

# Guide to **Sushi & Sake**



# Guide to Sushi & Sake

**Version 1.2**

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# Introduction

## Previewing this book?

Please [check out our enhanced preview](#), which offers a deeper look at this guidebook.

This Approach Guide was designed to serve as a valuable, quick reference guide for all of your sushi experiences at home and abroad.

It provide the basics on sushi and sushi protocol, a reference list of Japanese names for fish and their descriptions, and a detailed review of tuna species and its key sushi cuts, as well as advice for touring Tokyo's famous Tsukiji fish market. Further, as no sushi meal is complete without its perfect accompaniment, we have also included a brief primer on Japanese sake.

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We hope that this guide serves as a great resource for your sushi adventures and sets you on a path to making your own discoveries.

you on a path to making your own discoveries.

Have a great trip!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Raezer" followed by a flourish.

David and Jennifer Raezer  
Founders, Approach Guides

# Sushi Protocol

## Before Your Arrival At the Restaurant

- We would advise travelers to make reservations for dinner; for non-speakers, ask your hotel or Japanese speaking friends make a reservation for you.
- Ask your hotel or friend write down the address for you in Japanese; keep this with you, as you will inevitably get lost en route to the restaurant and might need to engage a local to point you in the right direction. Finding Tokyo's restaurants is particularly challenging, as many are not at ground level and therefore not visible from the street.

## Arriving and Being Seated

- The host or hostess will likely greet you with the traditional "irasshaimase" which means "please come in." You just need to acknowledge the greeting and are not required to say anything back.
- You may be offered a hot, wet towel (*oshibori*) at the beginning of your meal. Use it to clean your hands; fold it neatly and return it to the dish on which it was presented to you.
- Chopsticks should be placed parallel to the counter edge, with the tips resting on a holder or the shoyu (soy) dish.

## General Eating Protocol

- Very often, you will not be given a spoon if soup is served. In that case, simply pick up your bowl and drink the soup directly from it. Your chopsticks can be used consume any larger pieces.
- Do not pick up a piece of food from another person's plate. Food is best shared by passing the item on a small plate.

## Sushi Protocol

The Japanese take sushi protocol seriously. If you eat at a sushi bar, the sushi chef (*itamae*) will watch closely as you eat; observation at such close range can serve to create a bit of a high pressure situation. While you are expected to make a few mistakes, these rules should reduce the likelihood of any major problems.

- **Go very light on the soy and the wasabi**, particularly with regard to prized cuts of fish.
- **No wasabi in your shoyu dish.** Nigiri sushi comes with a small amount of wasabi placed under the fish by the sushi chef; this amount represents what he believes is the ideal amount of wasabi (rest assured that he has given this much consideration). If you find you need a

# Types of Sushi

## Sashimi

Sashimi is raw seafood served chilled and thinly sliced; unlike nigirizushi, there is no rice accompaniment. Sashimi is typically served as the first course, as the delicate flavors could be lost if diners were to eat stronger flavored dish prior. “Tataki” is a type of sashimi; with this preparation, the seafood is lightly seared over an open flame, crisping the exterior but leaving the interior raw.

## Nigirizushi

Nigiri (“hand-formed”) sushi is the most common type. It consists of vinegar-sweetened rice pressed into a finger-shaped pressed mound; a perfectly-sized piece of sliced raw seafood or other delicacy (spiced with a small amount of wasabi) rests on top. Most types of nigirizushi are meant to be dipped in soy sauce and eaten in one bite.

- **Gunkan.** Gunkan or “battleship” sushi is mound of sushi rice that has a strip of nori (toasted seaweed) wrapped around its edges that serves as a receptacle for a loose or fine-chopped filling. Most roe-based sushi is prepared in the gunkan style.

## Makizushi

Maki (“rolled”) sushi is made by placing the primary ingredients (usually seafood or vegetables) on a bed of rice and nori; the bed is then rolled into cylinder shape so that only the nori exterior is visible. Once formed, the makizushi roll is typically cut into six or eight bite-sized pieces.

- **Futomaki.** A thick cylindrical roll, approximately 1.5 inches in diameter; it typically includes 2-3 fillings.
- **Hosomaki.** A thin cylindrical roll, approximately 0.75 inches in diameter; it typically includes only one filling.
- **Temaki.** Temaki, a.k.a. hand roll, is a cone-shaped form of makizushi, wherein fillings are placed into the top (wide end) of the cone. It is not sliced; rather, the entire cone is picked up and consumed with multiple bites.
- **Uramaki.** Uramaki, a.k.a. inside-out roll, resembles futomaki and hosomaki, however, the rice component is on the outside of the roll and the nori on the inside.

# Seafood List

This list comprises the fish and shellfish you are most likely going to encounter in sushi bars in Japan.

**Ahi:** Yellowfin tuna. For more information, see the dedicated section entitled “Tuna: Species and Cuts”.

**Aji:** Horse mackerel. It is a bit milder and less oily than sawara (soft gray flesh, moderate flavor, moderate fat).

**Akagai:** Red clam.

**Akami:** The leanest cut of tuna, from the sides of the fish. While it is primarily used for sashimi, it is also used for nigiri sushi. For more information, see the dedicated section entitled “Tuna: Species and Cuts”.

**Amaebi:** Sweet shrimp, served raw.

**Anago:** Salt-water eel. Always served cooked. It is milder than unagi (fresh-water eel).

**Anko:** Monkfish.

**Aoyagi:** Round clam.

**Awabi:** Abalone.

**Buri:** Yellowtail. Yellowtail has different names according to its size and age. Buri is the oldest variety, referring to yellowtail over four years of age and three feet in length (dense flakes of white/off-white flesh, full flavor, moderate to high fat).

**Buri Toro:** Fatty yellowtail, cut from the belly (dense flakes of white/off-white flesh, full flavor, high fat).

**Chutoro:** A **mildly fatty** cut of toro, from the belly area of the tuna along the side of the fish between the akami (lean cut) and the otoro (fatty cut). See our detailed discussion in the section entitled “Tuna: Species and Cuts”.

**Ebi.** Shrimp. This is not the same as amaebi (sweet shrimp): Ebi is cooked, while amaebi is served raw.

**Fugu:** Puffer fish.

**Hamachi:** Farm-raised yellowtail (dense flakes of white/off-white flesh, full flavor, high fat).

**Hamaguri:** Hard shell clam (similar to littlenecks).

**Hirame:** This name is used for many types of flat fish, specifically fluke, flounder, or halibut (generally soft, flaky white flesh, delicate flavor, low fat).

**Hokkigai:** Surf clam. Firmer textured than Aoyagi.

# Sake Primer

## What is Sake?

Sake is a rice-based alcoholic beverage. In its homeland of Japan, it is known as “nihonshu”.

Sake is derived from **white rice** from which the outer portion has been milled or polished. The rice’s starch is first converted into sugar, which is then fermented into alcohol; sake alcohol levels typically range from 15-20%, as compared to 10-16% for conventional wine.

While sake is served in the range of temperatures, **premium sake is generally enjoyed chilled.**

## Some Key Bottle Information

Bottles of sake often will give the following two critical pieces of information that can help you in your selection process:

- **Sake meter value:** you will often see a number on the label with a plus or minus after it. The plus figures indicate dry sake, and minus figures indicate sweet. The higher the numerical value, the drier or sweeter the sake is.
- **Rice polishing ratio:** The degree to which the rice is polished is the **single biggest factor influencing the overall character of the resulting sake**. Polishing rice removes minerals and proteins, leaving a higher ratio of pure starch to be converted to sake; accordingly, the more the rice is polished, the clearer and cleaner the flavor of the resulting sake. **The rice polishing ratio represents the percentage of the original rice grain remaining after polishing.** To give you some perspective, unpolished brown rice’s ratio is 100%, while regular white rice that is used for eating is polished to 90%. Typically sake polishing ratios come in around 70%, with the best coming in at 60% or less (see below).

## Types of Premium Sake

### Junmai

Sake labeled as Junmai are **made exclusively from rice and water** (no distilled alcohol added). Junmai sake generally exhibits the greatest levels of acidity, tannins, and rich earthy flavors; a fragrant, floral bouquet is sacrificed to some extent. It is typically made from rice polished to less than 70% of its original size.

### Tokubetsu Junmai (Special Junmai)

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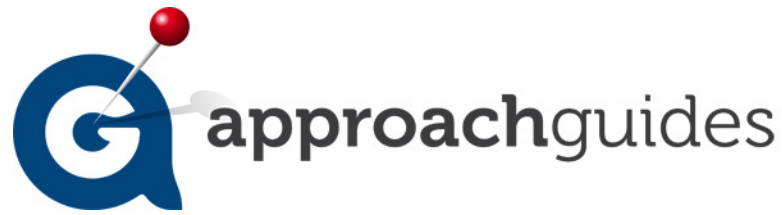
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