

The classic American hamburger

ALTHOUGH YOU CAN FIND A MCDONALD'S IN ALMOST EVERY LARGE CITY IN THE WORLD, THE GENUINE AMERICAN BURGER HASN'T REALLY BEEN EXPORTED. HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN'T FIND...

>level 2+

Outside the United States, 'American cuisine' almost always means the hamburger. It is, of course, so much more, but it is true that the great American burger is all-American, classic, and – done right – incredibly delicious!

Hamburgers don't come from Hamburg

Only the name 'hamburger' comes indirectly from Hamburg, Germany. It was first called 'Hamburg steak', a cold dish of *chopped* beef served in American restaurants in the 1880s. By 1889, the name had generally become 'hamburger steak,' and by the turn of the *century*, that was shortened to 'hamburger' and referred

to *ground* beef in a patty, either fried or grilled. The 'hamburger sandwich,' a grilled hamburger patty served on a *bun*, was officially introduced at the 1904 World Fair in St. Louis.

The idea of burgers as fast-food originated in the 1940s, but the *emphasis* was on 'fast' but not necessarily good. Exported around the world, these *thin*, *dry*, *chewy*, and essentially *tasteless* 'burgers' are fried on a *griddle* and served with 'special sauce' to give them some flavor. Now the rest of the world thinks this is what hamburgers should be! The real American burger, however, is the *backyard* burger. It comes *sizzling* off the barbecue, hot, *juicy*, and cooked *to order*.

No ham in a hamburger

The essence of the all-American burger is the meat, of course. It must be 100% beef, ground twice for the proper *tenderness* and *texture*, with about 15-25% fat. Meat that is too *lean* makes a dry, *tough* burger. Cheap ground beef is called 'hamburger' but its fat content of 30% is too high and makes the burger *greasy*. *Picky* chefs prefer ground round (from the *flank*), ground chuck (from the *shoulder*) or ground sirloin (from the *loin*).

The freshly-ground beef is mixed with *breadcrumbs*, egg, pepper, and spices to the cook's *taste*. Then the *raw* mixture is shaped by hand (patted) into rounds about



<i>chopped</i>	haché
<i>century</i>	un siècle
<i>ground</i>	haché
<i>bun</i>	un petit pain
<i>emphasis</i>	l'accent
<i>thin</i>	fin
<i>dry</i>	sec
<i>chewy</i>	élastique
<i>tasteless</i>	insipide
<i>griddle</i>	une plaque
<i>backyard</i>	l'arrière-cour
<i>sizzling</i>	grésillant
<i>juicy</i>	moelleux

<i>to order</i>	à la demande
<i>tenderness</i>	la tendreté
<i>lean</i>	maigre
<i>tough</i>	dur
<i>greasy</i>	gras
<i>picky</i>	pointilleux
<i>flank</i>	le flanchet
<i>shoulder</i>	l'épaule
<i>loin</i>	l'ailoyau
<i>breadcrumbs</i>	des miettes de pain
<i>taste</i>	le goût
<i>raw</i>	cru



10cm in diameter and about 2-3cm thick. Too thick, and the patties don't cook properly all the way through; too thin, and they tend to dry out while cooking.

Cooked to perfection

Real American burgers must be charcoal-grilled over glowing coals with no open flames. Frying or broiling burgers is for lazy cooks and fast-food joints. Although health officials warn against eating undercooked meat (with good reason, as salmonella bacteria can be present), the classic burger can be cooked 'to order' – rare (*pink* in the middle), medium-rare (brownish-pink in the middle), medium (no pink left), or well done (burned!). In all cases, it's important that the outside of the burger be nicely browned. The smoky, charcoal flavor is critical to the classic burger. Good cooks *flip* each burger only once.

With all the fixin's

Right up there next to the divine classic burger is the classic cheeseburger. The traditional topping for a cheeseburger is a thin *slice* of yellow 'American cheese' (which, we must admit, is technically not cheese, but rather some sort of vegetable-oil-based, vaguely cheese-flavored food product). One recent acceptable development in burger evolution is the use of real cheese on the cheeseburger – yellow or white

cheddar is a delicious *improvement*. The sliced cheese is placed gently on the burger just as it is finished cooking on the hot barbecue. The cheese *melts*, softly *coating* the top of the patty.

Burger or cheeseburger, either must be served right away on a fresh hamburger bun. It can be toasted or not, and sesame seeds are allowed. Burger buns are white, soft, and *squishy*, all the better for absorbing the hot juices and melted cheese.

Individual artistic touches may be added. Classic additions can include crisp green lettuce; a slice of *ripe*, red tomato; sweet or dill pickle slices; red Bermuda or white Vidalia onion slices. And of course ketchup. Or mayonnaise, which is also permitted. Mustard is for hot dogs.

Gourmet additions include sliced Swiss or crumbled blue cheese. Other popular toppings are sautéed mushrooms or crisply cooked bacon. In fact, Americans put all kinds of *stuff* on their burgers: salsa, *bean sprouts*, hot sauce, creamy salad dressing, avocado. Decorating a hamburger is a form of self-expression. There are

<i>thick</i>	épais
<i>charcoal</i>	le charbon de bois
<i>glowing</i>	rougeoyant
<i>coals</i>	les braises
<i>to broil</i>	griller
<i>lazy</i>	paresseux
<i>to warn</i>	déconseiller
<i>pink</i>	rose
<i>to flip</i>	retourner

How to eat a hamburger

There are only two words to say about how to eat a hamburger properly: two hands! Lots of napkins are a useful accessory. It's very difficult to eat a perfect, thick, juicy hamburger gracefully.

even tofu, turkey, chicken, bison, and other non-beef patties, which have devoted fans in spite of the strong disapproval of the classic burger traditionalists.

In search of the perfect burger

Real burger *joints* follow all the rules for the classic burger. It's possible to find them on the back roads and small towns of America, usually small local family-style eateries that are not chain restaurants. They use real beef patties, cook your burger to order over real charcoal, add a slice of cheese if requested, and offer you lettuce, tomato, pickle, and onion served up with your burger on its bun. The squeeze bottle of ketchup is on the table.

Bon appetit! ■

<i>slice</i>	une tranche
<i>improvement</i>	une amélioration
<i>to melt</i>	fondre
<i>to coat</i>	recouvrir
<i>squishy</i>	mou
<i>ripe</i>	mûr
<i>stuff</i>	des choses
<i>bean sprouts</i>	des germes de soja
<i>joint</i>	un restaurant