

In Hawaiian Gardens, Do as the Natives Do: Go to J Korean BBQ

by RENE VILLAROMAN

HAWAIIAN GARDENS – There is no denying that all-you-can-eat dining is the most attractive culinary invention during the last two decades or so, with hundreds of these restaurants sprouting like mushrooms in the Los Angeles basin. The early players, which opened their restaurants in the early 80s, have ruled the restaurant landscape and have retained their distinct markets. However, the phenomenon had also given birth to a sub-specialty – Korean-style Barbecue all-you-can-eat dining. During the intervening years between the early 80s until the late 90s, more and more all-you-can-eat restaurants of different persuasions had been established, some specializing in Chinese, Thai, even Filipino foods. The Japanese food industry took a while to jump into the fray due to the more expensive ingredients required in Japanese all-you-can eat dining. But a few daring Japanese establishments were forced to join the fray in order to retain their competitiveness. Years ago, a friend of mine took me to a Korean BBQ restaurant and that experience had converted me into a devotee.

I am not the typical all-you-can-eat gourmand, in the sense that my capacity to ingest pounds over pounds of food is limited to a certain degree by the slowly receding size of my stomach, and so I am on the lookout for all-you-can-eat establishments that do not pursue the practice of unlimited dining because it is fashionable and it is what other restaurants do.

My recent meanderings had taken me to the City of Hawaiian Gardens, close to the city of Cerritos, where J Korean BBQ Restaurant was in the thick of introducing a very popular beef barbecue (in South Korea). Andy Moon, the amiable owner, informed me that *kolbi* (barbecued marinated rib-eye steak) is the most popular barbecue item in his homeland South Korea. Not that Andy is new to *kolbi*, and *bulgogi*, two very popular and succulent barbecue iterations. It is because he wants to live up his business and to cater to another segment of diners that prefers all-you-can-eat dining, minus the related excess and unchecked gluttony that are associated with buffet style, stuff-as-much-food as you-can style dining that are the stock-in-trade of other bigger establishments.

Over at J Korean BBQ, the concept is pursued not with wild abandon, but with a little more restraint. Don't get us wrong here. J subscribes to the concept, the only difference is that his servers, and sometimes Andy himself, would be on hand to serve every customer's pick for as many times as the customer asks for the array of meat barbecues and other delicious barbecue entrees, including pork and chicken. Just like in other all-you-can-eat

restaurants, the customer pays a fixed amount.

When I dined there one afternoon recently, I was very lucky to find Andy. They serve liquor and other alcoholic beverage, and is open for business from 10:30am until 10:30pm everyday. The tables are large and can accommodate six to eight diners, and most of them are topped with built-in gas-fired hibachi grills. After he receives his uncooked order, the customer proceeds to grill the meat himself.

The entire dining area can accommodate about 90 diners at one time. When a customer orders a particular entrée, say the newly introduced *kolbi*, a server brings a tray of the marinated rib-eye steaks and sidings that include pickled radish diced red chili; cucumber pickles, soy bean sprouts, potato salad, and *kimchi* – fermented napa cabbage. There is also a green salad with vinegar, soy sauce and sugar dressing and steamed rice. This combo is quite substantial: the rib-eye steaks alone weigh approximately two pounds. That's pretty big. Here's the surprise: the whole package is only \$21.95 plus tax.

From my point of view, that one combination should suffice to feed me and my family (wife and daughter), leaving just enough space for desserts (not included). But, that is not the *coup d' grace*. It's the taste and the rib-eye's reputation as one of the most tender beef cuts of all. Andy, in his desire to prove the superiority of his culinary offerings to me, made me taste *kolbi* that's been marinated for 24 hours versus *kolbi* that's been soaked in its marinade just minutes before grilling. Well, the difference is like night and day. The beef that's been marinated for 24 hours was the hands-down winner.



Andy tells me that they make the marinade from scratch. I would tell you that it was one of the best rib-eye steak barbecues I ever had. I also enjoyed all the sidings, particularly the pickled radish and the *kimchi*.

If you are not into *kolbi*, or *bulgogi* (\$9.99 per person indefinitely), you may opt for the other all-you-can-eat offerings, like the thin-sliced beef brisket, sliced pork neck, marinated beef, non-smoked bacon, and marinated short ribs for \$14; the thin slice beef brisket, sliced pork neck, marinated beef, non-smoked bacon, marinated chicken, marinated pork, marinated beef short rib, sliced beef tongue and beef tripe, for \$16.99.

For pickier eaters, there is the thin-sliced beef brisket and non-smoked bacon, for just \$9.99; and bulgogi special marinated beef, also for \$9.99 for an indefinite period.

J Korean BBQ is located on the southeast corner of Norwalk Bl. and Carson St., in the City of Hawaiian Gardens. It is about a three-quarter mile east of the Hawaiian Gardens Casino. "This restaurant has become a regular with casino dealers," says Andy. "They come here to dine after their shifts."

For somebody who routinely drives some twenty odd miles to have an enjoyable dinner, I am not at all discouraged by J Korean BBQ's distance from my home in Glendale. After all, on weekends, when there's relatively little traffic on the freeways, almost every point in Los Angeles county feels like a twenty-minute drive. J Korean BBQ is on 11201 Carson St., Hawaiian Gardens, CA 90716, with telephone number (562) 865-1178.*

*Advertising Supplement

Cafe Sierra

at the Universal City Hilton

Seafood, Lobster & Prime Rib Dinner Buffet

Friday & Saturday 6:00pm-10:00pm
Sunday Dinner Buffet 6:00pm-9:00pm

• Friday & Saturday
Adults \$42 Children (3-10) \$20
• Sunday
Adults \$38 Children (3-10) \$20

Enjoy
Carving Prime Rib and Leg of Lamb, Broiled Lobster Thermidor, Action Sushi Station, Seafood Soup, Peking Duck, Pepper Shrimp, Frozen Yogurt, Banana Pastries, Chocolate Fountain and much, much more.

"The Ultimate Buffet" & "The Perfect Wedding"

MEMORABLE WEDDINGS HAPPEN HERE!

- Beautiful Ceremony Sites Available
- SIERRA BALLROOM - Up to 1000 guests
- World Class and Authentic Chinese Cuisine
- Outside Caterers WELCOME

Travel Should Take You Places.™

Champagne Brunch
"Voted the Best in Los Angeles"

Saturday Champagne Brunch
8:00am-2:30pm
Adults \$29 Children (3-10) \$14
Entertainment: Piano, Violin and Accordion

Sunday Champagne Brunch
10:30am-2:30pm
Adults \$38 Children (3-10) \$16
Entertainment: Piano and Vocal

Enjoy
King Crab Legs, Shrimp Cocktail, Mussels on Ice, Sushi, Sashimi and Caesar (on Sunday), Omelet, Waffle, Crepe and Pasta Stations, Champagne, Fresh Juices, Fruit, Cappuccino, Italian Grains, and Exotic Fruits, Chocolate Fountain, French Pastries, Banana Pastries and much, much more.

Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City
555 Universal Hollywood Drive
Universal City, CA 91608
For Private Parties Please Call: (818) 509-2020
For Reservations, Please Call: (818) 509-2030

NOW OPEN TO SERVE YOU!

in Carson
at the corner of Main & Carson Streets

PHO BLUE LOTUS

VIETNAMESE CUISINE

21750 Main Street, Carson, CA 90475 • Tel: 310.518.9538

sushi • grilled chicken • steak & shrimp combos • salads

San Sai

JAPANESE GRILL CARSON

20700 S. Avalon Blvd. #240 Carson, CA 90746 (South Bay Pavilion)
Open Daily: Mon. thru Sun. 11:00 am - 9:00 pm

310-527-0115
Fax: 310.527.4159 • www.sansaiusa.com

Take-Out • Party Trays

KOREAN BBQ

Marinated Beef

저장거리 J KOREAN BBQ

All you can eat!

Corner of Norwalk & Carson
Tel. 562-865-1178
12201 Carson St. Hawaiian Gardens, CA 90716

The Finest Thai Food • Dine In - Take-Out - Delivery

LOS ANGELES

- 4055 W. 3rd St., of Ardmore Los Angeles, CA 90020 Tel: (213) 383-8571 (213) 383-8572
- 484 N. Western Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90004 Tel: (323) 463-8499

GLENDALE

- 143 S. Glendale Ave. Glendale, CA 91205 Tel: (818) 507-6789

CARSON

- 441 E. Carson Street, # A, B Carson, CA 90745 Tel: (310) 834-6945

REDONDO BEACH

- Thai Thani 1109 S. Pacific Coast Hwy. Redondo Beach, CA 90277 Tel: (310) 316-1580

HOLLYWOOD

- 5324 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90027 Tel: (323) 962-2004

NORTHRIDGE

- 8650 Reseda Blvd., Parthenia Northridge, CA 91324 Tel: (818) 701-5712 (818) 701-5480

SANTA CLARITA

- 27530 New Hall Ranch Rd #109 Santa Clarita, CA 91355 Tel: (661) 257-6421

SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

- 2221 Geilert Blvd. So. San Francisco, CA 94080 Tel: (650) 878-0818

LAS VEGAS

- 2680 S. Maryland Pkwy Sahara Town Square Las Vegas, NV 89109 Tel: (702) 343-5800

STUDIO CITY

- 12254 Ventura Blvd., Studio City, CA 91604 Tel: (818) 763-7711

FULLERTON

- 211 E. Orangeflower Ave., Fullerton, CA 92832 Tel: (714) 870-1333

CULVER CITY

- 10034-10036 Venice Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232 Tel: (310) 559-9711

PANORAMA CITY

- 8251 Woodman Ave. Panorama City, CA 91402 Tel: (818) 780-0450

TARZANA

- 18618 Ventura Blvd. Tarzana, CA 91356 Tel: (818) 881-4909

WEST COVINA

- 1559 E. Amar Road, Suite D.E. West Covina, CA 91792 Tel: (626) 913-7647

"The Finest"

Visit us at our website: www.originalthaibbq.com