

America's #1 Allergen-Free Publication

explore

Houston,

WE LOVE YOU TO THE MOON & BACK

My first trip to Houston was truly out of this world. I came as part of a press trip to help "Space City" celebrate the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. From our space-themed United flight out of Newark Airport to spending time with real astronauts to going behind the scenes at NASA's Johnson Space Center and Space Center Houston, our schedule left us with little time to breathe. I loved every second of it. When it was time to leave, I couldn't wait to come back.

This February, my friend from college met me in Houston and we spent three jam-packed days exploring just a sliver (mainly the greater downtown area) of our country's fourth largest city. We found more (gluten-free!) food than we could eat, friendly faces, great shops, tons of fun, and even a lazy river in the shape of Texas!



GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are two major airports in Houston – Houston Hobby (HOU) and George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH). Barring traffic, they're only about 40 minutes from each other, so scoop up tickets for whichever one has the better flight deal or route for you. If you're planning on really exploring Houston, rent a car – it takes more than an hour to drive from one side to the other. Otherwise, rideshares are easy and affordable.



WHERE TO STAY

Marriott Marquis Houston, Downtown Houston

The Marriott Marquis Houston is a four-star high-rise smack in the middle of downtown Houston – right across the street from Discovery Green Park and within seven minutes' walk of Minute Maid Park, the Toyota Center, and the George R. Brown Convention Center. The open-style lobby is sprawling and sports a surprising Texas-Art Deco chic design with polished marble floors, dangling chandeliers, and elegant, sunken lounge areas. Contemporary guest rooms and suites have floor-to-ceiling windows with blackout curtains, mini-fridges, large flatscreen TVs, and comfy beds. Features like a full spa, wine bar, and casual bistro are nice, but the real draw here is the sixth-floor pool deck's massive Texas-shaped lazy river (which is just as fun as it sounds!).



WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

First thing's first: if you only eat at one place in Houston, make it **Xochi** (conveniently located inside the Marriott Marquis Houston). This is no Tex-Mex, this is a taste of Oaxaca from James Beard Award-winning chef Hugo Ortega. Vibrant dishes run the gamut from ceviche crudo to tamales to tacos (on housemade soft corn tortillas) to mole to soups and salads. Their menu is 99 percent gluten-free, plus there are options for vegans, vegetarians, adventurous eaters, and folks who want to stick with excellent versions of what they know.

The cocktails at Xochi are equally phenomenal, too, I might add. Other Houstonian watering holes worth mentioning are the rock-and-roll-themed **Cottonmouth Club** for inventive but casual cocktails and the ultra-casual **Axelrad**, a beer garden-style spot with cocktails and wine on tap.





Backing it up to breakfast and brunch, turns out Houston is home to several spots where you can get your hands on foods that are otherwise hard to find. For example, the drool-worthy, brunch-only spot **Snooze A.M.** was a dream come true with gluten-free options all over the menu, including a variety of decadent French toasts, selection of simple but very satisfying avocado toasts, double handfuls of Benedicts, and omelets. The superb gluten-free Bloody Mary with Tito's and free drip coffees didn't hurt either.



Sweet Paris serves up gluten-free and dairy-free options of sweet and savory crepes using buckwheat, rice flour, and soy milk. When you tell them it's an allergy or celiac, they will fastidiously clean the grill and bring in fresh utensils. Come hungry because these crepes are huge and you're going to want to try more than one. I recommend the Philly Cheesesteak, Croque Madame, the vegan Berry Agave, and strawberry with lemon and sugar. For another sweet treat, try the aptly named **Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams** located on the **Houston Heights** shopping strip (highly worth a stroll).

MAX's Wine Dive also serves a stellar brunch, but their unbelievably perfect jalapeño-buttermilk gluten-free fried chicken (potato, chickpea, and tapioca flour) are available all day. If you've ever wanted to try chicken and waffles, now's your most delicious chance, or try the fried chicken plate – the collard greens and home fries are both gluten-free. My non-celiac friend couldn't stop raving about the gluten-free fried chicken, and we also fell in love with their addictive crispy deviled eggs. While it's not a 100 percent GF restaurant, the owner's husband has celiac, so they understand it and they take extra precautions in the kitchen.

One of our favorite and definitely my most celiac-confident meals was in the restaurant at the **Downtown Aquarium Houston**. Chef Jamel Hall knows his stuff and helps set your mind at ease from the second he comes out to speak with you to when he hand-delivers your order himself. In between, he uses separate utensils, pans, fryers, and prep spaces, and substitutes in cornmeal or modifies as needed so people with celiac can enjoy menu items like fried shrimp, shrimp tacos, burgers, dips, and more.

I also ate at **Your Pie**, but it was not without a bit of anxiety. However, I didn't get sick and all their gluten-free reviews are pretty much stellar. This thin crust pizza joint is small, but if you specify you have an allergy, they'll scrub up to their elbows, change aprons, and prepare your pizza in a completely separate area in the back. It'll also get its own special baking pan and a separate peel is used to take it out of the shared oven.

Sadly, there weren't enough hours in the day (or room in our stomachs) to try out some of Houston's other notably gluten-free-friendly spots, but don't be shy. **Vibrant's** 100 percent gluten-free, refined sugar-free, and dairy-free menu full of goodies like turmeric bone broth, chickpea socca flatbreads, and cakes looked great; and I was eyeing the lemon poppyseed pancakes, veggie lettuce wraps, and brick chicken specialty over at **Bellagreen**.



WHAT TO DO

Depending on how many of the city's big tourist spots you're hoping to get to, you might want to consider shelling out the \$64 (\$54 for kids) for a CITYPASS. This tear-and-go ticketbook gets you in (and often through an expedited line) to the **Downtown Aquarium**, **Space Center Houston**, the **Houston Museum of Natural Science** (planetarium shows are extra, but very affordable), either the **Museum of Fine Arts** or the **Houston Zoo**, and either the **Kemah Boardwalk** or **Children's Museum of Houston**.

Anyone remotely interested in outer space should make the journey 30-minutes outside the city to Space Center Houston and NASA's **Johnson Space Center** where you can learn all about the U.S. Space Program, tour an astronaut training facility, step inside a shuttle replica of the Independence, walk through a mock space station, peep the Saturn V rocket, visit the Apollo Mission Control Center, and touch an actual piece of the moon.

Outside of a brief visit through outer space, one of the most memorable – and slightly out of the box – things I loved in Houston was the **National Museum of Funeral History**, where intricate exhibitions take you through different cultures, rituals, and permutations of death, dying, and what comes after. These are all things you can ponder later over a sunset (or sunrise) as you experience the changing colors of James Turrell's interactive outdoor **Skyscape** installation at Rice University.



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, features some of the wildlife, landscapes, and portraits she's photographed along the way.

