

## **Doggy Bag**

American food culture has come a long way. Yet, in other ways, it hasn't.

First, the good stuff. Even though Japanese people may still think "hamburger" when they think of American food, variety is the real spice of US food life. Don't get me wrong — we love our burgers, but not all burgers are equal. In fact, *Texas Monthly* magazine publishes a list of the "Fifty Best Burgers in Texas," and if you're ever in Texas, you must try at least one of them.

As great as hamburgers are, the best part of American food culture is how culturally diverse it is. You can see the diversity even in a small city like mine. Only five minutes from my office is the Euro Café, specializing in home-style Eastern European dishes, like stuffed cabbage, spinach pie, and hummus. About 10 minutes away is the mobile food park, with trucks offering everything from authentic Hawaiian and Thai food to Louisiana Cajun specialties like gumbo and shrimp po-boys.

What really excites me is the explosion of Japanese food in Austin, 30 minutes down the road. Besides some award-winning restaurants with full menus, Austin now has two ramen shops and its very own *izakaya*, the Dojo Sake Bar. While I haven't had a chance to visit these newer places yet, I'm thrilled that Japanese food is beginning to mean a lot more than teriyaki chicken and sushi in Texas.

OK, so here's what I don't like. As big as portions have always been here, they seem to be getting even bigger. The other day for lunch, I ordered an American classic, macaroni and cheese, and there was enough on my plate for at least three meals. I immediately lost my appetite and took more than half of it home with me.

So here's my advice for hungry Japanese travelers in the US. Ask locals where their favorite burgers are and indulge yourself. But remember, the best "American" food is often the great Italian, Mexican, Cajun, or even Japanese food you can find in both big cities and small towns. After all, America is the land of immigrants, and our food culture reflects that. If you can't eat everything on your plate, don't be shy about asking for a to-go box or "doggy bag." Everyone does it, and if you don't, you're probably wasting good food and money or eating way too much. It may be called a "doggy bag," but everyone knows it's really for you!