

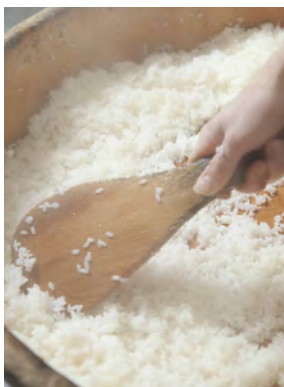
# Sushi



*Shimofuri*, a choice cut of fatty tuna, is melded onto its bed of rice in this classic *nigiri-zushi*.



Yosuke Imada of Ginza Kyubey places freshly formed *nigiri-zushi* on a serving plate. When offering an *omakase* tasting menu, he keeps a careful eye on the pace of each diner.



*Shari* is key to sushi's quality of flavor. At Kyubey each batch is made with 4.5 liters of freshly steamed rice spread into a shallow wooden *bandai* tub. Dashes of vinegar and salt are then folded in using cutting motions with a flat wooden spatula.



Edomae *nigiri-zushi* shown above from top left are *shimofuri* marbled tuna (appearing twice), *tai* sea bream, *akami* lean tuna, *kue* kelp grouper, *akagai* ark shell, *sumiika* cuttlefish, *uni* sea urchin, *kobada* gizzard shad, simmered *hamaguri* clam, steamed *awabi* abalone, salt-grilled *anago* conger eel, and basted *anago* conger eel. At top right is pickled ginger, or *gari* in sushi parlance.

## Crafted for balance

Sushi has many forms, but the style best known outside Japan is *nigiri-zushi*—also called Edomae, referring to its Edo (early Tokyo) origins. Predating it is *nare-zushi*, whereby a skinned and gutted fish is stuffed with rice and salt-cured for deepened flavor, as well as for transport. *Haya-zushi*, or “fast sushi,” emerged in the mid-Edo period (1603–1867). Its sour taste derives not from natural fermentation but rather from the vinegar that is mixed into the rice. *Haya-zushi* evolved in two main ways: Kansai-style *bako-zushi* presses the flavored rice and fish together in block-shaped form, while the Edomae *nigiri-zushi* of the Kanto area serves up the fish on bite-sized morsels of rice.

Yet *nigiri-zushi* is far more than a slice of raw fish on rice. The toppings, known as *neta*, are cured or otherwise prepped by methods appropriate to each, or that reflect the chef's own flair. Equally important is how firmly the sushi rice, known as *shari*, is pressed into shape. “It has to be firm enough to remain intact when lifted, but still loose enough to melt softly in the mouth,” says Yosuke Imada, owner-chef of Kyubey, one of Tokyo's renowned sushi bars. There is also a practiced art to slicing the *neta* for optimum flavor and texture; the best sushi demands years of expertise. Different toppings are cut to different sizes and thicknesses, depending on the part and firmness of its flesh.

“When sushi is eaten, its *neta* and *shari* must strike a perfect balance. A good chef knows how to achieve this almost by instinct,” says Imada, who wields a knife made to a specific weight, length, and thickness of blade. Sushi quality is also determined by the catch itself: line-caught fish, rather than netted ones, are preferable as the flesh is less likely to be bruised. Over its long history as a means to preserve and enjoy seafood, sushi has developed into a culinary art reflecting the skills of fishermen, those who bring the catch to market in pristine state, knife artisans, and the chefs who delight us with their creations.

Ginza Kyubey  
www.kyubey.jp

# Tempura



Dating back to the Edo period, when enterprising minds offered up freshly fried daily catch at food stalls near present-day Tokyo Bay, tempura is made by dipping seafood and all manner of vegetables in a light batter of flour, water, and eggs before deep-frying. Today it is one of the most prominent types of washoku cookery, as well known as sushi or soba.

Fumio Kondo, owner-chef of the Ginza restaurant Tempura Kondo, is renowned for his elegantly fried tempura. At a time when seafood was the main draw at most tempura restaurants, he gave equal focus to vegetables, sourcing organically grown, pesticide-free produce and perfecting his frying technique so that the vivid colors and essential flavors of each ingredient burst forth.

Precisely because it involves such a simple cooking method—batter-dipped and deep-fried—tempura is a real litmus test of a chef’s skills. Kondo uses only sesame oil, blending his own mixture of cold-pressed and roasted varieties. One of his signature dishes is sweet potato. Cooking it slowly at 170°C for over 30 minutes, he renders it delightfully crisp on the outside yet fluffy and moist inside. His julienned carrots are another double treat—first for their crunchy bite and then for the sweet flavor that slowly spreads on the palate.

“Making tempura well is all about keeping the right moisture retention. That’s what seals in the flavors, and it’s the trickiest thing to do,” says Kondo. “Each offering should be crisp on the outside but tender and just moist enough inside.” Kondo adjusts frying temperatures and times for each ingredient, and listens to the oil to gauge the process.

The point has less to do with frying the food until it is done, and more to do with leveraging each ingredient’s natural water content so that it steams in itself with the careful application of heat. When tempura is done well, the food’s essential flavor will come forth cleanly the very moment you bite into it.



1. Lightly battered and fried until just crisp on the outside, prawns seem to stand to attention. 2. With its internal moisture nearly vaporized, asparagus has an intensified flavor to match its bright color. 3. Japanese whiting is a classic tempura treat. 4. Green beans are quickly clustered together at the last moment before they are removed from the oil. 5. Thickly sliced sweet potato is almost like a baked confection.



Carrots are rotary-cut into paper-thin sheets, julienned, and dusted with flour. Next, they are dropped into the batter for a thorough coating. Finally, they are plunged into 180°C oil, stirred, and gathered together just before they are lifted out.

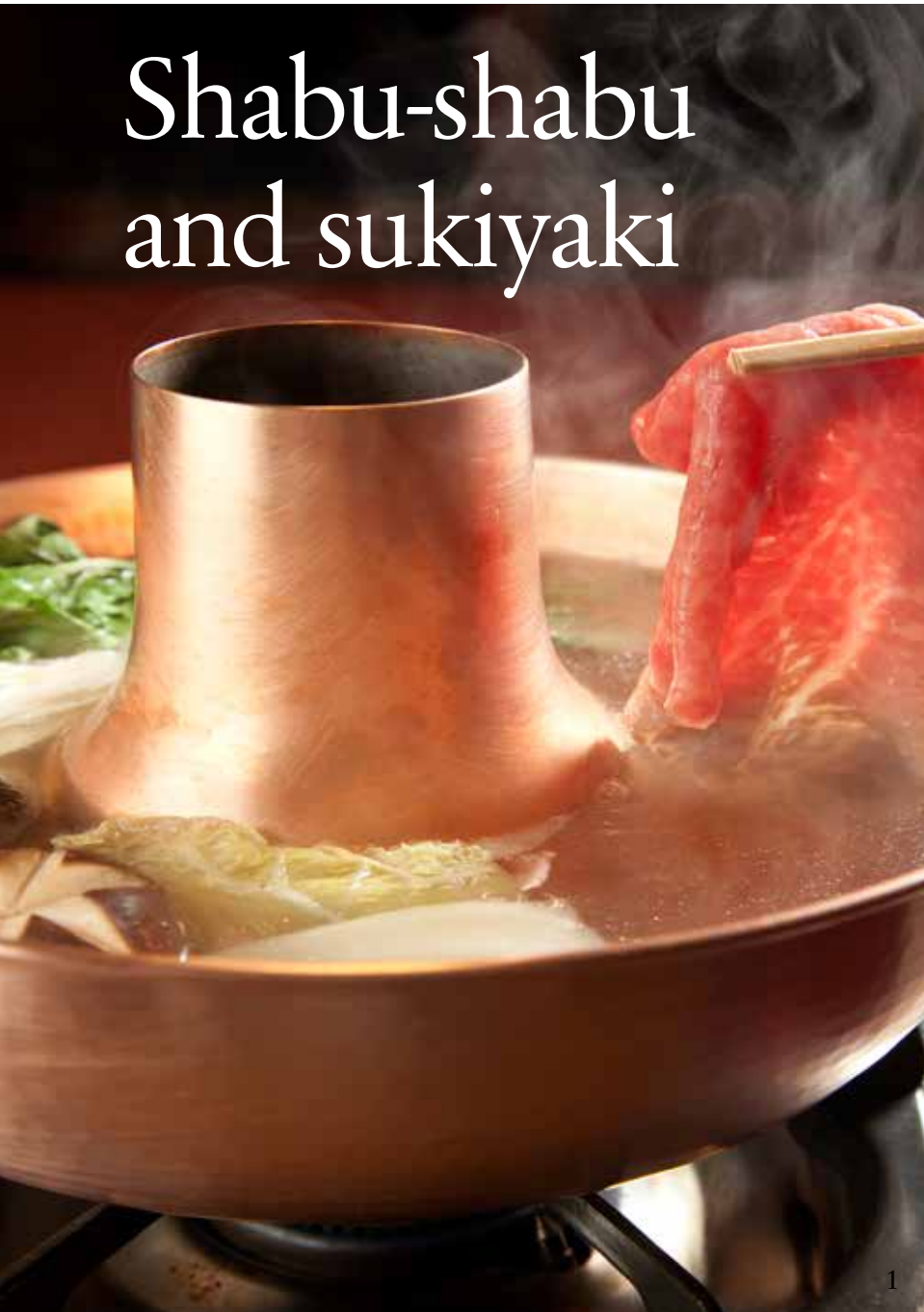


After serving as executive chef at the Yamanoue tempura and Japanese restaurant at Hilltop Hotel in Tokyo's Ochanomizu area, Fumio Kondo opened the eponymous Tempura Kondo in Ginza. His published works include *Tempura no zen shigoto* (All about Tempura).

Tempura Kondo  
Sakaguchi Building 9F  
5-5-13 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo  
Tel. 03-5568-0923



# Shabu-shabu and sukiyaki



## Two sumptuous ways to enjoy Wagyu

Two hotpot dishes, shabu-shabu and sukiyaki, are probably the best-known meat dishes of washoku. The first cooks paper-thin cuts of beef (or pork) in a clear broth, highlighting the meat's essential flavor. The second seasons the beef with a *warishita* blend of soy sauce, mirin, and sugar. Both are prepared together with vegetables and tofu.

With shabu-shabu, the slices of meat are swished once or twice in a boiling pot of dashi stock, then dipped into a choice of flavored sauces to eat. Other ingredients, such as vegetables, tofu, and slender *shirataki* noodles, flavor the pot as well. Typical dipping sauces are ponzu and sesame.

Sukiyaki has enjoyed enduring popularity in Japan as an upscale treat since its introduction in the late 1800s, when eating meat was hailed as part of the country's sweep toward modernization. When cooked Kansai-style, the beef is partially stir-fried and then topped with *warishita* to finish cooking, while the Kanto way simmers the meat together with other ingredients in *warishita* from the start. At the Tokyo sukiyaki restaurant Echikatsu, a waitress prepares and serves the meal for you. She pours the *warishita* in a pan, carefully arranges the meat with vegetables and tofu, and removes it while it is still partially red. This is had with a dipping sauce of beaten raw egg, which enhances the rich umami flavor of tender marbled beef.

1. Shabu-shabu is a healthy way of eating meat, as its excess fat extracts out into the boiling broth. 2. At Echikatsu, a waitress serves the sukiyaki for you in a Japanese-style room overlooking a garden. 3. It takes practiced knife skills to cut the thin slices required for sukiyaki. 4. The fresh beef is tastiest when rare or medium rare.

Echikatsu  
2-31-23 Yushima, Bunkyo-ku,  
Tokyo  
Tel. 03-3811-5293





Translucent fugu sashimi is deftly arranged from the outer edge of the plate in *kiku-zukuri* style, after the shape of a chrysanthemum bloom.

# Fugu



Only the edible parts, from top left: fillet and three sheets of skin. From bottom left: lips, *kama* section beneath the gills and around the pectoral fins, *shirako* milt sacs, dorsal fin, pectoral fins.



Among several species of blowfish, *torafugu* puffers caught in the Seto Inland Sea of Japan between October and March are prized for their delicate flavor.



Kuniyoshi Yamamoto is the third-generation owner-chef of Tsukiji Yamamoto, a century-old fugu specialist in Tokyo. Milt crepe and others of his original creations fill out the restaurant's traditional menu of fugu classics.

Tsukiji Yamamoto  
2-15-4 Tsukiji, Chuo-ku, Tokyo  
Tel. 03-3541-7730  
[www8.plala.or.jp/tsukijiyamamoto](http://www8.plala.or.jp/tsukijiyamamoto)

## Licensed chefs turn poisonous fish into seasonal delicacy

*Torafugu* is a species of blowfish sought for its delicate white flesh, yet its liver and other viscera contain a lethal amount of tetrodotoxin, a potent nerve poison. In Japan only specially licensed professionals are allowed to prepare this delicacy; they separate the edible and toxic parts following strict rules mastered over a long certification process that involves apprenticeship and a battery of tests.

Owner-chef Kuniyoshi Yamamoto of Tsukiji Yamamoto in Tokyo is an expert in blowfish preparation. In recent years an increasing number of restaurants have begun to offer farm-raised fugu, but Yamamoto serves only two-year-old wild *torafugu* weighing a minimum of 1.5 kilograms—the best of the lot, at the peak of flavor. He closes his restaurant from April to September, when the fishing season has ended.

These days the fish arrives with its poisonous parts already removed by licensed specialists at Haedomari Port in Yamaguchi prefecture, a major collection point. For chefs, the real magic of fugu preparation lies in the creation of sashimi—this is where they display their finesse. Blowfish meat is naturally fibrous; thick cuts render pieces that are too chewy to eat. Sashimi is therefore sliced into ultrathin pieces using a knife with a fine blade made especially for the purpose. Yamamoto arranges each one slightly raised at the edges, like petals, a flourish made possible by the flesh's high gelatin content. His presentation is as practical as it is lovely to look at: each artful slice comes away easily with chopsticks. And nothing is wasted: the skin is jellied, the milt served in soup, and the fins steeped in hot sake. Presenting all of the edible parts deliciously is also part of the magic.



# Shojin ryori

Healthy food for the spirit and body

Both a style of cooking and a protocol for eating practiced at monasteries in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279), *shojin ryori* was brought to Japan by Buddhist monks about 700 years ago. At the meditation hall of Daitokuji temple in Kyoto, Zen monks eat a vegetarian *ichiju issai* lunch of one soup with one dish and rice such as the simmered vegetables and rice cooked with barley shown above at right. All three of their daily meals are frugal fare, just enough to keep hunger at bay. At Daitokuji, these meals and their preparation are considered part of the monks' ascetic training.

From late in the Muromachi era (1336–1573) to the Edo period (1603–1867), a *bonzen*-style vegetarian meal was served at Daitokuji to visitors such as daimyo lords, tea masters, and prominent merchants who arrived there to practice

*zazen* meditation. A more elaborate version of what the monks were eating, *bonzen* meals offered foods such as tofu, *yuba* soy-milk skin, *namafu* wheat gluten, and *natto* fermented soybeans in addition to vegetables. For occasions like an ancestral memorial service, daimyo and other dignitaries sometimes brought their own ingredients and had meals prepared for them by cooks at the temple's licensed caterer—now known as the restaurant Daitokuji Ikkyu.

Diners at Ikkyu can enjoy much the same meal as was served centuries ago—a style that is said to have influenced the *chakaiseki* cuisine later developed by tea masters for the formal tea ceremony. While *bonzen*-style *shojin ryori* is more elaborate than what is served at the meditation hall, both share the same spirit of eating in balance and wasting nothing.



At Daitokuji Ikkyu, a restaurant by the temple grounds whose kitchens have been in operation for more than 500 years, visitors can enjoy a meal like the one shown at top on the red lacquer tray.

Daitokuji Ikkyu  
20 Murasakino Shimomonzen-cho,  
Kita-ku, Kyoto  
Tel. 075-493-0019  
[www.daitokuji-ikkyu.jp](http://www.daitokuji-ikkyu.jp)



Osamu Ueno's kitchen at Kigawa is the stage where he entertains his customers. Both à la carte dishes and multicourse menus can be enjoyed at its spacious wraparound counter.

Naniwa-kappo Kigawa  
1-7-7 Dotonbori, Chuo-ku, Osaka  
Tel. 06-6211-3030

# Itamae kappo

## The counter culture experience

A Japanese term, *itamae* literally means “in front of the cutting board.” *Kappo*, on the other hand, is derived from a Chinese word written with characters meaning “to cut” and “to cook,” and signifies two modes of preparation: serving dishes raw, such as sashimi, and cooking with fire. Together *itamae* and *kappo* refer to the type of intimate restaurant found in Japan today where the chef himself presides at the counter and diners order their dishes from him one by one. Conversation is welcomed; more often than not it's a highlight of the experience. If the chef has procured some premium sea bream, for example, customers can request how they would like to try it—as sashimi, simmered, or grilled, for example.

Kigawa in Osaka is one of the pioneer *itamae kappo* restaurants. Second-generation owner-chef Osamu Ueno says, “While naturally I do some prep work beforehand, my preference is for customers to enjoy something made freshly on the spot to suit their own fancy.”



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1. Colorful arrangements of sea bream, squid, and ark shell sashimi delight the eyes and palate.
2. Tennoji turnip and grilled sea bream grace a clear soup.
3. Osamu Ueno serves a dish of *shiro-amadai* tile-fish broiled with dried mullet roe.