



Published by

**Hokkaido District Transport Bureau
Ministry of Land, Infrastructure,
Transport and Tourism**

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An Introduction to Sushi in Hokkaido

Welcome to Hokkaido, the kingdom of sushi!



If you want to eat sushi, Hokkaido – its birthplace – is the place to go.

Sushi is gaining popularity around the world. A familiar type of sushi is called *namazushi*, which consists of pieces of rice topped with sliced raw fish. *Namazushi* was born in Hokkaido.

A long time ago, cooked fish in its simmered, broiled, steamed, marinated (in vinegar) or salted form was used for sushi to prevent the topping from going bad. However, the ready availability of fresh fish in Hokkaido meant that the raw form could be used as a topping, and the wide range of fish and shellfish in the vast waters surrounding Hokkaido provides a rich variety of tastes.

If you're new to sushi restaurants, it might take you a minute to understand how to order and eat in them, but you'll be fine as long as you know the rules and etiquette surrounding sushi. Read this leaflet and enjoy Hokkaido sushi with style!

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Introduction to Sushi No. 1

Entering a sushi restaurant



The mark of a sushi restaurant

Traditional Japanese shops and restaurants hang a short split curtain called a *noren* over the entrance. This *noren* carries the name of the shop or restaurant; if you see “すし,” “寿司” or “鮨” on it, the establishment is a sushi restaurant.



Pass through the *noren*

The *noren* is the face of a restaurant, and these curtains are handed down from generation to generation. It also symbolizes the soul of the restaurant, so handle it with care. After passing through the *noren*, open the door and enter the restaurant.

Greetings

When you enter the restaurant, the staff will greet you. Follow the instructions of a staff member and take a seat. You may be asked, “Would you like a counter seat or *ozashiki* (*tatami room*)?” or “How many people?”

A word of advice

When you go to a sushi restaurant, be aware of your fragrance rather than your clothes.

Since perishables are handled at sushi restaurants, don't wear anything that gives off a strong odor, such as perfume, cosmetics and hair spray. The sushi will absorb these odors, and its flavor will be destroyed as a result; the other customers will not thank you!

Introduction to Sushi No. 2

Inside a sushi restaurant



① *Itamae*

An *itamae* is a sushi chef. The highest ranked sushi chef is called the *taisho* (sushi master), and is usually found at the rearmost part of the restaurant.

② *Tsukedai*

A *tsukedai* is a serving plate on which the sushi chef puts the sushi he has made. Those sitting in counter seats reach out to get the sushi from the plate.

③ *Tsukeba*

The *tsukeba* is where the chefs make the sushi. Customers are not allowed in the *tsukeba*.

④ Counter seats

In a counter seat, you sit facing the sushi chef and watch him making sushi in front of you. It is customary for regular customers to take seats at the back.

⑤ *Ozashiki* (*tatami room*)

An *ozashiki* is a separate *tatami*-matted room. Since many *ozashiki* are private spaces, they are perfect for families and friends wanting to enjoy a meal in comfort.



Photograph courtesy of Sushizen (Honten)

- Address: Kita 1-jo Nishi 27-chome 59, Chuo-ku, Sapporo
- Tel: 011-612-0068
- URL: <http://www.sushizen.co.jp/>

Introduction to Sushi No. 3 Ordering sushi



Before ordering

In a sushi restaurant, there are three ways of ordering: *okimari*, *okonomi* and *omakase*. First of all, choose which of these three ordering systems you want to use, and directly convey your choice to the sushi chef. You'll feel more at ease if you let him know your budget in advance.



Okimari
(photo for illustration purposes only)

Ordering *okonomi*

With *okonomi* ordering, you order the sushi you like. There are lots of in-season toppings, so ask the sushi chef what he recommends.

Ordering *okimari*

Okimari refers to a course menu, with the kinds of toppings and number of sushi pieces depending on the price. Since it contains many regular toppings, this is a good option for those who are new to sushi. After enjoying *okimari* sushi, you can make additional requests for your favorite toppings as an *okonomi* order.

Ordering *omakase*

With *omakase* ordering, you leave it up to the sushi chef to select toppings for you. He will include the ones he recommends on that particular day and ones that the restaurant is known for.

A word of advice

Tuna is the king of sushi – give it a try!

Tuna is classified into the types of *akami* (lean tuna), *chutoro* (medium fatty tuna) and *otoro* (fatty tuna) depending on the part of the fish it comes from. No other fish provides different tastes from different parts of the body, which is why tuna is known as the king of sushi.



A word of advice

A sushi connoisseur would order an a la carte dish or some culinary delicacies before ordering sushi.

Sushi restaurants also have a la carte options such as *sashimi* (sliced raw fish) and simmered dishes, as well as culinary delicacies involving rare ingredients. Savor these dishes before ordering sushi – they go well with sake!



Enjoying *nigirizushi*



Eating by hand is advised

We recommend that you eat sushi by hand. For those who eat with the fingers, the delicate flavor. For those eating with chopsticks, the rice will be packed slightly hard

sushi chef will pack the rice loosely so that it falls apart in the mouth, bringing out its so that it can be easily picked up with chopsticks. Once sushi is served, eat it before the



Wipe your fingers with an *otefuki* (a small wet wipe)

First, wipe and moisten your fingers with an *otefuki* to keep the rice from sticking to them.



Lay the sushi down and hold it

Put your thumb on the topping and flip the sushi over toward you using your index and middle fingers, then pick it up sideways.



Dip the topping into the soy sauce

With the fish side facing down, dip the end of the topping into the soy sauce. Be careful not to soak up too much sauce.



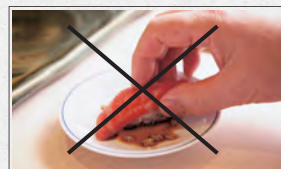
Eat in one bite

With the topping facing up, put the sushi into your mouth. Eat it in one bite so that it doesn't fall apart.



Refresh your palate with *gari* (pickled ginger)

Gari removes the aftertaste of your last bite, allowing you to fully appreciate the flavor of the next piece.



Don't dip the rice into the soy sauce

Rice soaks up too much soy sauce, which destroys the flavor of the topping. It's also considered bad form to leave rice grains in the soy sauce dish.

Enjoying other types of sushi



There are lots of other kinds of sushi too.

Just as there are many sushi toppings, there are also lots of sushi types. These include *makizushi* (sushi rolls), for which many non-fish toppings are used; and omelet sushi, different from regular *nigirizushi*.



Gunkan-maki

This is a mound of rice wrapped in a strip of *nori* (seaweed) topped with soft ingredients. Typical types include sea urchin and salmon roe, both of which are Hokkaido specialties.



Makizushi

This is made by placing the ingredients in rice and rolling them up with *nori* (seaweed). A variety of ingredients are used, ranging from fish to pickles.



Omelet sushi

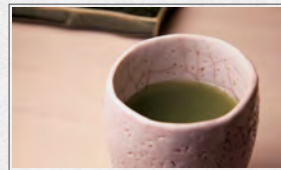
Every sushi restaurant is particular about the taste of its omelet sushi. Its sweet taste means that many people eat it at the end of their meal like a dessert.

gunkan-maki, named for its resemblance to a battleship (*gunkan* in Japanese); for which each sushi restaurant boasts its own taste. Give them a go – they taste



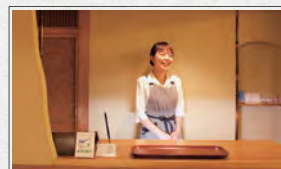
How to put soy sauce on *gunkan-maki*

To put soy sauce on a piece of *gunkan-maki*, dip a piece of *gari* (pickled ginger) in the sauce and brush it over the topping.



Enjoy green tea to refresh your palate

Green tea is served free of charge at sushi restaurants. This refreshes your palate as it neutralizes the aftertaste of sushi and removes any fats remaining in the mouth.



Paying the bill

Settle the bill after you finish eating. Pay at the cashier and thank the sushi chef with a smile before leaving the restaurant.

Informal sushi at affordable prices

Kaiten-zushi (conveyor-belt sushi)



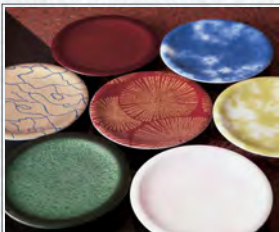
What is *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor-belt sushi)?

This is served at self-service restaurants; plates of sushi are presented to customers on a conveyor belt, enabling them to freely pick out the plates they want.



Pick out the dishes you want

Once you take a seat, you'll see the plates of sushi moving along the conveyor belt in front of you. Simply pick out the ones you want and enjoy!



The price of the sushi depends on the plate color

Different sushi plate colors indicate different prices. Being able to readily see the prices of the sushi you are going to eat is more reassuring.

Photograph courtesy of Nagoyakatei (Fukuzumi)

- Address: Fukuzumi 3-jo 4-chome, Toyohira-ku, Sapporo
- Tel: 011-836-5550
- URL: www.mitsuboshi.net/nagoyakatei/



Individual orders

If the sushi you want doesn't show up, you can order it from the sushi chef standing inside the conveyor-belt area, who will make it especially for you.



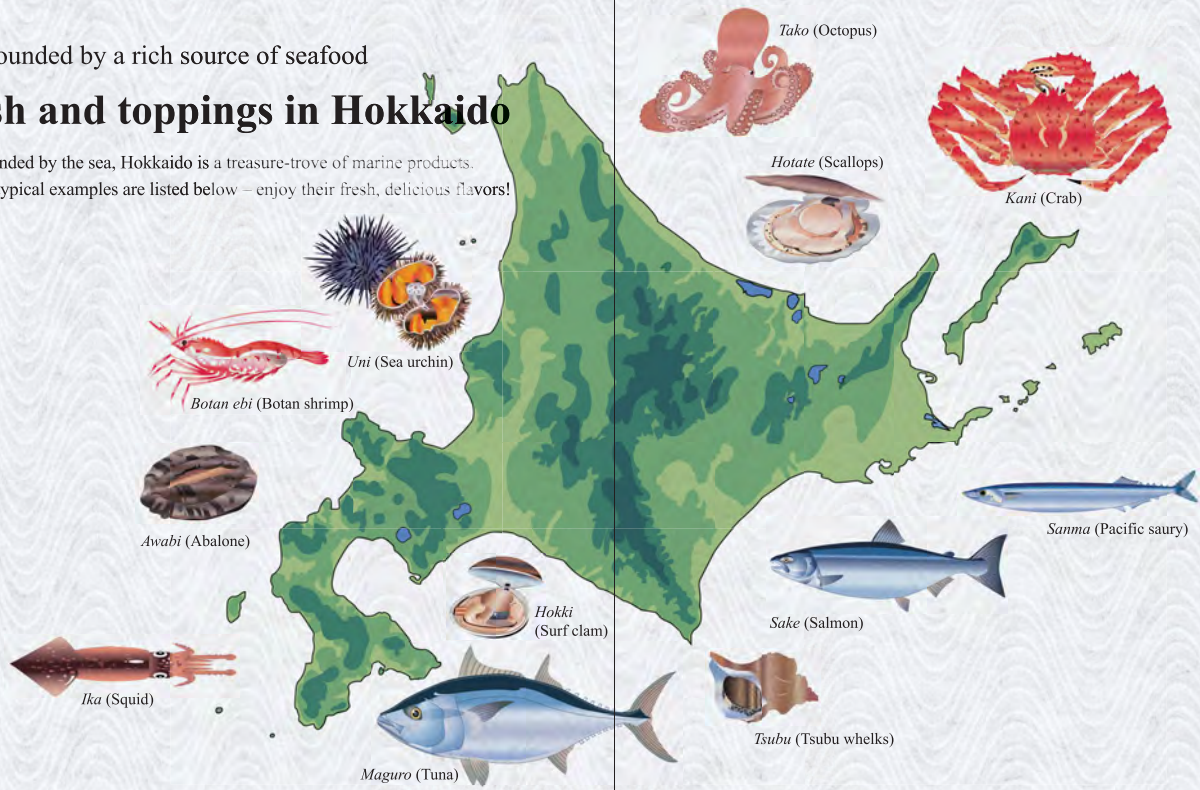
Stack your plates after eating

Stack empty plates on your table. After you finish eating, the staff will count the number of plates and let you know how much to pay.

Surrounded by a rich source of seafood

Fish and toppings in Hokkaido

Surrounded by the sea, Hokkaido is a treasure-trove of marine products. Some typical examples are listed below – enjoy their fresh, delicious flavors!



Please use the pictures for *okonomi* ordering by pointing to the ones you would like.

