

Alice Springs – eat well and confidently

Gary Fry tells us about his home town of Alice Springs where gluten free eating is easy.

Being a person with coeliac disease in Alice Springs, 1500 km from the nearest city? That must be rough.

Not so; it is very easy. Alice Springs is a town of some 27,000 people, a town that generally punches above its weight. As the nearest major centres are so far away, local suppliers have pretty well everything that is needed on hand. Indeed, in these days of on-line shopping, local suppliers can ill-afford not to be competitive. The same applies to dining out; businesses need to be competitive. Tourism is an important feature of Alice Springs, and local restaurateurs benefit. When one is away from home, one tends to eat out, if not most nights then certainly more often.

Alice Springs is my home. It is a great place to live, an easy place to live for coeliacs and it is becoming easier with each passing year. All coeliacs most probably say this of their home town or suburb, but I am more confident eating out here in Alice Springs than I am in any of Australia's capital cities. No doubt, that is mostly due to familiarity. There are more than forty local restaurants listed in the Yellow Pages, at almost all of which I realise I have eaten. (That's me and the familiarity bit.)

Most surprisingly, even with junior wait staff, it is rare when asking about gluten free options that the response is that blank and slightly worried look (I am still speaking English, but I shall use smaller words). Or worse: 'those dishes are all rice-based, so you can't eat them'. (Please, don't pretend to know. It means I can't be confident of anything you say. And you can't take rice away from me. It mightn't seem much, but it is sometimes all I have. My teeth are not gritted). I make life even more difficult for myself by only



Alice Springs from Anzac Hill looking down Bath Street towards Heavytree Gap, part of the MacDonnell Ranges, in the distance.

eating one meat – kangaroo. So it is often gluten free and vegetarian for me. In spite of that, I haven't gone hungry yet. It does happen that I eat other meats more often when dining out. One can be precious about only so much.

A very impressive menu is available at Hanuman Restaurant, run by the famous Jimmy Shu. Simply ask, and you will be given a list of all of the ingredients in each of the dishes, complete with a list of those to avoid for those with different food allergies. You can't be more certain other than if cooking for yourself.

I have very recently enjoyed dinner at Casa Nostra Pizza & Spaghetti House. This favourite of locals has gluten free pizza bases available. The pleasure derived from eating a pizza in a restaurant is quite astonishing. And that is from someone who almost never ordered pizza before being diagnosed with coeliac disease. Not only am I still talking about it, I am writing about it. For publication. A pizza. Go figure.

Bar Doppio off the Todd Mall in the centre of town is a local café. Delight of delights for coeliacs, it has a gluten free section on the blackboard! Afghan Traders has a range of deli products, and sells a lot of organic and locally grown produce. It also sells dry foods in bulk, perfect not only for us locals, but many travellers.

There are friendly cafés tucked away all across town. Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, the Royal Flying Doctor

Service, the Desert Park – all of those places, which you must visit when in town, can meet your gluten free needs.

The restaurant at the ten-pin bowling alley has just changed theme, and is gluten free. I haven't dined there, but I hear good things. Oh, the name of the bowling alley? The Dust Bowl of course.

For the committed carnivores, there are a number of butchers. It seems many locals are more likely to change political allegiance than change butcher. Milner Meats should be mentioned as one which manufactures its own gluten free sausages. They also have ingredient lists for all their products. The others may also, but they are not my butcher. So I wouldn't know. Besides, I am less committed to the life of a carnivore than others. But I am committed to my butcher.

There are two large supermarkets in town, four medium sized, and a number of smaller markets at which you can buy dry goods. Each is as you would expect, and carries items typical of that chain. Purchasing gluten free products is no more or less difficult than any other centre in Australia.

For a full list of restaurants in Alice Springs, you should try the Tourism Central Australia website http://www.centralaustraliatourism.com/ct_dv.php.

Come and see us in the centre some time. Every Australian should visit at some stage (not me at home; I don't have enough towels). The town. You should all visit the town. And eat well, and confidently. But not the rice!