

This cloud helps save more than time.



Explore

Business Day

SUBSCRIBE | LOG IN

BUSINESS TRAVEL

## Those Keeping a Diet Find Better Signposts to Dining on the Road



FOOD FINDS Melanie Melia said Asian restaurants helped her maintain a vegan diet when traveling. ULI SEIT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

By JANE L. LEVERE  
May 7, 2014



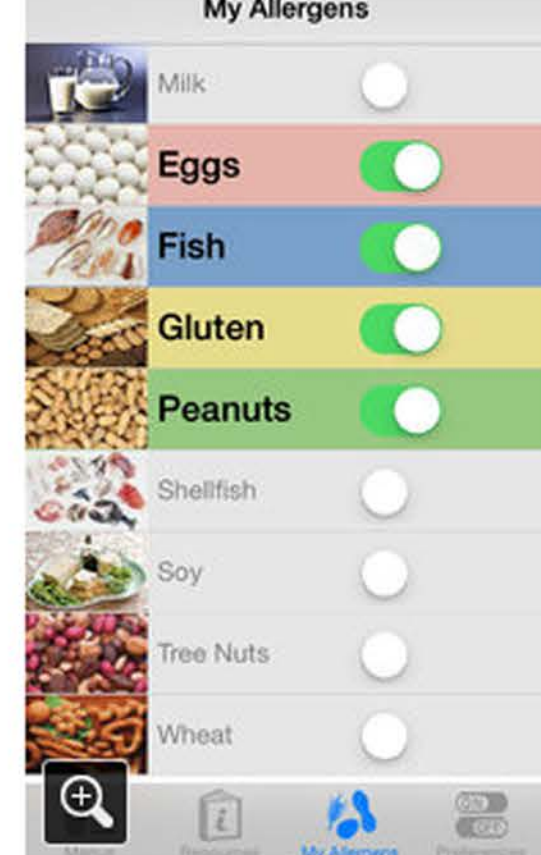
Melanie Melia, owner of a brokerage company in Glen Cove, N.Y., that represents natural food manufacturers, is a vegan who has found many ways to stick to her diet while traveling for business.

She relies on the [Happy Cow](#) app, which identifies vegetarian and vegan restaurants around the world, often with diners' reviews. She also finds Yelp helpful.

Asian restaurants "are the best way to go," she said. "I've hardly ever been to an Asian restaurant where I couldn't get a good, balanced vegan meal."

For breakfast, her "most challenging meal," she takes packaged oatmeal that she can prepare with boiling water in her hotel room; she can also find this at Starbucks.

A screen from an app, iEatOut Gluten Free and Allergy Free. ALLERGYFREE PASSPORT



Ms. Melia is far from alone in trying to maintain her diet while traveling. In fact, the number of travelers like her is growing constantly.

Bjorn Hanson, divisional dean of the Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management at New York University, estimated that some two-thirds of the United States population regularly or periodically focused on special diets. He said almost 5 percent had a food allergy, some 20 percent had a food sensitivity, while 30 percent had consistent dietary preferences — vegan, vegetarian, kosher and so on. The number of people with special dietary needs is growing at least 10 percent annually, he added.

Susie Ellis, president of Spafinder Wellness, a wellness industry media and marketing company, said she was "definitely seeing far more gluten-free menu options."

"And weight is increasingly a major issue for a huge percentage of the population," she added.

"People's stress levels just continue to skyrocket, and this has a lot to do with technology," she said. "People are working 24/7. And business travelers have had to become more conscious of what they do when they travel. There's no more recovery period; they have to recover when they travel."

Henry Harteveltdt, travel analyst for Atmosphere Research, said full-service and luxury hotels were doing a "very good job" of catering to business travelers' special dietary needs. Among these are Fairmont hotels, which introduced their [Lifestyle Cuisine Plus](#) menu three years ago, provided on request to guests who have diabetes or a heart condition, or who prefer gluten-free, macrobiotic, raw, vegan, vegetarian, low-fat or low-carbohydrate dishes.

In 2007 Westin Hotels and Resorts teamed up with SuperFoods Partners to [create dishes](#) — offered worldwide on all Westin menus, including those for room service — featuring foods with health-enhancing or life-lengthening benefits attributed to them, like avocados, spinach, honey, blueberries, wild salmon, walnuts and oats.

Hyatt and Andaz hotels worldwide offer a "create your own" room service menu that lets guests choose a protein, a side dish and a preferred preparation method. One way Marriott International addresses its guests' dietary needs is through training: Since 2008 it has offered chefs and servers in its restaurants and bars a course that teaches them about food allergies, how to prepare and serve meals free of a guest's allergen, and how to handle an allergic reaction. Over 80,000 staff members have completed the training, Marriott says.

Mr. Harteveltdt said airlines needed to "do better responding to food trends." He criticized United States carriers in general, saying they focused on "shelf-stable items, high in sodium and fat," sold in economy class on domestic flights.

Carriers considered more proactive in catering to food preferences include Singapore Airlines, which generally offers a choice of 15 special meals to passengers in all classes of service, and Delta, which has 16 special meal categories available in first class on some domestic flights and in all classes of service on most international flights. Special meals usually must be ordered 24 hours before departure.

This month, Swiss International Air Lines began offering lactose-free and gluten-free coffee cream and chocolate bars on all flights. Depending on the length of the flight, passengers also can get special snacks, like candy bars, yogurt or cakes, that meet their dietary needs. Alternative dairy and bread products also are being offered at the airline's airport lounges in Switzerland. The carrier recently was certified as an "allergy-friendly" airline by the [European Center for Allergy Research Foundation](#).

Travelers are relying on an ever-growing number of websites and apps to identify healthy dining options. These include the [Food Tripping](#) app, which provides alternatives to fast food at restaurants, juice stores, farmers' markets and elsewhere; [HealthyOut](#), an app that lets users find dishes at local restaurants that meet their dietary needs; and [HealthyDiningFinder.com](#), a website where registered dietitians and other nutrition professionals identify restaurant menu items that incorporate lean and high-nutrient ingredients.

Other websites are [SafeFare](#), which helps users find nearby allergy-aware restaurants, and [AllergyEats](#), a guide to peer-reviewed restaurants in the United States that cater to those with allergies.

For those avoiding gluten (a type of protein found in foods processed from wheat and related grains), there is [glutenfreepassport.com](#), a website that offers tips, travel language guides and gluten- and allergy-free apps. There is also an app, [Gluten Free Restaurant Items](#), that is a fast-food diet guide for people with celiac disease and wheat allergies.

Carol Kicinski, editor in chief of Simply Gluten Free Magazine, uses the [Find Me Gluten Free](#) app, which features gluten-free restaurants, and the [Dine Gluten Free](#) app, which offers user-submitted reviews of restaurants, hotels, bakeries and markets worldwide. She always travels with gluten-free foods with an extended shelf life, like hummus, gluten-free chips, protein bars and oatmeal.

Mr. Harteveltdt suggested that full-service hotels might incorporate information on their guests' special dietary needs in their reservations systems or loyalty program databases. This could let them recommend special menu items at their restaurants when travelers book a room, creating a "way to show that the hotel is responsive and cares for guests' needs."

"This could also keep guests on the property," he said, "something they might otherwise not do."