



TRUFFLE BURGER



JAPANESE BURRITO



MISO-GLAZED COD

[ Kaua'i ]

## Kenji Burger

**W**hen Erik Tanigawa was a boy, he played on Wailua's verdant hills with his buddies. Today, Wailua Meat's cattle graze on the rolling pastures. Three mornings a week, Tanigawa visits the meat company to pick up freshly ground beef for Japanese-style burgers at Kenji Burger, his restaurant in Kapa'a. Thick grilled patties rest within sturdy brioche buns made with Kealia Farm taro and finished with a shiny egg wash. The buns, made exclusively for Tanigawa by Passion Bakery, took 17 months to perfect.

The restaurant is named after Tanigawa's grandfather Kenji, a former cane-field union president and Kaua'i liquor commissioner who graduated at the top of his class at Waimea High School. Kenji is also Tanigawa's middle name.

Tanigawa was cooking at Shibuya in the MGM Grand in Las Vegas when he met his future wife, Whitney, who was a dancer in *Le Rêve* at the Wynn. The couple remodeled the Kenji Burger location with Tanigawa's father, Clarence, owner of Tanigawa Construction. Clarence specializes in Japanese woodwork, and the restaurant's beams are joined rather than nailed.

Kenji's small menu is chock-full of Japanese items such as Lucky Cat lychee soda and burgers with Kewpie mayonnaise. Bento boxes come with locally made *chi chi dango* mochi, and french fries drizzled with house-made teriyaki sauce and ponzu aioli, then sprinkled with furikake. Miso-glazed cod is served with a lively fresh salad, and the Japanese burrito is like a large, uncut sushi roll.

Kenji Burger's menu is 80 percent Japanese, 10 percent American, and 10 percent Hawaiian, which makes the restaurant stand out from other burger joints, and outside seating overlooks a grassy field, minus the cattle. —Marta Lane

### INFO

4-788 Kūhiō Highway,  
Kapa'a  
(808) 320-3558  
kenjiburger.com

### BEST DISHES

Truffle burger with organic Japanese *semji* mushrooms, truffle-ponzu aioli, and Swiss cheese; Japanese burrito with house-made sushi rice, shrimp tempura, crabmeat, spicy 'ahi, cucumber, and avocado; seasonal local lychee milkshake