

Southern Travels, Part One

By Louise Harmon

My non-vegan husband and I just returned from a two-week road trip visiting family in Texas and sharing the total solar eclipse experience with some very good friends in Arkansas. Although I anticipated that meeting my vegan, gluten-free dietary needs might present a challenge, I thought I was well-prepared. I stocked up on several packages of pre-cooked meals-in-a-pouch which could be easily heated in our hotel microwave, as well as ingredients (canned beans, rice, seasonings, etc.) to be used in creating tasty meals at our non-vegan family and friends' homes. The part that presented the greatest challenge was those times we were on the road and needed to rely on restaurants for our meals.

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Many of the motel chains we stayed at offered free breakfasts. However, the only foods I could eat there were some fresh fruits (usually oranges, apples and occasionally, bananas), and instant oatmeal. As none offered plant milk alternatives, I added one of their packaged serving-sized containers of peanut butter to my oatmeal for at least a little protein with my breakfasts. It was truly sad to see so many people gobbling up large amounts of the unhealthy meat and dairy-laden food choices.

[Happy Cow](#) is my go-to resource for finding restaurants with vegan options, but unfortunately their site listed few options along most of our southern route. [Yelp](#) had several restaurants listed noting vegan and gluten-free options, however we found that these listings were not always accurate.

A Mexican restaurant noted on Yelp to have vegan and gluten-free options was a very welcomed site after a particularly long stretch of highway driving. However, our waitress did not understand any of my dietary limitations. She enlisted the aid of the restaurant manager, who told me that the beans they used were whole beans and were not prepared with lard, they could substitute a corn tortilla for the wheat one, and they would leave out any cheese or dairy products from my meal. I realized from our conversation, customers requesting vegan options were not something they usually encountered. Shortly after leaving the restaurant, I had a rather "robust" GI reaction (I do not tolerate dairy in any form), so I felt pretty certain there was dairy somewhere in my meal.

The following day, my omnivorous hubby thought he found a great place to eat along our route—a small Indian restaurant which again noted vegan and gluten-free options. The ad even showed photographs of tables and chairs, looking like a small, quaint place to eat. However, when we arrived, the "restaurant" was a tiny counter in a truck stop. Okay...still not an issue, until I looked at the menu, which did not seem to include a lot of options I could have. So, I asked, "What do you recommend that is vegan and gluten-free?" The owner's face fell. "I am sorry madam, I have nothing that is vegan. All the dishes I make contain ghee." As we thanked him and started walking away, he offered me rice with some boiled vegetables—all without ghee. I was so famished, I accepted. As we ate, he kept checking on us, repeatedly apologizing for not having any other options. I appreciated his honesty and kindness.

We did find two outstanding places along our route which offered wonderful vegan and gluten-free options. *(To be continued next month.)*