

## RESTAURANT RANTS & RAVES

### Lilit Café: How a Small Cafe Went Gluten-Free

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Gluten-free sandwiches, pizza, and crab cakes, OH MY! That is the typical reaction when a person on a gluten-free diet walks in the door of Bethesda's Lilit Café. Not only does this small, family-owned café have some of the most delicious gluten-free food items, they also have Redbridge beer to wash it all down.

Lilit has become a famous, must-visit restaurant for the Washington, D.C.-area celiac community. They are best known for their incredible gluten-free pizza and sandwiches as well as amazing gluten-free desserts supplied by Sweet Sin Bakery. I spoke with owner Davinder Singh about the challenges of starting and maintaining a gluten-free institution. Here's what he had to say:

Davinder took over Lilit Café, then a little sandwich shop, in January 2007 and immediately started offering gluten-free options. He is good friends with the owners of Sweet Sin Bakery, Richard and Renee, and had observed Renee, who has celiac, struggling to dine out on several occasions. He wanted his restaurant to have options for her and other celiacs so he started carrying the Sweet Sin desserts. Every few months, he would add another gluten-free item to his menu. First came the sandwiches and then the pizza. At the start of 2008, Davinder launched his latest gluten-free creation: gluten-free crabcakes! And he spilled the beans that he is working on other new items as well.

Davinder says maintaining a restaurant with gluten-free options is not as difficult as one may think, although it can be challenging at times. The biggest issue is the cost of purchasing gluten-free products. Lilit Café has mostly avoided these issues by using only one type of products. In other words, the sauce on the glutinous pizza or the mayonnaise used on the sandwiches made on wheat bread is the same as that on the gluten-free options: completely gluten-free. In the restaurant kitchen, they have a second set of everything to prepare gluten-free food and have even purchased a second oven.

As time went on, Davinder has noticed several positive changes in his business. People with celiac heard how great and safe Lilit Café was and spread the word! Soon Davinder noticed that there was a great deal of repeat business, and not just from Bethesda. People in the DC Metro area sometimes travel over an hour to eat at Lilit. Visitors and tourists with celiac stop in all the time after hearing how great it is on the internet. The decision to offer gluten-free has been a very good one for Lilit Cafe!

Lilit Café is a fantastic example of how a small restaurant can provide gluten-free food effectively and how great it can be for business. Please pass this article on to other restaurants in your area that may be interested in offering gluten-free options. Maybe a café like Lilit will follow their example and open near you!

To learn more about the Lilit Café, visit [www.lilitcafe.com](http://www.lilitcafe.com).

And, if you need help convincing a restaurant near you to offer gluten-free options, contact us at the NFCA and we can help! Email [GREAT@celiaccentral.org](mailto:GREAT@celiaccentral.org) for more information.