

ALL ABOARD THE SUSHI TRAIN

Sushi has moved into the realm of everyday fare, but there's still something special about conveyor-belt food. Giselle Whiteaker stacks up the sushi plates.

Sushi may be the only food I have serious cravings for. This is rather ironic, given that when I first lived in Japan I hated the stuff. I found it flavourless; bland rice topped with the taste of sea air, made even less palatable by the burn of wasabi. But sushi is patient.

Over time, it trains your taste buds to seek out its subtle flavours, to welcome the fresh taste of the ocean, and to shiver with delight at that fiery wasabi hit that zings straight into the frontal lobe of your brain, stimulating inspiration. Then one day you wake up and those little slabs of achingly soft salmon and the salty wham of soy sauce are all you can think about.

When that feeling hits, nothing but sushi will satiate the craving. While there are a number of upmarket Japanese restaurants across the country, the sushi train has to be the most entertaining way to dine. There's an abundance of fun with *kaiten-zushi*, where deliberately small plates loaded with sushi and sashimi treats are placed on a rotating conveyor belt that winds through the restaurant, travelling past every table and counter seat to tempt patrons into devouring the contents. The plates are colour coded with a key that outlines the different plate cost for each colour. Punters pick their plates, feast on

the fare, stack them high, and the final tally is done on a colour count. It's long been a novel way to dine and that's not set to change.

K10 Appold Street in London is the remedy for my latest sushi craving. As I sit waiting for my perpetually late friend, Lily, I survey the tantalising dishes making their way along the conveyor belt. By the time Lily arrives, I have slurped up a bowl of warming miso soup and been mesmerised by the train of delicious dishes snaking around the room. There's a simple pleasure in anticipating food, whether it's perusing a menu, or allowing your eyes to devour the courses as they travel past your nose. I'm wondering how many I can fit in.

Within minutes of Lily climbing on to her counter stool and pouring a self-service water from the narrow fountain between each set of chairs, I've ordered a bowl of *edamame*. The salted, steamed immature soya beans are traditionally served with beer, so I oblige with a bottle of Asahi Super Dry. The draft beer's barley flavour and crisp aftertaste make the perfect companion for this teaser.

"You choose and I'll just eat what you choose," Lily says as I start listing out the dishes that we should try. Like most kaiten-style eateries, K10 offers more than sushi and sashimi. I've seen little piles



K10 and the sushi train

of *soba* [buckwheat noodles] zoom past, along with lightly poached salmon and what I think may be fried squid. I point to the specials board. “Duck *gyoza*?” I ask Lily and she nods enthusiastically. The fried dumplings are crispy on the outside with a rich duck filling that whets our appetite for more.

I pluck a plate of tuna *tataki* off the belt before it jogs past the finish line. The beautifully soft tuna is accompanied by a chunky coriander vinaigrette that sets our taste buds tingling. From the hot dish list, all of which is cooked to order by the chefs whizzing around the open kitchen in the centre of the room, we select servings of delicious *kara age* [marinated fried chicken], K10’s signature chilli baby squid, and prawn tempura, which arrive lightly golden, the delicate batter hugging the sweet tender crustaceans.

We’re fast filling up, but Lily pleads for a plate of black cod. The sweet soy-glazed fish perched on a green salad melts into flakes. I also whip another sushi plate off the belt, realising that we’ve had more hot dishes than actual sushi. We need to redress the balance. It’s an unusual peppery beef roll, topped with a spot of spicy mayonnaise.

Between courses, Lily asks the waitress about the Kizakura Junmai warm sake. Hailing from Kyoto, this smooth rice wine is heated before serving. It’s presented in egg-cup-like vessels, but rather than being a one-shot, it’s a delicacy to be slowly sipped.

“One last one,” I say and watch the chain of dishes chugging towards us to make an artful final choice. As soon as I see the simple slices of pinky-orange salmon, I know that’s what we’ve overlooked. The sashimi wedges exude the simple, fresh flavour of the sea that has contributed to sushi’s popularity in the west – testament to K10’s produce, which is delivered fresh daily, and to the superior quality of Scottish salmon. It’s the perfect savoury finale.

I’d been keen to try K10’s light green tea mousse, but while I wait for one to appear Lily snaffles the chocolate version and hands me a spoon. It’s deliciously velvety and we can’t stop until our cutlery clinks on the bottom of the glass container.

My sushi craving has been sated, and I’ve been entertained to boot. I’ve observed every one of K10’s offerings and tasted a great range, but now it’s time to wave goodbye to the sushi train. I’m sure it won’t be long until I’m back on board.

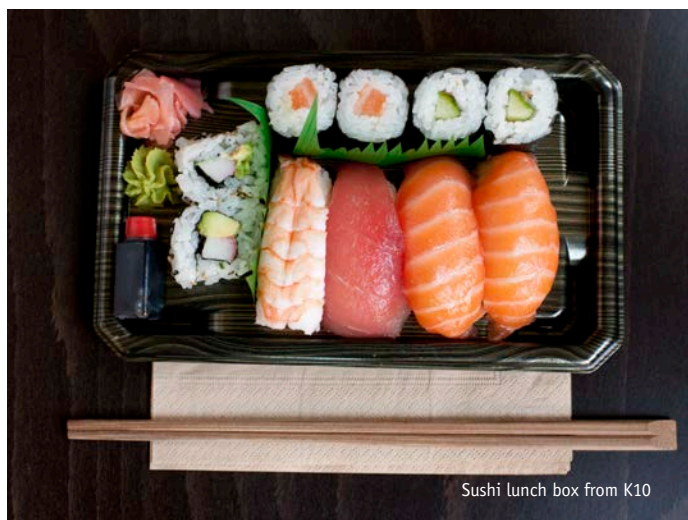


Fresh salmon sushi



Duck dumplings

K10 has consistently been acknowledged as London’s best kaiten restaurant. The chefs use the freshest ingredients to create a traditional Japanese menu with a modern twist. See www.k10.com for details.



Sushi lunch box from K10

Ingredients

1 Kg Chicken thighs, boned

6 tablespoons Soy sauce

4 tablespoons Sake (substitute white wine if need be, but Sake works best)

1 tablespoon Grated ginger

1 tablespoon Grated garlic

2 eggs

5 tablespoons Self raising flour or 3 tablespoons plain flour and 2 tablespoons potato flour or corn starch works as well – for a crispier finish

K10'S KARA AGE

1) Cut chicken into bite size cubes.

2) Mix the chicken, ginger, garlic, soy sauce and sake in a large bowl and leave to marinate in the fridge for a minimum of three hours or overnight if possible.

3) Add the eggs and flour and mix thoroughly so every bit of chicken is thoroughly coated.

4) Heat your oil, ideally in a deep fat fryer, and fry until golden brown. A vegetable oil such as rapeseed, sunflower or corn oil works well. Don't use olive oil as it will affect the flavour of the chicken.

Serve piled in a bowl and squeeze a little lemon juice over the pieces.

