



Our expert is always ready to tour the world, with epinephrine, allergy chef card and safe snacks at the ready. In this article, she advises one family about a trip to remote Italian villages, then helps another family to ponder South Florida vs. Utah's slopes.

# Italy

or the

# Keys

---

with Allergies

BY ALLIE BAHN

**I simply love to travel** and see the world, which opens one's eyes to different cultures, astounding landscapes, and can lead to far-flung friendships. My most memorable trips include camping on the world's largest sand island in Australia, awakening to the sunrise on a sailboat, rolling down desert sand dunes and hiking glaciers in Patagonia. I've also spent stretches living abroad in Australia and in Italy.

Since I began blogging about travel 10 years ago (at [Missallergicreactor.com](http://Missallergicreactor.com)), people often ask how I do it, given my long list of food allergies, including severe allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. The truth is these trips require research, planning, and most importantly, trusting myself before going for it.

When it comes to travel with food allergies, one of the big challenges is first deciding your comfort level vs. the desire to travel to a destination. With life-threatening food allergies, I recommend getting a few trips to cities with lots of amenities and easy access to medical care under your belt first – to benefit from experience before trying more remote locations.

In this article, I explore travel options with two parents of high school seniors, who reached out to me with questions about travel choices: one related to travel in Italy, and the other a dilemma over where to go for spring break. In each situation, the issue of comfort zone looms large as we weigh the risk versus the experience.

A trip to the Florida Keys (right) boasts superb snorkeling, attractions, fresh produce, plus allergy-aware restaurants.

TRIP  
**1**  
CHLOE

### VISIT TO REMOTE ITALIAN VILLAGES



Barbara says she and her family have dreamed of visiting Cinque Terre, a picturesque series of colorful villages along the Italian Riviera coastline. The five centuries-old villages, built into the rugged terrain of rocky cliffs and outstretched sea, offer charm that captures the Italy of times gone by. Car traffic isn't allowed within the five villages and the roads to them hug cliff edges, so most transportation is by train, bus, boat or footpath. Visitors take their time wandering through the narrow streets of each little village, indulging in la dolce vita, one espresso, gelato, or glass of vino at a time.

I told Barbara of my visit to Cinque Terre, some years ago. My friends and I followed trails overlooking the painted towns and glimmering sea, struck by the tranquil calm of this remote and idyllic place. But while eager to go, Barbara has concerns about quick access to a hospital, since her daughter Chloe, 17, has severe allergies to peanuts and tree nuts.

Chloe originally raised the idea of Cinque Terre, since her Southern California high school was planning a senior class trip there. However, this family usually tries new travel experiences together first because of her allergies. So they've decided the best option would be to visit Italy first as a family. The hope is that a family vacation to Italy will help Chloe to feel more comfortable as she goes on to college and has more travel opportunities.

The family has experience hiking and camping, and has taken guided river raft tours on the Colorado River. They have also been abroad once – to Switzerland when Chloe was a little girl. While Italy is definitely in the plans, Barbara is trying to decide whether to keep Cinque Terre on the itinerary.

### WEIGHING THE RISKS vs. EXPERIENCES

To help with her Cinque Terre decision, I told Barbara how I'd prepared for my own trip. My friends and I decided to drive, and leave our car in a carpark outside of Riomaggiore, the southernmost of the villages, where we had rented an apartment. We then spent the day walking the path between the villages, winding our way to the northern end at Monterosso. My advice to Barbara is to rent an apartment because this ensures kitchen access and to pack plenty of food and snacks ahead for the trip, in case it proves challenging to find something safe to eat. This method of planning ahead had relieved any of my food anxiety, since safe options were with me. Throughout our hike, I was able to comfortably eat my snacks, drink coffee, wine and eat allergy-friendly lemon gelato.

I also found a safe meal at the first and last towns we visited. My suggestion to Barbara was to plan to do the same because either end would be easiest for access if any medical attention was necessary. My own preparations also included knowing the Italian emergency numbers, and packing extra epinephrine auto-injectors, since medical attention could take longer than usual to arrive.

I told the teen and her mom that guided tours are available. Chloe feels comfortable going to Cinque Terre if they are with such a tour, carry a satellite phone and since we learned there is helicopter access in an emergency. If the footpath is not a comfortable choice, the family could also take the train or the bus among the villages. Cinque Terre can be done as a two-day overnight trip or a more relaxed few days, with nearby sites to visit including Genoa and the towns of Tuscany. Now the ultimate decision rests with Barbara.



TRIP  
**2**  
JOEY

## WHERE TO GO FOR SPRING BREAK



Joey, an 18-year-old North Carolina high school senior, received an enticing invitation: a Senior Spring Break 2019 trip to celebrate graduation with 12 of his friends at a resort in St. Lucia, with his parents and his friends' parents chaperoning. Trouble is, Joey is severely allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, green peas and lentils, and Paula, Joey's mom, reached out to me with concerns about this trip. She was particularly wary about accessibility on a Caribbean island resort in case of an anaphylactic emergency.

Since Joey was open to other travel ideas to celebrate graduation, the family shifted gears. Paula's reasons for moving away from the St. Lucia idea included the challenge of finding a grocery store with brands she knew, trusting the allergy awareness at the resort, plus concerns about Joey and his friends wanting to eat at restaurants. I had pointed out that there could be ways to make it work, but Paula was still out of her comfort zone, and that's not a way to vacation. The family is now trying to decide between two polar opposite options: the Florida Keys or skiing in Park City, Utah.

### TO SNORKEL OR TO SKI?

While the family weighed their Spring Break vacation choice, I got busy researching to help the decision-making.

**Florida Keys** Driving down Highway 1 from Miami through the Keys is a stunning experience: you're surrounded by water, yet still connected to the mainland by a four-hour, end-to-end drive. This provides for an adaptable journey, in which a family can choose where and when to stop and explore. Grocery store chains like Publix Super Market, can be located throughout the journey for safe snacks or day trip food preparation. Medical support is good, with both urgent care centers and hospitals dotting the map of the Keys. Paula can also choose to stay in resort accommodations, but likely will prefer to rent a condo or a hotel with a kitchenette, both of which are common.

My advice to Paula would be to start in Key Largo, only a 60-minute drive from Miami and boasting wildlife experiences and cinematic history. There are chain restaurants available as well as other restaurants earning good ratings

## Allergies on the Go

on the app AllergyEats. For example, the owners of Key Largo Conch House have a child with food allergies, contributing to a restaurant experience where cross-contact should be understood. As they drive south on Highway 1, the family can enjoy snorkeling and farmers' markets full of Florida's freshest fruit and vegetables. If they drive 2 hours south from Key Largo, they will reach Key West, the southernmost city of the continental U.S. It's famous for attractions, from the Ernest Hemingway Home to pre-Civil War mansions, stunning sunsets and a lively performance scene. For dining, there are chains, such as Hard Rock Café, as well as places like Fogarty's where food allergy families have posted online about being safely accommodated. This vacation option should be easy to adapt to meet Paula's family's needs.

**Park City, Utah** A former Olympic venue, Park City is now a skiing and snowboarding tourist hot spot. Located 32 miles from downtown Salt Lake City, there are plenty of non-skiing activities, ranging from hikes to spas and crater hot springs to film screenings. (Park City is home to the Sundance Film Festival.) There are two main resorts: Park City Mountain Resort and Deer Valley Resort, along with plenty of other lodging options, including condominiums and other apartment-style vacation properties.



Park City is a hot spot for skiing and snowboarding, with lodging with kitchens easily available.

If she goes for this option, my advice to Paula is to choose a condo with a full kitchen, so the family can cook allergy-safe food. It may be helpful to pack some basic packaged foods they trust to ease the process. Grocery stores, including Whole Foods Market, with trusted brands, are readily available. Each ski resort has local first aid and there is a main hospital right in Park City. Since it is a popular tourist destination, there is likely to be more allergy awareness among the many restaurants, as positive ratings on the AllergyEats app seem to confirm. So Park City is another excellent choice for this family from a food allergy perspective.

### MY TRAVEL TAKEAWAY

Traveling with food allergies has its challenges, however there are ways to embark safely on most trips. I like how these two families are approaching their vacations: they're gaining experience within their comfort zone. From there, they can become more familiar with travel strategies and research and build confidence. Most important, though, is trusting the experiences they're ready to take and going for it! Vacation, after all, is about enjoyment. o

*Allie Bahn is the founder of Missallergicreactor.com. See our Airlines & Allergies Guide at [Allergicliving.com/airlinesguide](http://Allergicliving.com/airlinesguide)*

## TOP TRIP TIPS

### For Cinque Terre

Stay in one of the towns on either end and rent an apartment.

Go prepared with safe food and snacks.

Bring extra auto-injectors and know the emergency numbers 118 and 112.

See: [Parconazionale5terre.it](http://Parconazionale5terre.it)

### For the Florida Keys

Rent a condo, timeshare or hotel with kitchen, and know closest medical facility.

Research restaurants and read reviews on reliable allergy apps.

Pack extra safe snacks for day-long excursions.

Look for a waterproof epinephrine storage option for water activities.

See: [Floridakeys.com](http://Floridakeys.com) and other top websites.

### For Park City, Utah

Find a condo with full kitchen to rent. If staying at a ski resort, ask about their emergency procedures.

Locate closest grocery stores and bring snacks for full days on the slopes.

Decide how and where epinephrine will be carried to keep at room temperature.

See website: [Visitparkcity.com](http://Visitparkcity.com).

