

OUR FIVE FAVES

# Gelato Cafes in the Triangle

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By Hadassah Patterson

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — Few things take the humid edge off of a North Carolina summer like a frozen treat! While everyone has their favorite ice cream stop, gelato can be a bit harder to find. What is the difference?

There are several distinctions between the two. Primarily, the amount of air, fat, and temperature tends to vary between ice cream and gelato recipes. The air produced by churning, called the overrun in ice cream, makes up only 25 percent of the ice cream in traditional, hand-scooped mom-and-pop shops. Compare that to the average commercial brand, and you'll find that they are generally above 50 percent

overrun, usually between 50-90 percent! That lighter texture means big-box store brands are often mainly comprised of air! As our seniors might say, "They don't make things like they used to!" The excessive overrun in commercial blends also explains why they melt so quickly and need to add ingredients and chemicals to boost flavor. This is just another reason to shop local, whether ice cream or gelato is calling your sweet tooth!

Gelato is churned at a slower speed than ice cream, so even less air is whipped into it. Ice cream also differs from gelato in the amount of fat required. American ice cream is still cream. In fact, the FDA requires recipes to consist of not less than 10 percent milkfat to retain the designation. Gelato often relies on milk and thus has less fat added to the base. It is maintained at a lower freezing point, which gives it that characteristic dense, viscous creaminess. Keep in mind that frozen yogurt is merely soft-serve with a yogurt base, and not the same as either one of these.

Of note is that many gelato shop owners have diverse offerings. Whether coffee, lunch menus, or bakery sweets, most places will have a good number of things to tickle one's fancy. We have been all over the Triangle area, checking out our favorite frozen fun bites. Here are a few of our favorite places to stop in for a cool treat in random order, with notes about what they offer. This is not an all-inclusive list, nor do we attempt to list all options for each location. Most have some type of dairy-free option.

### **Sugarland, Cameron Village in Raleigh and Franklin St. Downtown Chapel Hill**

Sugarland has been a well-loved favorite for a number of years, and they are always helpful and prompt when we have stopped in. They offer a number of desserts, cupcakes, special occasion cakes, and even mixed drinks! Try one of the frozen martinis made with their hand-crafted gelato one evening, and you'll satisfy your grown-up sweet tooth and cool off at the same time. Gelato flavors vary, but they always include traditional flavors in addition to their unique creations! They do still offer gluten-free cupcake options every day. Usually, they have at least one vanilla or citrus and one chocolate type of gluten-free flavor on hand.

### **Fresca Café (Waverly Place in Cary)**

Fresca offers light breakfast and lunch fare as well as coffee and gelato. If you're craving a richer but cooler morning pick-me-up, try their affogato, which features one of their gelatos with an espresso shot poured over it. It is an ideal meeting place in fun surroundings. As a matter of fact, they are gaining more gluten-free diners with their gluten-free crepes! They also offer sandwiches on gluten-free bread as an option, and have gained a number of gluten-sensitive and celiac customers as regulars. I spoke with Mr. Romvari, who is close friends of the original owners, as they are from the same area of Europe. He stated that when they arrived to the area, "We looked around and we saw that even if there was fine dining, there was not that much effort put into it, so we decided that this restaurant would be perfect, because it would bring a more traditional way of making things to the neighborhood." The café has a

very casual, laid-back atmosphere with quality offerings.

### **La Vita Dolce (Southern Village, Chapel Hill)**

La Vita Dolce has coffee, casual menu options, wine, beer, sorbetto and gelato. Their location is on Market Street in Southern Village of Chapel Hill. The gelato is definitely worth a visit. Though they have traditional flavors, on our last stop we tried the avocado sage. It was delicious! They have the option of gelato milkshakes and dairy-free sorbetto sodas. During the visit there was a sample setup for the 'nitro' coffee, and we asked to try. Wow! Think Fast and Furious cool in a cup-of-joe! The coffee is served uber-cold and has an unbelievably smooth palate. It is not a weak coffee. The solution is cold-brewed for 14 hours and infused with nitrogen, then kegged and hooked up to a stout tap. So the 'crema' is more like a stout head on a beer. Oh it is smooth, cold and serious coffee refreshment! If that isn't enough, they have the Dolce Nitro Float. In other words, they take a pilsner glass of nitro coffee and top that with any flavor of gelato you choose. Summer genius! ☺

### **Dulce Café (Sutton Station, Fayetteville Road in Durham)**

Stopping by Dulce café was easy, as the location is right off of a main thoroughfare in Durham. Coming in, visitors are greeted by a sizable 'living room' lounge area that is comfy and unpretentious. The gelato selection is modest, but good, and always includes some vegan options (sorbetto).

Attention chocolate lovers! The Chocolate Nero is a rich and vibrant chocolate gelato that is almost pudding-like. Also worth a taste are the cherry, salted caramel, and coffee-flavored gelato. We tried the sorbetto as a refreshing change, and the lychee nut sorbetto was wonderful! It was very fruity and light, with a 'creamy' texture and good lychee essence. They also offer specialty baked items that are unique takes on traditional French pastries. Beautiful individual-sized fruit tarts, mango layer cakes, pistachio éclairs, Frasier cakes, and Latin American Alfajores (light sandwich cookies with dulce de leche filling) share space without fighting. And this is one of the only shops I've seen with both light-as-meringue coconut macaroons, as well as the quintessential and diametrically different French macarons. They currently have a macaron in Peach-Sriracha flavor that dwindled during our visit. Need we say more?

### **Café Buongiorno's (north Raleigh)**

This neat café is in the Bedford area of North Raleigh, on the way to Wake Forest. They are a charming hybrid of a restaurant with pastries, gelato, espresso and other beverages to take home or drink on site. They also offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner with classic foods such as Paninis, sandwiches, chicken and fries. Aside from the gelato, give the cannoli or one of the 26 Italian cookies a try. Also check out their wine list! As of printing, they are offering 10 oz. of wine for \$4.. They are very accommodating. Feel free to ask them about alternative dietary items. As far as the gelato, they have one of the state's largest in-

house gelato selections, making between 50-75 different kinds! They offer very authentic and unique flavors. One to try is the classic Tartufo al Bacio, which has a blend of Swiss and Dark Chocolate! Yum!

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