

Sushi 101

By Todd Justman

We were pretty happy with our experience at Sushi 101. The wide variety of items promises to please anyone, even those who aren't fans of sushi or even Japanese food. Not that we're sushi connoisseurs but the variety of sushi seemed impressive. The \$2 yakitori menu was impressive with over 20 meat and vegetable items that you can choose to be grilled, tempura fried, or fried in panko bread crumbs (called *katsu*, but it's the same as schnitzel). I had chicken fried in panko and I got a nice quantity of food along with a sweet sauce that was kind of like a barbeque sauce but different. If you don't like the idea of sushi or noodles, you cannot go wrong with chicken or beef fried on a stick. You get three of these and you're good to go until you hit the Cold Stone Creamery next door.

You can also get a bowl of noodles where you choose from five types of noodles, five types of meat, and three types of sauce preparation. I had grilled steak with udon noodles and it was decent. A bottle of hot sauce kicked it up to a proper heat adjustment, but it did seem to miss something. The wide variety of vegetables (peppers, zucchini, onions, etc.) included permitted me to think I was eating healthy.

The restaurant had an open design with lots of space devoted to the many chefs cooking at the sushi bar. We couldn't help but notice the lack of Japanese people working the bar and grill, which is unusual for sushi, which is very carefully prepared. There's also a regular bar and a flat-panel TV. They serve lots of Japanese beers, sakes, and wines if that's your thing.

To provide a balanced view there are some downsides. This place won't refill your soft drinks, but they only charge a buck for your pop, so that's no big deal. It's a bit crowded and chilly if you're near the door. Service doesn't come with a big fake TGI Friday's smile but it's responsive and somewhat helpful with the menu. I wasn't crazy about the repetitive beating of the techno music, which made me think I was eating in the dressing room at The Gap or Old Navy. They probably play that annoying music so you'll drink more sake.

Overall, this is a great place to get away from the 67 Italian restaurants we have in Matthews if you're interested in trying something a little different while not departing from your comfort zone.

As an aside, for those who haven't tried sushi, this is a good place to do it. There are plenty of other options in case you don't dig it. The common misconception is that sushi is only made with raw fish. You can get the fish cooked or smoked. The most common roll is California Roll, which has crab (usually imitation crab meat), avocado, and cucumber, all wrapped in sticky rice. The meat is cooked but the whole thing is served cold. You get six pieces, and you can dip them in a little plate of soy sauce. For extra kick, take a little wasabi (Japanese horseradish) and dab a little on your sushi, or mix the wasabi in the soy. (Be careful!) Dip your piece and enjoy. Another really good sushi roll to get is the shrimp tempura roll. If you like "fried" and "shrimp" this is a winner. Chopsticks are provided but I resort to using fingers because you don't want your sushi falling into your soy unless you have a sodium deficiency.

Sushi 101 is located at I-485 and Providence Road near Home Depot.