

A Foodie Road Trip Through Waterloo Region {Recipe!}

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Melody Wren

A Food-lovers trip.....especially for those with dietary restrictions!

If you live with food intolerances, you will know how hard it can be to eat out. But that is changing fast. On a recent 2-day getaway to the three cities of Waterloo Region—Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge—I discovered a host of great food outlets that cater to intolerances. The advice from many chefs and owners was, “Speak up. Let us know your specific allergy and intolerance and we will work with you. We need to know, and patrons who call ahead make it easy” How empowering is that?



Del's Italian Kitchen Pan seared salmon – Photo Melody Wren

Don't just take my word. Nick Benninger, co-owner of the Fat Sparrow Group, emphasized that with two daughters with food allergies he wants to “make the food stand out for the customers with food sensitivities”. Quality is a big part of the experience, and Ajoa Mintoh of Four All Ice Cream said “we want vegans to feel that they aren’t missing anything.” At

Del's Italian Kitchen, Head chef Terry Salmond told me, “ people forget to mention their allergies and we serve hundreds of people with allergies every month, so it's a high priority for our business . ” And Mary Traversy, Marketing Manager for the Charcoal Group, shared that “there is at least one guest per night with serious allergies. If it's an allergy, we will take care of you, and if it's a preference, we will take care of you.”

Recipe for Harvest Vegetable Pizza Here!

With those encouraging words in mind, let me take you on a tour. Lunch at [Taco Farm in Waterloo](#) was a delicious start and a rare treat as I could order anything from their 99% gluten-free menu. When Nick Benninger opened Taco Farm in 2018, he approached the Mexican menu with authenticity and a focus on boosting farm to table: “Our gluten-free tortillas, made fresh every day, are the thing that separates us from the competition – a lack of preservatives means they don't hold up well, so eating them fresh is important, and guests love it. Sometimes clichés are good”. I had the gluten-free fried chicken, smothered in local honey, lime juice and tequila with a side of corn tortillas – pure gold.



Gluten free fried chicken, Taco Farm – Photo Melody Wren

With blue skies and sunshine, ice cream treats naturally came next. [Four All Ice Cream](#)

owner, Ajoa Mintah is a chemical engineer who bought an ice cream maker, then took a one-week ice cream making course at the University of Guelph joining people from all over the world. Unique, inventive and creative flavours allow her to showcase local foods. Ajoa's oldest daughter has a milk sensitivity prompting her to create the vegan and low dairy ice cream so that Four All really is for all. My favourites were Sweet Corn Blueberry and Roasted Strawberry Rhubarb.



Four All Ice Cream owner, Ajoah Mintoh – Photo Melody Wren

After a quick change and a refresh, it was time for dinner at [Del's Italian Kitchen](#). I

devoured the pan-seared Tuscan Salmon served on a bed of summer corn succotash, red potatoes and asparagus. According to Chef Salmond the fall menu is expanding to include more gluten-free, dairy-free and vegan options.

Next morning started at St. Jacob's Farmer's Market—a favourite farmer's market with stalls showcasing the harvest: jewel-toned eggplants, peppers and tomatoes. It is a must for all foodies and those who love a bargain. The market started in 1975 beginning as an adjunct building to the livestock exchange.



Produce at St. Jacob's Market – Photo Melody Wren

Foodie Gems at St. Jacobs!

St. Jacob's Farmers Market is located at 878 Weber Street North, Woolwich and is open Thurs and Sat 7-3:30. Leanne McGray, Marketing Manager at St. Jacobs, introduced me to vendors that focus on shoppers with dietary restrictions:

Grain Harvest Bread House carries gluten-free bread, cookies and squares.

The Sconery has Keto treats at the market as well as their store in Belmont Village.



The Sconery, Yvonne, mother of owner – Photo Melody Wren

Maria's noodles carries gluten-free pasta made with either kale, lentils, rice or

chickpeas, with chickpea noodles having the highest protein content.

Moroccan Cuisine has gluten-free Halva, vegan spicy galette and very cleverly makes “naked samosas” which have all the filling, but no casing, making it gluten-free.

Cathy's Kombucha was gifted the ancient genetic bacteria combination starter from monks and nuns from a Quebec Monastery and now is behind the small-batch, hand-crafted Kombucha produced in a variety of flavours. Non-alcoholic, gluten-free and vegan, Kombucha has been referred to as the “elixir of life” in ancient Asia with positive experiences shared by loyal customers.

Chocosol is an essential stop for any chocolate fans for the pure chocolate experience. Ranging in different percentages and flavours, even the drinking chocolate is 70% and perfect to pick up now for the coming cold weather.

Don't miss **Waffle Haus**, serving delicious gluten-free and vegan waffles made by Richard Bruckeder, the owner.

Behind **The Tamale Girl**, owner Kathy makes gluten-free corn tortillas from scratch and has vegan or meat choices for filling. Tamales are freshly made and filled with a combo of beef and pork or a vegan black bean filling. Customers can also buy them fully cooked and frozen to enjoy at home.



The Tamale Girl, owner Kathy Hanshaw – Photo Melody Wren

Scoop It Bulk and Gluten-free baking from Harriston includes gluten-free and dairy-

free baked goods.

Moo Free is dairy-free and vegan featuring almond milk, coconut milk and oat milk.

Pizza Junction in the market building makes gluten-free pizza.

British Baked Goods in Pedlars Village has a large gluten-free section boasting a separate kitchen making it safe for Celiacs.

Kippers Heritage Farms carries gluten-free sausages

After seeing all the beautiful produce and baking at the market, we were ready for lunch at Café Pyrus, a casual vegan café. Everything is gluten-free and vegan. Tyzun James, owner, talked about his idea behind starting the restaurant “basically I wanted a place that I could eat, and he wanted to be able to serve his mother food that she would enjoy as a carnivore. Locally made tempeh and local soybeans, and when they can, it is organic. I had the popular Angry Vegan with tempeh, avocado, artichoke spread and melted dairy-free cheese. Save space for the melt in your mouth gluten-free cookies and muffins or take some home to snack on later.

Driving home through Cambridge mid-afternoon it was natural to stop in at Sugar Daddies Bakery for a treat. Owners Greg Gardner-Orbon and David Orbon started the bakery two years ago with a large selection of Keto baking and one of the only bakeries that bake on-site every day. Filled with goodies where everything is 100% gluten-free, sugar-free and low carb, there is little guilt. Everything can be frozen, so customers come from afar and stock up.



Sugar Daddies Bakery – Photo Melody Wren

Where to stay:

The award-winning Holiday Inn Express and Suites Waterloo-St. Jacobs area was across the road from St. Jacob's market. It was the first time I stayed in a hotel since COVID-19 and any apprehension I had was quickly dashed after reading the website on the cleaning protocols. Personal protective equipment kits are available at the front desk. Well equipped rooms made it easy to be self-sufficient, however, there is a lounge with continental breakfast included.

More information on the area: www.explorewaterlooregion.com

Harvest Vegetable Pizza (Gluten-free, lactose-free and vegan too!)

Inspired by harvested vegetables from St. Jacob's Farmer's market, I pulled together these gluten-free, lactose-free, vegan pizzas. They were such a huge hit I know they will be a regular occurring meal in our home and hopefully yours too!

Ingredients:

Frozen cauliflower crusts

Portobello mushrooms with stems removed

Eggplant, cut into 1-inch slices and salted both sides

Zucchini, cut into long slices

Tomato passata (pureed and strained tomatoes that come in a tall jar or box)

Fresh basil

Method:

For the grilled vegetables:

After wiping off the salted eggplant that has sat for several hours to get rid of the bitter taste, baste liberally with a combo of balsamic and canola oil.

Zucchini, cut into lengthwise thin slices and cover with balsamic vinegar.

Remove stems from portobello mushrooms and brush liberally with balsamic vinegar letting it sit for at least 45 min

The veggies should be grilled on the bbq until tender and browned, but if the weather isn't cooperating, they could also be basted liberally with a mixture of oil and balsamic and repeatedly basted while roasting at 400° checking regularly. The vegetables should be

tender and not overly crisp.

Note on zucchini: if you prefer the zucchini not to be visible to little ones, grating it directly onto the prepped crust will add a veg without the fuss.

Pizza prep:

Coat the cauliflower crusts with plain tomato passata and add chopped fresh basil to each pizza

After cooling grilled vegetables, sprinkle them over the pizza base, adding any other veg from your fridge that would be compatible. I often add pieces of leftover roasted Butternut pieces of roasted Delicata squash as on the pizza in the photo.

Cover the top of the prepared pizza with Dairy-free Italian shredded mozzarella type cheese or if you aren't vegan, you could add goat feta first.

Bake according to crust directions.

Cut into slices and enjoy. Delicious as leftovers too if you can leave any behind!

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About The Author

Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.

