

MOVE UP A GEAR

A BOOM IN DRIVING HOLIDAYS HAS SEEN ROADSIDE RESTAURANTS FLIP THEIR MENUS - FROM HO-HUM FARE TO SPICY SOBA AND OYSTERS

Not only has this year marked the rise of the road trip as an alternative escape, but foodies are getting their fix en route now more than ever – a savvy way to steer clear of others and bypass sit-down spaces. While most of the USA is *au fait* with a car-park dinner, it reaches its zenith in the South-west. When Covid-19 hit, Mac's Steak in the Rough in **Albuquerque**, off New Mexico's Route 66, doubled its sales and staff – plus its chilli-filled burgers and cherry limeade are legendary. Meanwhile, in **Houston**, Texas, gas station Rockwell Mart serves *al pastor* tacos on homemade tortillas with punchy salsa verde, and Al Quick Stop plates up Middle Eastern snacks such as kibbeh and falafel, ideal for one-hand eating. **Japan** has never shied away from service-stop feasting, either. Its popular *michi no eki*, or rest areas, are favourite refuelling hubs housing bakeries, farmers' markets and snappy cafés that won't keep you off the road for too long. The past year has seen the launch of Oita prefecture's Notsuharu, which turns out black-beef curry and persimmon soft-serve ice cream, and Izutsukigase Road Station in Shizuoka, where Tsukigase Terrace Kitchen whips up wild-boar sukiyaki and soba with grated wasabi to satisfy the most finicky motorists. In Europe, the drive-in is still in its infancy. Fondue and raclette might not be takeaway-friendly, but Gasthaus Ochsen hotel in **Switzerland's** Brunnen has had a spike in orders of its classic finger food *poulet im chörbli*, or chicken in a basket, from those riding along the Axenstrasse motorway on Lake Lucerne's south-east shore. Expect crispy skin, buttery sauce and a heap of *pommes frites*. In **Italy's** mountainous L'Aquila, chef Niko Romito's kerbside Alt Stazione del Gusto, *pictured*, a stone's throw from his three-Michelin-starred Casadonna Reale, reels in travellers heading to the Amalfi Coast. The neon-lit beacon specialises in fluffy *bomba* sandwiches stuffed with roasted pork and, of course, bracing espressos. Newer to the scene in the UK is Mark Hix, who shuttered his five restaurants across London and Lyme Regis in response to the pandemic. He quickly pivoted, buying a truck on eBay and stationing himself outside Felicity's Farm Shop in Morcombelake, **Dorset**, where he prepares smoked-salmon sliders and shucks the region's finest oysters. Certainly worth a detour. ADAM H GRAHAM

