



Fish enthusiasts will find more than two dozen varieties in Chef Ito's case at Umi—they make their way into sashimi, nigiri, boxed sushi and mouthwatering rolls.

A Cheat Sheet: How to Eat Sushi

If anyone in Atlanta knows sushi, it's Fuyuhiko Ito, executive chef and co-owner of packed-every-night Umi in Buckhead. The Tokyo native has been working in Japanese and French kitchens for nearly 30 years—you may recognize him from now-shuttered MF Buckhead. After an über-successful first year (Umi celebrated its anniversary in May), Chef Ito has agreed to equip Buckhead residents with the ultimate sushi guide.

Q: Deciphering a sushi menu can be more than intimidating. What are the signature dishes?

A: Nigiri is hand-shaped rice made with vinegar, salt and sugar that's topped with raw or cooked fish. Sashimi has no rice; it's the center cut of raw fish. And then there are maki rolls (made with sushi rice, fish and seaweed), boxed sushi, (pressed sushi rice and fish without seaweed) and tamago, an egg omelet.

Q: Is there a progression in which you should eat sushi or can you mix and match?

A: The best way to taste is on a clean palate, rather than one that's been dulled with fat and spices. Start with a white fish sashimi and then move on to other sashimi. Then nigiri, and end with miso soup. Hot dishes are not found at sushi restaurants in Japan, but we want anyone to come in and be able to find something they like. So we also offer dishes like cooked black cod. It's traditional Japanese food, just not traditional sushi.

Q: Speaking of traditional sushi, what are some of the most Americanized sushi items?

A: Flash-fried or California rolls, or anything with mayonnaise, cream cheese, eel sauce or teriyaki sauce. You would never find these in Japan—it's usually offered here because the fish isn't fresh enough to serve raw or because restaurants have such a limited variety of fish that they're trying to find many ways to serve the same fish, like tuna or salmon.

Q: Tuna, salmon and yellowtail dominate most sushi menus. But what do you wish people were eating?

A: Snapper. Or scallops, clam,

umi. If you're unsure, go with what you know. Even if you order the California roll at Umi, it'll be the best California roll you've ever had. Hopefully then we gain your trust and you'll try something new next time.

Q: When in doubt, what should people order at a sushi restaurant?

A: The omakase, which is when you leave the selection to the chef. You'll get to try an assortment of their freshest offerings. But if à la carte is the only option, go for handrolls, (cone-shaped rolls with seaweed on the outside and fish, rice and vegetables on the inside). I also like chirashi, [a bowl of sushi rice topped with a variety of raw fish and vegetables].

Q: What should we drink with sushi?

A: Beer, sake, green tea or water. The tanuns in wine make fish taste fishier, but the amino acids in sake enhance the flavor and kill that overly fishy taste. The temperature of sake is important—most Americans drink it too hot. Each sake has an ideal temperature—cold, just above body temperature or 140°F at the hottest.

Q: Soy and wasabi. What's the rule?

A: People use way too much soy sauce, which takes away from the flavor of the fish. Most sushi chefs will brush soy on the sushi before serving, but if you want more, the trick is to dip the fish side first, not the rice. It's best to put wasabi directly on the fish—the fatter the fish, the more wasabi you can use. For every six pieces of sushi, I would only use one ounce of soy sauce and a pinch of wasabi.

Q: What about chopsticks? Sometimes I see people eating sushi with their hands. Is that right?

A: Sushi started out as a street food—it's casual, so it's perfectly acceptable to eat with your hands, especially if a hand towel is provided. We don't provide one, so chopsticks are good too, but in Japan you'd see it done both ways.

Q: If you were going to a sushi restaurant you'd never been to before, what would you look for?

A: First, I'd check the color of the fish. Tuna should be red, not brown; white fish shouldn't look dirty. Then I'd check the temperature. The boxes some restaurants store fish in are potentially hazardous. Fish should be refrigerated. Watch the chef's knife skills, too. The technique of sushi is like surgery.

Q: Sushi prices can vary widely, from all-you-can-eat buffets for \$20 to \$300 omakase menus. What's the difference?

A: You get what you pay for. Most cheap restaurants use frozen domestic tuna; they don't have Japanese fish. The fish are often farm-raised, gassed and stuffed with chemicals, and the sushi is made with no love. We get shipments in from Japan every day, plus Scottish salmon and tuna from South America, which is the best tuna in the world because it hasn't been overfished.

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