

The dining experience of people with celiac disease



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Abstract:

The author has made this research to learn more about celiac and to make more awareness amongst the Maltese restaurants. The author made this research by first made her research online for the literature review then she made a qualitative question for celiac people to gather more information about what they think when dining out.

It came to conclude that celiac people do not feel very safe when dining out as the restaurants do not have a separate kitchen to prepare food for celiac people. Moreover, celiac people also said that there needs to be more awareness in restaurants. The author suggests that there needs to be a course for all the restaurants to make them more aware of all the conditions that they can face.

The author had learned more about this condition and what celiac people feel when they go and dine out. The implications of this research are to make more awareness about this condition online, at school, and especially at everyone's place of work.

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Table of content:

	Page Number
1. Abstract	1
2. Introduction	4
3. Literature review	
3.1. Condition	5
3.2. Disease	5
3.3. Symptoms	6
3.4. Testing for celiac	7
3.5. Celiac can become active	7
3.6. Untreated Celiac	7
3.7. Food to avoid and consume	8
3.8. Beverages	9
4. Methodology	
4.1. Data collection Methods	10
4.2. Secondary data	10
4.3. Primary data	11
4.4. Sample	11
4.5. Pilot Study	11
4.6. Methods of analyses	11
4.7. Limitations	12
5. Findings and analyses	
5.1. Are celiac options provided?	13
5.2. Feel safe when eating from a restaurant?	14
5.3. Chef's level of knowledge increased or cosmetic changes?	15
5.4. Should servers be aware of this condition?	16
5.5. Need to be more awareness about celiac?	17
5.6. Confidant yourself with cooking celiac food?	17
5.7. Celiac beers in Malta?	18
5.8. If ITS offer's a course on celiac will they participate?	18

6. Discussion	
6.1. Comparing literature review to the findings	19
6.2. Learning through the project	19
6.3. Self-reflection	19
7. Conclusion	20
8. References	21
9. Appendices	
9.1. Questionnaire sample	22

2. Introduction:

This project will consist of research about knowing more about celiac. It will consist of what are the side effects when eating normal food and what types of food and drinks can be consumed. Moreover, the author will also research how celiac can become active and what happens if it is untreated. It is also important to know how to get tested for this condition.

In the past celiac was not that popular, so not every restaurant had produced gluten-free meals, while nowadays celiac food is more popular in restaurants. The author will be conducting research to see if celiac people think that the chef's level of knowledge had increased, how celiac people think about the preparation of food in restaurants regarding this disease. It is also important to research if servers are aware of this condition. However, the research will also include if celiac people find them insecure and safe when eating food from restaurants or they prefer to make their meals.

During this research, the author will be making a qualitative questionnaire to eighty celiac people.

3. Literature review

3.1. Condition:

Celiac disease is a condition where people need to follow a diet by not consuming any type of gluten products. Normally, gluten can be found either in wheat, barley, and rye. However, when celiac people consume any food that may contain traces of gluten it will damage the small intestine. Celiac disease can be found in all ages, but it is most common in people over the age of fourthly year olds. The best treatment for celiac people is to create a balanced diet by eliminating food that contains gluten. However, research has shown that one in a hundred people have this condition, that it is more frequently in countries that produce wheat and is their basic diet. (O'Kelly, n.d.)

3.2. Disease:

Celiac disease is when the body consumes gluten, the villi that are found in the small intestine will be damaged. The function of the villi is to help absorb all the nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. However, if the villi are damaged the body will react by not absorbing enough of these nutrients. (AY, 21-8-2020)

During the research, it come across that celiac disease and gluten intolerance are slightly different from each other though they are very similar. A person who has the celiac disease will have their immune system damaged. The lining of the small intestine will lead to suffering from malabsorption. On the other hand, gluten intolerance is also known as "non-celiac gluten sensitivity". People suffering from gluten intolerance will have very similar symptoms to that of a celiac disease person, as both will cause the body to respond to the consumed gluten. Moreover, when celiac people eat gluten food their immune system will attack its body tissue. On another note, gluten intolerance people will cause short-term bloating and belly pain. (Clerici, 21-06-2018)

3.3. Symptoms:

Celiac disease can be divided into the following three classifications classical celiac disease, non-classical celiac disease, and silent celiac disease. Classical celiac disease can have such symptoms as weight loss, failure of growth in children, and malabsorption that can include the following symptoms diarrhea and paleness. Non-classical celiac disease is when having no clear symptoms and signs of malabsorption. However, some of the symptoms can be anemia, migraine, bone fractures, fatigue, and Vitamin deficiency of Folic and Vitamin B12. Silent celiac disease is also known as "asymptomatic celiac disease" when having this disease, you will not have any symptoms but still be damaging the small intestine. Moreover, when they do a gluten-free diet they will not have any symptoms, but they will have better health and reduce abdominal bloating. (Sanders, n.d.)

Symptoms that will show that you have celiac disease can include the following: diarrhea, weight loss, abdominal pain, constipation, itchy skin rash (that can occur on the knees, chest, elbows, and in the scalp), bloating, vomiting, headaches, fatigue, gas, nausea, and nervous system injury that can include coldness and itchy in feet and hand. However, some of the most common symptoms found in children are diarrhea, gas, gained weight, constipation, pale skin, and vomiting. On the other hand, half of the adults can suffer from bloating, pain in the abdomen, or diarrhea. (O'Kelly, n.d.) (AY, 21-8-2020)

There are a few celiac people that do not have as many of these symptoms, but they have anemia or osteoporosis. This will happen because of the damage done in the villi. The body does not consume the right amount of iron, calcium, and other vitamins that need to be consumed by the body. (O'Kelly, n.d.)

3.4. Testing for celiac:

A person can have a test to find out if they are celiac. This can be done by making a blood test while they are still consuming any products that contain traces of gluten. Then if tested and you have celiac disease, the doctor will issue another test which is called "endoscopy". Endoscopy will take samples to show how the villi are reacting strangely and to confirm the diagnosis. The endoscopy will be taken by putting a flexible tube in the mouth that will go down and pass through the gut, and the small intestine where the samples will be taken. (O'Kelly, n.d.)

3.5. Celiac can become active:

Celiac disease can become active after pregnancy, viral infections, surgery, childbirth, and emotional stress. However, it is more common to have celiac disease if anyone has a family member with celiac or if a person is suffering from thyroid disease, diabetes type 1, and down syndrome. (AY, 21-8-2020)

3.6. Untreated celiac:

Untreated celiac disease can cause complications in both children and adults. This can include malnutrition that can cause weight loss and anemia and in children slow growth because they can't absorb enough nutrients. Structure bone weakening is when having a serious lack of calcium and vitamin D absorption. This can lead to rickets in children and osteoporosis in adults. Besides, people with celiac disease that does not follow a gluten-free diet will have a high risk of having small bowel cancer. Moreover, if celiac is not treated it can also be sensitive to another disease such as lactose intolerance when drinking dairy products. There is also infertility and miscarriage, and nervous system problems that can include in the hands and feet. (AY, 21-8-2020)

3.7. Food to avoid or consume:

It is extremely important that when buying food especially processed, they need to check the food labels with caution. Moreover, gluten can be found also in medication, lipsticks, and postage stamps. However, celiac people should not consume food that contains any traces of gluten that is made from wheat, rye, and barley. These include bread, pies, cereal, biscuits, couscous, wraps, pasta (noodles, spaghetti), baked goods (cakes, pastries, muffins), condiments (salad dressings, gravy mixes, barbecue sauce), snacks (cereal bar, candy bar), and processed foods (prepared meat, soup mixes, French fries, and certain ice cream). Moreover, oats are gluten-free, but people are afraid to eat them because they can be contaminated with other cereals. (disease, 03-12-2019) (Kubala, 2020)

On the other hand, they can consume all fruit and vegetables, legumes (red lentils, chickpeas), nuts and seeds (walnuts, pumpkin seeds), animal proteins (poultry, fish), dairy products (cheese, milk, butter), certain seasoning (pesto, hummus, apple cider vinegar), nut butter, and gluten-free products (quinoa, wild rice, cornflour, and brown rice). (Kubala, 2020) (disease, 03-12-2019)

3.8. Beverages:

Beverages that cannot be consumed due to gluten being found in a beverage are the following, beer, lager, premade coffee drinks, and drinks mixes. On the other hand, there are more drinks that can take this can include herbal or fruit teas, chocolate drinks (that contain pure cocoa powder), savoury drinks, wines, spirits, pure fruit juices, plain rum, and plain coffee. (disease, 03-12-2019) (Anderson, 2020)

Gluten-free people must check well before buying a product double-checking that it is gluten-free. However, most of the gluten-free products have the “gluten-free symbol” on the package. On the other hand, if there is no symbol it does not mean that the product is not gluten however you must go through the ingredient list and revise well. It is also important that when reading the ingredient list, you know what the other words mean that it contains gluten. This can include wheat, barley, rye, malt, oats, starch, dextrin, durum, farina, semolina, wheat berries, and Khorasan wheat. Although some of them are gluten-free like starch and dextrin they can be originated from wheat. (Vigerust, 22-02-2021)

4. Methodology:

4.1. Data Collection methods:

This study aims to gather as much information that is needed regarding the dining experience for a celiac. The research method used to collect this data was a qualitative questionnaire that is based on to see if a celiac is confident in preparing their meal if they feel safe when eating from restaurants and if celiac options are provided.

The qualitative questionnaires were sent to the Celiac Association and thanks to them they had helped to promote this survey on their website and on a Facebook page. The questionnaire result's helped this research to have a better understanding of what celiac people feel when they are dining in a restaurant.

On another note, the author had refused to use other research methods because it felt that they do not match the research. This is because the author wanted a lot of celiac people to give their feedback. However, if interviews were taking place, or a focused group, or case study they need more time, as this was against the time limitation. However, if the author had made a quantitative questionnaire, it would not have gained enough information on how they feel when they go and dine in a restaurant.

4.2. Secondary data:

The secondary data used during the research were from multiple websites and articles that were written by professional celiac doctors and gastroenterologist doctors. All the secondary data was gathered through to the support of the primary data of this research. All the secondary data was relevant to the study conducted that was analysed and related to the primary data. However, all the previous research had given some understanding of what the final study was designed up to be.

4.3. Primary data:

To start with, the primary data that had inspired the author to write this long essay title on celiac was because of her cousin that had known she was celiac almost four years ago. This is because at that time she did not know what to do as there was very lack of awareness in Malta about celiac. Therefore, the author decided to do this research to make more awareness about celiac.

However, the author had decided to do a qualitative questionnaire to eighty people that are celiac or have a family member. This questionnaire was sent to the celiac association so that the author, can gather the best result for her research, so that she can ensure that it will have enough information that could help the author during this research. These questionnaires are focused more on 'The Dining Experience of people with celiac disease so that the author can improve the awareness about celiac in restaurants.

4.4. Sample:

The questionnaire was sent to the Celiac Association and with their permission, the author was able to start and digging for the analyses on this condition. This result had helped to be more aware of celiac and to make more awareness.

4.5. Pilot study:

During this study, every week or when new development or arrangement on the long essay was made, the tutor will revise it. This proved that the author's tutor was a solid backbone as he had helped her to arrange the long essay and get better information.

The questionnaire took the author some time to finish. This is because when the questions were made the author gave them to the lecturer and two of her friends to see what she can arrange regarding the questions to make them more in a good sentence. Moreover, thanks to the tutor she had arranged the question to make them more specific till the last minute before sending them to the celiac association.

4.6. Methods of analyses:

The method used to analyse the questionnaire was qualitative methodology, where each question had been gathered enough information for this research. However, almost all of them responded in a detailed answer by telling their own experience.

4.7. Limitations:

Time:

Regards to time management there was a slight problem to have gathered all the results in good time. This is because when the author emailed the association, they took some time to send it back. On another note, the questionnaire was not posted on the date that the author received an email form them and the time was passing. On another note, when they posted it on their website and Facebook page the people help by giving their feedback about what they feel about this condition.

Findings:

Regarding the findings of the questionnaire where most of them celiac people and very few of them had a family member. The majority said that they do not feel safe when eating from restaurants and they prefer to make their meals.

5. Findings and analyses:

The questionnaire was sent to the celiac association and thanks to them the author had gathered enough information for the research, as eighty people who are celiac had responded. However, only three of the people that responded were under the age of eighteen, eight people who responded were between nineteen and thirty, twenty-seven of the people that responded were between thirty-one and forty-nine, and twenty-seven of the people who responded were over the age of fifty. Moreover, fifty-one of the people had said that they are celiac while twenty-six of the people said that they have a family member. In addition, only four people said that they are gluten intolerant.

5.1. When dining out are celiac options provided?

In this question, the author had asked if when dining out are celiac options provided. However, fifty-seven out of eighty said that they need to request, thirteen out of eighty said no and ten people said yes. Moreover, the author had asked them to elaborate more on this question, and as a result, it showed up that twenty-five out of eighty only trust one or two restaurants that offer gluten-free options however, they said that they do not have enough options to choose from. On the other hand, ten people out of eighty said that the majority do not cater for celiac, while ten out of eighty said that some of the restaurants need to ask if they have gluten-free food. Moreover, fifty out of eighty said that in Maltese restaurants they do not have a separate section to prepare celiac food this will lead to food being contaminated with normal food.

In the questionnaire twenty-five people said that in Malta, some menus include gluten-free food but when they ask what the ingredients in the dish are, they found out that there is one item that is not gluten like soy sauce. On another hand, they also said that some of the restaurants do not take the risk to write what items are gluten-free on the menu. On another note, ten of the people said that most of the restaurants only offer gluten-free bread, pasta, or pizza as a gluten-free meal, and to avoid any problems and be on the safe side they offer a salad. However, they said that they would like to eat something different when dining in restaurants and not giving the same food every time, they go and dine.

Five out of eighty said that before they go to a restaurant they call to make sure that they have gluten-free foods. However, most restaurants say yes and tell them we talk when you arrive at the restaurant. They also said that when ordering gluten-free food they need to tell them that they are celiac so that they need to go and tell the chef about the food contamination.

5.2. Do you feel safe when eating from a restaurant?

It came to result that sixty-four out of eighty said that they do not feel safe when eating from outside, while only sixteen out of eighty said that they feel safe enjoying a meal with peace of mind. Moreover, the author had asked them to be more specific about why they do not feel safe. However, thirty-five out of sixty-four said that in Malta they do not have a separate kitchen, so they are afraid of cross-contamination. In addition, they also mentioned that they trust only one or two restaurants, but they also keep in mind that there is a high risk of cross-contamination, especially during rush hours. Moreover, fifteen of the people had said that restaurants that make gluten-free pizza, after they were served, they told them that it was cooked in the same oven that they bake normal pizza. They also mentioned that there were also served gluten-free burgers with a gluten-free bun and then on the side, they were served with non-gluten-free chips. They also specify that sometimes they were served with gluten-free pasta and then when the waiter go back inside the kitchen, they will notice that the sauce is not gluten. They also said that they do not feel safe even when eating a salad as it would not be 100% sure, as they might mix the lettuce with the pasta utensils that they may have just used. On another hand, one person said that they always eat fish from restaurants to feel safe.

However, twenty-five out of sixty-four of the people said that there is a very lack of knowledge on this condition in the industry and they are not properly trained. They also said they do not feel safe because of the attitude and the knowledge of the staff, as they do not know the difference between gluten intolerance and celiac. On another note, five of the responders that they feel safe, when they know that the restaurant has a separate kitchen and that they know exactly the difference between gluten intolerance and celiac because they are not the same.

5.3. Do you think that the chef's level of knowledge increased or just cosmetic changes?

In the seventh question, the author had asked if when dining out if they think that the chef's level of knowledge had increased, or they just do cosmetic changes to accommodate the celiac. During this research, the author had found that forty-seven out of eighty said that they are cosmetic changes to accommodate the celiac. They said this because they think that the chefs feel modern and cool just to advertise gluten-free items on the menu whiles they do not understand what is celiac. However, people think this because, the chefs cook gluten-free food with normal food or change the boiling water for gluten-free pasta. Also, the people said that when you make it extremely important that you are celiac, they think that you are making a "fuss for pleasure". They also said that because of the foreigners that are working in the industry they do not care for allergic people especially celiac. On another note, they said that if the restaurant or the chef-owner is celiac or has a family member they take it very seriously.

On another hand, twenty-one out of eighty of the people said that the knowledge had increased during the last 5 years but still they do not feel safe as they think that they need to learn more. They also said that the knowledge had increased but they do not put it into practice. They also said that they do not know how to distinguish between celiac and gluten intolerance, so they think that nowadays it is not safe for celiac people to dine out. Moreover, twelve out of eighty of the responders said that it depends on the restaurants as they are not all the same.

However, the difference between celiac and gluten intolerance is that celiac will have an immune system that will attack against its own body's tissue while gluten will have short-term bloating and belly pain. (Clerici, 21-06-2018)

5.4. Should servers be aware of this condition, or they get a request from the chef?

Regarding question eight, the author had asked in the questionnaire if they think that servers should be more aware of this condition, or they go and ask the chefs. Through the research, the author had found that sixty-seven out of eighty of the people said that the servers need to know about this condition at least one staff of the server member. They should be trained as they are the ones which are in contact with the customer, and they can also contaminate the plate. They also should be aware so that they can answer basic questions, guide you through the menu, and most important that they are understanding the condition you are referring to.

One of the responders had said that throughout his experience abroad when they said that they are celiac a manager took care of them from the beginning till the end and he was served on a coloured plate with food being labelled.

However, twenty-two of the people said that they should be training for each one who is involved in the catering industry. Also, they said that the server should be aware so that they can give better information to the chef. They also said that most of the serves have a lack of knowledge because sometimes they ordered gluten-free food and then they are served with normal bread.

However, thirteen out of eighty of the people said that servers should be aware, but they feel safer when referring to the chef so that they have a rest of mind of cross-contamination and about the ingredients used in the products.

5.5. Does it need to be more awareness about celiac in the restaurant?

In questions nine and ten the author had asked if there needs to be more awareness about celiac in restaurants. However, all the eighty people respondents with a yes, this is because some of the chefs and waiters are afraid to take the responsibility.

The author also asked them to elaborate more on this question. Fifty-eight out of eighty of the people respond that there is no knowledge about this condition and the catering industry should be more proper training about all the conditions especially celiac disease. They also said that in the training they should learn the difference between celiac and gluten intolerance, as when celiac people are given gluten-free meals they can still damage the intestine. They also mentioned that if they are well aware they can enjoy the same lifestyle as the rest of the public. Moreover, five people also said that they need to learn how to store gluten-free meals by putting them in a separate room and are clearly labelled. In addition, training should also be done because some of the staff had never heard about the word celiac, and they just keep staring at you or they mix it with lactose intolerance, or they do not understand the English. They also highlighted that if the staff is not trained properly, they can kill a person through their ignorance and this disease should be treated the same as salmonella. Twenty of the people also said that chefs don't take the responsibility as they are afraid and other's chef, they do not take it seriously.

On another note, twenty of the people also said they would feel more safe and confident if the staff are aware of this condition. They also said that if there is more awareness, they will have more choices to choose from the menu. In addition, one also mentioned that if restaurants offer gluten-free meals they should have a certification so that they can have a rest of mind.

5.6. Confidant yourself with cooking celiac food?

In the next question, the author had asked if they feel confident themselves whilst cooking celiac food. However, fifty-five out of eighty of the people said that they feel very confident cooking celiac food. Two people said that after almost eight or nineteen years of being celiac they become more aware of what is good and what is not for them, but they keep an eye open on the labels.

Twenty-four out of eighty said that they are still learning since they were diagnosed a few months ago, as they are still finding certain products that they can take, such as spices that do not contain gluten.

One person also stated that because of her age she cannot cook very well like doing gluten-free bread or pastry and ending up eating the same food every time.

5.7. Celiac beers in Malta?

As the author's research is on the dining experience of celiac, the author also asked if celiac beers are available in the Maltese restaurant. Fifty-six out of eighty of the people said that they had never requested because some of them, do not like beer and others said that they are not sure if they are good for celiac people. On the other hand, twenty-four out of eighty said yes and no. They also said it depends on the restaurant, but it is not easy to find them in all restaurants. Some of the restaurants do not know that gluten-free beers exist. They also said they normally see that they sold gluten-free beers in the supermarkets. Moreover, they also said that ciders are normally available in all restaurants as they are good for celiac.

5.8. If ITS offer's a course on safe food for celiac, will they consider to participate?

Last but not least, the author had asked them if the Institute of Tourism Studies offer's a course on safe food for celiac if they will consider participating. As a result, fifty-three out of eighty said yes as long it is a short evening course as they like to learn more about this condition. On another hand, twenty-five out of eighty said no because they have been diagnosed for years, and now they are well informed from the research that they had made over time and the experience. They also said that they are aware of what food is suitable and how to prepare it as they only cook gluten-free food for everyone in the house. They said that it would be a great idea for those that had been newly diagnosed.

However, twenty of the people had said that the catering industry should have a mandatory certification that they know what the diseases are, especially what is celiac disease. They also said that they believe that this type, of course, should be given to people working in this industry starting from the kitchen steward, chefs, and waiters.

The author had been studying at the Institute of Tourism Studies said, that the school do not give very importance to all the diseases that they can find in the industry. As a theory very basic information is given and not how in the industry can be prepared. Moreover, the author had said that at the school they only serve food to clients one person out of the bloom that a celiac person comes and dine on one of the ITS restaurants. The author also said that they only prepare something basic such as gluten-free pasta and they are very careful that the meat of the fish is not contaminated with flour although they keep in mind that the environment is not gluten-free.

6. Discussions

6.1. Comparing the literature review to the findings:

In the findings from the questionnaire, people had said that when dining out they are normally always served the same food such as gluten-free bread, pasta, and pizza. However, through the research, the author had found that they can eat much more food like nuts, animal protein that can include fish and meat, and soups. However, through the research, it may also come to conclude that they can consume a lot of beverages compared with food like savoury drinks, wines, fruit juices, rum, and gluten-free beers. However, through the findings, it came to conclude that they prefer more spirits when dining out as they are more sure that the restaurant has them and that they are gluten-free.

Moreover, in the questionnaire, they mostly highlighted that every one that is working in the catering industry starting from the kitchen stewards, waiters, and chefs should have a course and license that they know what are the diseases. This is because through the author's research it also came to conclude that if celiac is not treated well it can cause complications in the body that can include malnutrition and bone weakness.

6.2. Learned through the project

During this research, the author had learned that there is a difference between celiac disease and gluten intolerance. Celiac is when a person will damage the small intestine because it will attack its body tissues while gluten intolerance will cause short-term bloating and belly pain. However, the author also had found that restaurants don't know what the difference is between these two. The author has also learned that there need to be more awareness in Malta about all the diseases especially celiac

6.3. Self-reflection

As the author had worked in the catering industry, she agrees that celiac options on the menus are very limited to a choice from. However, she also thinks that the chef's level of knowledge had increased throughout the years. This is because that the author had worked in this industry, where she used to work, they had been very careful not to make cross-contamination when preparing celiac food. However, the author thinks that there should be more awareness about all the diseases, especially celiac. She also believes that by training on these diseases is the most important thing that every catering industry should make before opening the business.

7. Conclusion:

During the research, that had been conducted a qualitative questionnaire to eighty celiac people. Thanks, to the celiac association the author has gathered all the information that she wanted from these questionnaires. However, it came to conclude that most of the people said that the chef's knowledge had not been increased as that they think that they only do cosmetic changes to accommodate the celiac.

Moreover, it also came to conclude that celiac people think that servers should be aware of this condition as they are the people who are touching the plate and giving a suggestion of what to eat. On another note, some of the people said that they prefer to ask the chef. They also said that they prefer to make their meals instead of eating from outside, as they said that the preparation of celiac food is done in the same room where normal food is being prepared.

On another note, the author also has made her research of what are the side effects of this disease on food and drinks that can be consumed. The author also researched how celiac can become active and what happens if it is untreated. Moreover, she also researched how a person can be tasted if they are celiac.

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9. Appendices:

9.1. Questionnaire sample

Celiac

I am Bernice Vella currently doing my long essay of Higher National Diploma in food preparation and production management with the Institute of Tourism Studies. My long essay title is " The dining experience of people with celiac disease ". As part of my research, I am required to present questionnaires regarding this subject. Whilst thanking you in advance for your support I look forward to getting your responses back.

* Required

What is your age? *

☐ Under 18 years old

☐ 19 - 30 years old

☐ 31 - 49 years old

☐ 50+ years old

Do you or a family member have celiac disease? *

☐ I am celiac

☐ Family Member

☐ Other: _____

When dining in the restaurant are celiac options provided? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Have to request

Kindly elaborate on what box you have ticked in the previous question. *

Your answer _____

Do you feel safe when eating from a restaurant? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you have marked NO in the previous question kindly share your thoughts

Your answer

From your personal experience when dining out, do you think that the Chef's level of knowledge increased, or are they just cosmetic changes to accommodate the celiac? *

Your answer

Do you think that servers should be aware of this condition or when they get a request they just refer to the chef? *

Your answer

Do you think that there needs to be more awareness about celiac in a restaurant? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Kindly elaborate on what box you have ticked in the previous question. *

Your answer

Are you confident yourself with cooking celiac food? *

Your answer

Are celiac beers available in Maltese restaurant? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Never requested

☐ Other: _____

If the Institute Of Tourism Studies (ITS) offer's a course on safe food for celiac will you consider to participate? *

Your answer

Submit