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Sushi in Niigata: Wonderful Rice, Spectacular Fish

Sushi: the Japanese cuisine that has become even more famous than tempura and sukiyaki. Niigata: one of the best places in Japan to enjoy this great cuisine. Blessed with abundant local fishing grounds and renowned for our wonderful Koshihikari rice, Niigata prefecture offers delectable sushi to locals and visitors alike. If you visit Niigata, be sure to indulge in our outstanding sushi.

Start of Modern Sushi: Eaten Standing at Outdoor Stalls in the Edo Period

Today's sushi is known worldwide as a healthy food—low in calories, low in fat, and high in nutrition. Modern sushi emerged from the practice of fermenting freshwater fish in salt and rice for the purposes of preservation. Then, in the Edo period, sushi took its current form, becoming popular in the city of Edo (old Tokyo) as a new type of fast food eaten standing at outdoor stalls. Today sushi remains one of the favorite foods of the Japanese people. Niigata, a major rice producer with abundant seafood resources, is recognized as one of the best places to eat sushi.



Wonderful Rice : Thanks to Ideal Conditions and the Quest for Perfection

Niigata is Japan's top rice producer in both quantity and quality. Natural conditions are ideal, as winter snowfalls ensure a plentiful supply of mountain water and the temperature difference between night and day persists from initial planting to harvest.

Moreover, Niigata was also one of the first areas in Japan to take up selective rice breeding, leading to today's famous brand of Niigata Koshihikari rice.



Wonderful Seafood, and Rich Seasonal Varieties —Thanks to Rough and Nutritious Seas



Niigata's many rivers carry nutrients from the mountains into the sea, generating high-quality plankton and stimulating the growth of marine plants, fish, and shellfish in the nearby waters. The abundance of food attracts and fosters very tasty fish, including an especially wide variety of seasonal white-fleshed fish (*shiromi*). Indeed,

Niigata is known in Japan as the "kingdom of *shiromi*," a place where delicious seasonal white fish is available all-year round.

Located in the center of Japan, Niigata is blessed with a long coastline that allows for an active fishing industry. Warm and cold currents come together off the coast, creating excellent fishing grounds and ensuring an abundance of fish in all seasons.



Sushi Restaurant Basics

Are you a newcomer to the sushi dining experience?

Here we offer some basic information about how to find a sushi restaurant, what you will encounter inside, how to order, and more.

Finding a Sushi Restaurant

Look for a sign or curtain (*noren*) that says "sushi" in Japanese. Or look for the "SUSHI RESTAURANT" sticker widely used throughout Niigata. There are at least three different ways to write sushi in Japanese—"すし", "寿司" and "鮓"—so keep your eyes open.



Types of Seating

If you sit at the sushi bar, you will be able to watch the sushi chefs prepare the food, and you can view the varieties of fish and other ingredients lined up in the glass cases in front of you. If you prefer a more private and relaxing experience, you can sit on *tatami* mats at a Japanese-style table. Your host will guide you according to your wishes and the number in your party. You may want to state your preference in advance when making a reservation.

Types of Sushi



Nigiri ("molded" sushi)

This sushi is made from a hand-molded bite-size amount of vinegar-flavored rice ("sushi rice") dabbed with wasabi and topped with a slice of fish or other tasty tidbit. An order of "one" will usually get you one piece.



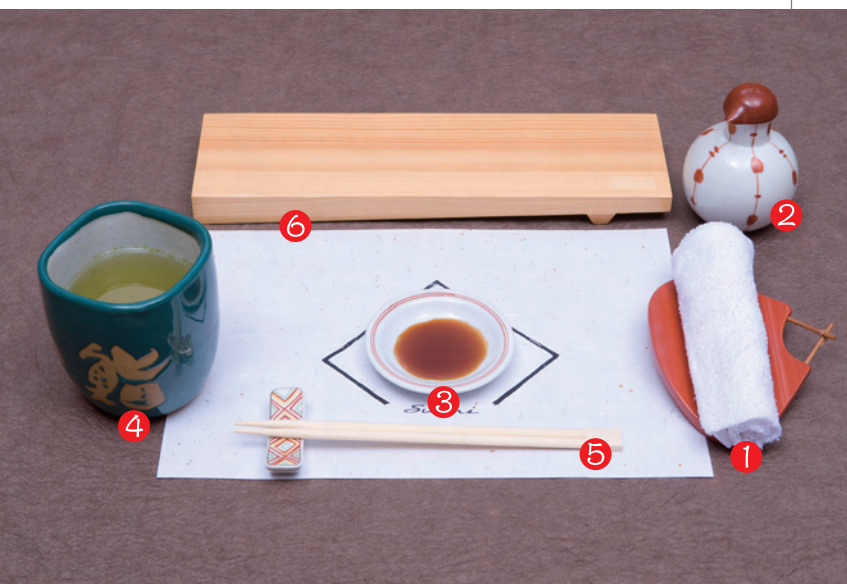
Gunkanmaki ("Battleship roll")

This style of sushi is often used to provide added support for toppings such as *ikura* (salmon roe) and *uni* (sea-urchin roe) that fall apart easily. The sushi rice is hand molded, wrapped with *nori* (dried, pressed seaweed), and topped with the item of your choice.



Norimaki ("Nori-wrapped roll")

Sushi rice is spread on a sheet of *nori*, the item of your choice is then placed on the rice, and the *nori* sheet is then rolled into a cylinder which is then cut into pieces to make this type of sushi. These rolls come in various styles with different names, depending on the size or ingredients: *hosomaki* (thin roll), *futomaki* (thick roll), *kappamaki* (cucumber roll), *tekamaki* (tuna roll), and others.



① *Oshibori*

This is a wet towel that may be hot or cold which is used for wiping your hands and face. You may wish to use it repeatedly if you are eating your sushi with your fingers.

② *Shoyu sashi* (Soy-sauce jar)

Pour some soy sauce from the jar into your little soy-sauce dish, and then dip the sushi into the dish before eating it. Pour out only a small amount, and then add more when you run out.

③ *Shoyu zara* (Soy-sauce dish)

This small dish, about 10 cm (4 inches) in diameter, is used for holding your soy sauce. Pour in a small amount of sauce from the soy-sauce jar, and then dip pieces as desired before eating. Note that not all sushi pieces require soy sauce; a few types come with their own special sauce, others may use salt, and still others should be eaten with no additional flavorings.

④ *Agari or Ocha* (Tea)

This powdered green tea, which is served hot, has a subtle aroma that does not overwhelm the delicate taste of the sushi. It refreshes the tongue and brings out residual flavors.

⑤ *Hashi* (Chopsticks)

Some shops provide disposable chopsticks known as *waribashi* which come fused together and are broken apart before being used. Feel free to eat sushi with your hands, however; it's a true finger food.

⑥ *Tsuke-dai*

These are small wooden trays on which sushi pieces are served. Not all shops use these; some set the sushi on leaves or on plates.

Ordering

After wiping your hands with your *oshibori*, you are ready to order. Sushi usually comes with a dab of *wasabi* (spicy Japanese horseradish), so if you'd prefer it without the *wasabi*, be sure to say so when ordering. If there's anything else you specifically don't want to eat, feel free to say so. The usual way to proceed is to order a small portion, finish it, and then order some more.

From a Menu

Many restaurants will provide a menu, posters, or other type of display so that you can easily see what's available and how much it costs. Menus will often include fixed courses or combinations, with names indicating their content or ranking (such as 特上 [*tokujō*, or extra special], 上 [*jō*, special], and 並 [*namī*, regular]).



By the Piece

Proceed at your own pace, and satisfy your curiosity. Prices are often posted on the wall, but feel free to ask if you are uncertain. A frequent approach is to order a fixed combination and then order additional pieces one by one.

Chef's Choice

If you want to get a balanced assortment of the day's best offerings, you can leave the selection up to the sushi chef. If you're concerned about pricing or if there are some types of fish you really don't want included, feel free to speak up before ordering.

Quick Japanese Lesson

「XX wo ikkan kudasai.」

Please give me one piece of XX.

Ikkān means one piece (of sushi). Be aware that some restaurants will give you two pieces per order if you do not say *ikkān*. The price written on the menu or on the wall is per piece, so keep that in mind when ordering.

「Wasabi wo nuite kudasai.」

Hold the *wasabi*.

Wasabi is pretty strong, and some people don't like it on their sushi. If you are one of those people, be sure to tell the waiter or chef to omit the *wasabi*.

Eating

It is a Japanese custom to say *itadakimasu* ("I am about to receive") just before you start eating. Sushi tastes best when it's freshly made very, so eat it quickly when it comes—don't let it sit out too long. And when you have finished your meal, it is customary to say *gochisōsama* ("that was a good meal").

Using Chopsticks

Turn the sushi piece on its side and grasp it gently but firmly so that the fish doesn't fall off the rice. Dip the fish side into the soy sauce, and then lift it to your mouth and eat it.



1 Hold the lower chopstick stationary, and move the upper chopstick to grasp and release your food.



2 Turn the piece and its side, and gently lift with the chopsticks.



3 Dip the fish side into the soy sauce, and then eat it.

Using Your Hands

It is perfectly acceptable to eat sushi with your fingers. If you are not good with chopsticks, or if you simply prefer to not use them, feel free to eat with your hands.



1 As with chopsticks, turn the piece on its side, dip the fish side into the soy sauce, and eat it.



2 When eating a *gunkanmaki* (battleship roll), hold it upright so that the topping doesn't fall off, dip the bottom side into the soy sauce, and eat it.

Paying the Check

When you have finished your meal, drink some tea to refresh your mouth. Then tell the sushi chef or a waiter that you would like the check (*Okaikei wo onegai shimasu.*) They will bring it to you, and then you can take it to the register to pay.



Sushi List

Niigata offers different fish varieties each season. Enjoy a wide selection of red-fleshed fish, white-fleshed fish, blue-backed fish, and more.

Niigata's Seasonal Specialties



メジ鮪

Young Bluefin Tuna
MEJIMAGURO

Exceptionally tasty



柳鰈

Willowy Flounder
YANAGIGAREI

Good as sushi, sashimi, or semi-dried and grilled



喉黒

Blackthroat Sea Perch
NODOGURO

This high-quality fish is a deliciously fatty Niigata specialty.



Other Seasonal Varieties



目張

Rockfish
MEBARU

Also tasty cooked or as sashimi



鯛

Sea Bream
TAI

Well-known, white-fleshed fish from the waters off Sado Island



鯧

Silver Sand Borer
KISU

Known for its delicate flavor



鱸

Sea Bass
SUZUKI

A well-known Niigata white-fleshed fish



穴子

Saltwater Eel
ANAGO

Soft in texture, eaten with special sweet sauce



鮪

Bluefin Tuna
CHUTORO

A very popular part of the tuna, with just the right amount of fat



楚蟹

Snow Crab
ZUWAIGANI

A wintertime favorite



鰯

Sardine
IWASHI

Deliciously fatty when in season



水蛸

Octopus
MIZUDAKO

Distinctly soft and smooth in texture

Feel free to point to the pictures on this page when ordering.

※Note: These photos are examples only. Presentation may differ at each restaurant.



Winter

寒鰯

Coldwater Yellowtail

KANBURI

Niigata winters bring delicious yellowtail to the waters around Sado Island.



Winter

南蛮海老

Northern Shrimp

NANBANEBI

Sweet-tasting shrimp that seem to melt in your mouth



Winter

槍烏賊

Spear Squid

YARIIKA

In season during autumn and winter



Summer

鮑

Abalone

AWABI

Delicious shellfish with a subtle sweetness



Summer

鰭

Jack Mackerel

AJI

Jack mackerel from the Japan Sea is particularly tasty.



Summer

鰯烏賊

Japanese Common Squid

SURUMEIKA

Uniquely sweet in taste



Autumn

雲丹

Sea Urchin Roe

UNI

Dense, with a melt-in-your-mouth sweetness



Autumn

鯖

Mackerel

SABA

Mackerel from Sado Island is particularly good.



Autumn

イクラ

Salmon Roe

IKURA

Often from the salmon in the Miomote River in the city of Murakami



Winter

秋醬蝦

Akiامي Shrimp

AKAHIGE

Very delicious; related to sakura shrimp



Winter

蜆

Japanese Ivory Shell

BAIGAI

A shellfish with a uniquely crunchy texture



Winter

鰯

Flounder

HIRAME

A white-meat fish with a springy texture

極み

kiwami

新潟
すし 三味



Niigata's Special *Kiwami* Sushi Platter: Highly Recommended

The *Kiwami* ("zenith") platter is a special 10-piece serving of the finest sushi, offered by participating establishments in Niigata. The platter includes local seasonal offerings unavailable anywhere else, together with *uni* (sea urchin roe), *toro* (medium-fat tuna), and *ikura* (salmon roe). The content varies according to the season and sea conditions, but you can always be sure you will be eating the best fish of the day.



Nanban Ebi Soy Sauce
(Trademark regst.: 5313482)

Available only at establishments offering the *Kiwami* platter, this original soy-based fish sauce evokes the flavor of northern shrimp, and goes wonderfully with shrimp sushi. Please give it a try.

