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INTRODUCTION

Street food in Japan: you don't immediately think of streets and squares full of food carts or pavements decked with tables and chairs... The country with the most Michelin stars in the world is associated mainly with sushi and sashimi and seldom, if ever, with street food. But this is wrong because sushi used to be street food; it was sold in *yatai* or mobile food stalls.

Nowadays, you can still find those *yatai* at religious festivals – the main religions are Buddhism and Shinto – and other events where lots of people gather. They are still a popular attraction. But there's much more to it than that, except that street food is not always as visible in Japanese public life. It's almost as if it's not done to be seen eating on the street, so people do their utmost to hide it away. Often, you have to look in alleys or under railway bridges, very often close to stations. But once you know where to look, you'll discover a laid-back and cheaper way of eating that really brings you into contact with Japanese people, which also means a little bit closer to Japanese culture.

I only have to think about Japan and automatically I smell the typical odour of *dashi*, a stock made from roasted, finely-ground slivers of bonito – a type of tuna (*katsuobushi*). If I had to name one type of food preparation that characterises Japanese cooking, it would be *dashi*, much more so than sushi or sashimi. You can find these bonito flakes at any supermarket and *dashi* forms the base for many soups and dipping sauces. That characteristic smell can't be found anywhere else in the world. *Dashi* is the absolute key to Japanese cooking.

Ask any chef in the world about his favourite country for eating out and nine times out of ten the answer will be “Japan”. Japanese cuisine has its own unique identity as well as many external influences. The most significant influence, as is the case in the rest of Asia, comes from Chinese cuisine: ramen noodles are originally Chinese. Rice and soy sauce became part of everyday fare via Korea. English sailors introduced (Madras) curry from India, their former colony. Then the French familiarised the Japanese with *croquettes* (*korokke*) and, in turn, the Portuguese also made their mark: they introduced tempura, as well as bread (*pan*) and many types of sweets. Japan has four large islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. The country has different climate zones, ranging from very cold in the north (Hokkaido) to subtropical in the south (Kyushu). Of course, the climate influences the various regional types of cuisine.

Washoku or traditional Japanese cuisine, is on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage, and with good reason. Restaurants in Japan often specialise in one thing, which therefore becomes their strength. A true master specialises in one trade, in some cases for his whole life. A craftsman, or *shokunin*, is a highly prized person in Japan.

Restaurants are literally stacked one on top of another, often without English signs, and are therefore not always easily accessible or easy to find. A five-storey building can contain ten different restaurants, each only the size of two snooker tables, with room for about a dozen people. Space is scarce in Japan. But this makes it more convenient for the *shokunin*: with only twelve seats rather than twenty-four, he can really indulge his customers' tastes and serve up pure quality.





The Japanese have a special feel for cleanliness and style – it’s as if everyone comes out of a box. Their desire for balance and their unparalleled yearning for perfection also explain the abundance of starred restaurants. But what makes Japanese cuisine so special is the deep desire for detail – and cooking is all about the detail. Presentation, experience, that little bit extra: these all make a difference. Often, a link also exists between the presentation of dishes and the changing seasons.

In addition to a gourmet meal in a restaurant – the most chic restaurants often don’t even have a sign outside – you can also choose to eat in a more casual or relaxed manner. Traditional *yatai* or food carts may have somewhat lost their significance in high- end, futuristic cities like Tokyo, but they are still just numerous enough to play an important role. Cheap lunch concepts such as *donburi*, *udon*, *soba*, *tori* or *tonkatsu* eateries are well-represented all over Japan. But there is so much more: *tachinomiya* or standing bars make Japan unique; here you can eat the most incredible things while standing up. *Izakaya* is a fantastic, low-threshold food and drink concept that bears a striking resemblance to tapas bars. As if that were not enough, train stations and transport hubs serve up a feast for any traveller on a culinary voyage of discovery: the colourful *ekiben* boxes at stations look almost psychedelic. If you’re feeling a little adventurous, the market street or shopping arcade offers an incredible variety of street food, from delis to croquette bars, tofu shops and funky bakeries. Convenience stores,

such as 7-Eleven, Lawson’s or FamilyMart, offer even more accessible solutions to bridge the hunger gap at any time of day. No other country in the world has 24-hour shops that provide such high-quality snacks.

Japan amazes and continues to amaze. Forget all the clichés about light and healthy because Japanese street food cuisine breathes rock ‘n’ roll and a hearty dose of fat. Let yourself go with the mayonnaise topping, a steaming bowl of ramen noodles or a portion of *okonomiyaki*, the true cholesterol explosions! These dishes emerged after the Second World War, at a time of great scarcity, when a crafty America sold grain to Japan to feed its needy population.

What I still miss about Japan, as well as the food, is the courtesy and the politeness of its people. Wherever you go, you are greeted with a cheery “*konnichi wa*” (hello), “*ohayo gozaimasu*” (good morning), “*komban wa*” (good evening), or you are thanked with a friendly “*arigato*”. That is incredibly infectious: I really miss the etiquette each time I come back to the West. There’s a good chance that a visit to Japan will make the same impression on you; what is certain is that it will be one of the best culinary experiences of your life. *Itadakimasu!*



LOCATIONS (+ OVERVIEW RECIPES)

In contrast to our previous books, we explored more than one city. That means that we did not confine ourselves to Tokyo alone, but also branched out to Osaka and Fukuoka – and justifiably so. These cities offer genuine added value in terms of street food in Japan. The recipes on these pages are listed by location. You can find them listed alphabetically in the index at the back of the book.

TOKYO

With 37 million inhabitants, Tokyo is the futuristic, super-modern capital of the future. Tokyo is not really one city, but a collection of 23 special districts (central Tokyo), surrounded by conurbations. In 1923, Tokyo was hit by one of the strongest earthquakes in Japan's history. Over 140,000 people lost their lives and many traditional neighbourhoods were flattened. Initially, the city's name was Edo. In 1869, it became the capital of Japan, where the emperor resided. Alongside London and New York, Tokyo is now one of the world's largest financial centres. It offers science fiction street scenes, neon lights, a pop culture mecca, a night life like no other, etc.

The renowned Tsukiji market, located on Tokyo Bay, is a microcosm in itself and one of the city's major attractions. Rumours have been circulating for some time that the market could move to a new location. Tokyo has one of the highest concentrations of restaurants in the world with infinite variety; in Tokyo you can order absolutely any dish you can imagine. Central Tokyo, and Ginza in particular, is the sushi centre of the world. It is one big food-fest. The city with the most Michelin stars in the world serves up the best fish you'll ever taste.

- 27** Breaded chicken *Chicken Katsu*
- 28** Ice-cold soba noodles with dipping sauce
Zaru soba
- 31** Octopus balls *Takoyaki*
- 34** Cucumber with spicy miso dip *Morokyu*
- 37** Japanese curry with vegetables *Yasai curry*
- 38** Miso soup with clams
Asari no misoshiru
- 41** Fishcake with corn
Tomorokoshi no satsuma-age
- 42** Sushi balls topped with fish *Nigiri sushi*
- 183** Green soy bean shake *Edamame shake*
- 184** Scampi burger *Ebikatsu burger*
- 187** Rice with sea bream sashimi
and hot dashi *Tai chazuke*
- 189** Hand-rolled rice balls with salmon
Sake no onigiri
- 190** Grilled mackerel with sea salt
Saba no shioyaki
- 195** Karaage-don (rice bowl) with salsa
Salsa sosu no karaage don

OSAKA

Osaka is the third largest city in Japan and, like Tokyo, is located on the island of Honshu. Osaka was very briefly the capital of Japan, shortly before neighbouring Nara acquired that title. It was then known as Naniwa, a name that is still regularly used. Osaka was heavily bombed during the Second World War, which led *Lone-ly Planet* to describe it as having little real charm. However, its charm lies in its people. Osaka receives nowhere near the same number of visitors as Tokyo. Over the centuries, it has always been a centre of trade and definitely of food too. Precisely as a result of its “underdog” reputation, the people of Osaka are perhaps more open or more welcoming than those in Tokyo. In Osaka, people are less punctual than in other cities in Japan, you have the feeling that there are greater possibilities there. Flashy skyscrapers, chic neighbourhoods right next to ghetto-like neighbourhoods, rich and poor side-by-side, it just feels more free and easy.

Local street food dishes such as *okonomiyaki*, *takoyaki* and *kushikatsu* have their roots here. The counterbalance to the lively street food culture is found in the *kappa* food concept, up-market dining at a restaurant counter. Osaka has more Michelin stars than Paris, for example. By day, its population doubles as a result of people coming to work in Osaka and it becomes the second largest city in Japan. But Osaka really comes to life at night, when the locals come out to eat, drink and be merry. “*Kuidaore*”: eat until you drop, is a frequently-heard saying in the city.

Osaka is also very well-known for its comedians, who often move to Tokyo and its major TV studios once they become successful. Osaka (and, by extension, the entire Kansai region to which the city belongs) has a very special feel for humour and an immediately recognisable intonation. Once they have made a breakthrough and moved to Tokyo, these comedians do not modify their dialect at all, instead they make it even more obvious.

- 65** Triangular breaded chicken sandwich
Chicken katsu sando
- 140** Thinly sliced beef with egg
Gyuniku no tamago-toji
- 145** Steak with Japanese savoury sauce
Gyu steeki wafu-sosu
- 146** Cold green tea *Tsumetai ryokucha*
- 149** Shaved ice with green tea syrup
Matcha kakigori
- 150** Monaka with mascarpone
Mascarpone no monaka
- 151** Japanese green tea latte *Matcha latte*
- 153** Smoked eggs *Kunsei tamago*
- 154** Japanese-style croquettes with minced meat *Niku korokke*
- 157** Soy milk pudding *Tonyu purin*
- 158** Okra and chicken salad
Okura to toriniku no salad
- 161** European/Dutch-style aubergines (eggplant) *Nasu no orandani*
- 162** Japanese omelette *Dashimaki tamago*
- 167** Rice with hijiki seaweed
Hijiki gohan
- 169** Miso-marinated and baked salmon
Sake no saikyo yaki
- 170** Pork and kimchi stir-fry
Buta kimchi
- 173** Fried rice and noodles
Sobameshi
- 174** Sweet and sour pork *Subuta*
- 177** Savoury Japanese pancakes with cabbage (Osaka-style) *Okonomiyaki (Osaka-style)*
- 178** Crab and scallops with ponzu
Kani to hotate no ponzu gake



FUKUOKA

This bustling and eminently liveable city is sometimes referred to as Tokyo's little brother and is Japan's sixth city. Fukuoka grew out of two cities: Fukuoka and Hakata. The oldest part of the city still bears the original name of Hakata.

Fukuoka is the city where the largest number of *yatai*, or food carts, roll out every day to feed the appetites of hungry visitors. In most Japanese cities, *yatai* have completely disappeared from street life. Fukuoka is the exception and the last trace of a lively and traditional street food culture. Until ten years ago there were still three hundred *yatai*; now there are only one hundred and fifty. The number of *yatai* falls every year. Since they are supposedly a nuisance, they are now resisted. I can only hope that they will survive. You have to be in the districts of Tenjin or Nagahama to really get to know the amazing *yatai* street food culture.

This bustling city is located on the island of Kyushu and enjoys a mild climate. It is the home base of the famous Softbank Hawks baseball team and apparently the most beautiful Japanese women come from Fukuoka. In culinary terms, it is the source of *tonkotsu* ramen stock, *motsunabe*, a local speciality made from pork or beef tripe and *mentaiko* (marinated pollock roe), a commonly-used ingredient.

- 79 Deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables *Kushikatsu*
- 80 Fried skewered chicken *Yakitori (negima)*
- 83 Daikon, egg and fishcake in stock *Oden*
- 88 Ramen with pork stock *Tonkotsu ramen*
- 91 Omelette on fried rice *Omuraisu*
- 92 Sashimi on rice bowl *Kaisen-don*
- 95 Sardines with ginger *Iwashi no nitsuke*
- 96 Spinach with sesame sauce *Horenso no gomaae*



- 99 Meatballs in sweet sauce *Nikudango no ankake*
- 103 Potato salad *Poteto salad*
- 104 Cod roe tempura with perilla leaves *Mentaiko to shiso no tempura*
- 111 Pesto ramen *Basil ramen*
- 113 Dipping noodles *Tsukemen*
- 120 Fried and steamed dumplings *Gyoza*
- 123 Japanese sponge cake *Kasutera*
- 124 Curry bread with beef *Curry pan*

...AND BEYOND!

OKAYAMA

- 66 Vegetables with “broken” tofu *Yasai no shiraae*
- 69 Don (rice bowl) with yuba and thick dashi sauce *Yuba no donburi*
- 70 Cold tofu with various types of garnish *Hiyayakko*
- 73 Udon noodles with oysters *Kaki udon*

KYOTO

- 48 Ramen with spicy minced meat *Tantanmen*
- 51 Pickled Chinese cabbage *Hakusai no tsukemono*
- 52 Thick pancakes with sweetened adzuki beans *Dorayaki*
- 55 Marinated and fried chicken *Tori no karaage*
- 56 Grilled scallops with soy sauce and butter *Hotate no grill*
- 59 Tofu balls with thick dashi sauce *Tofu-dango no ankake*
- 60 Grilled aubergine with bonito flakes *Yaki nasu*

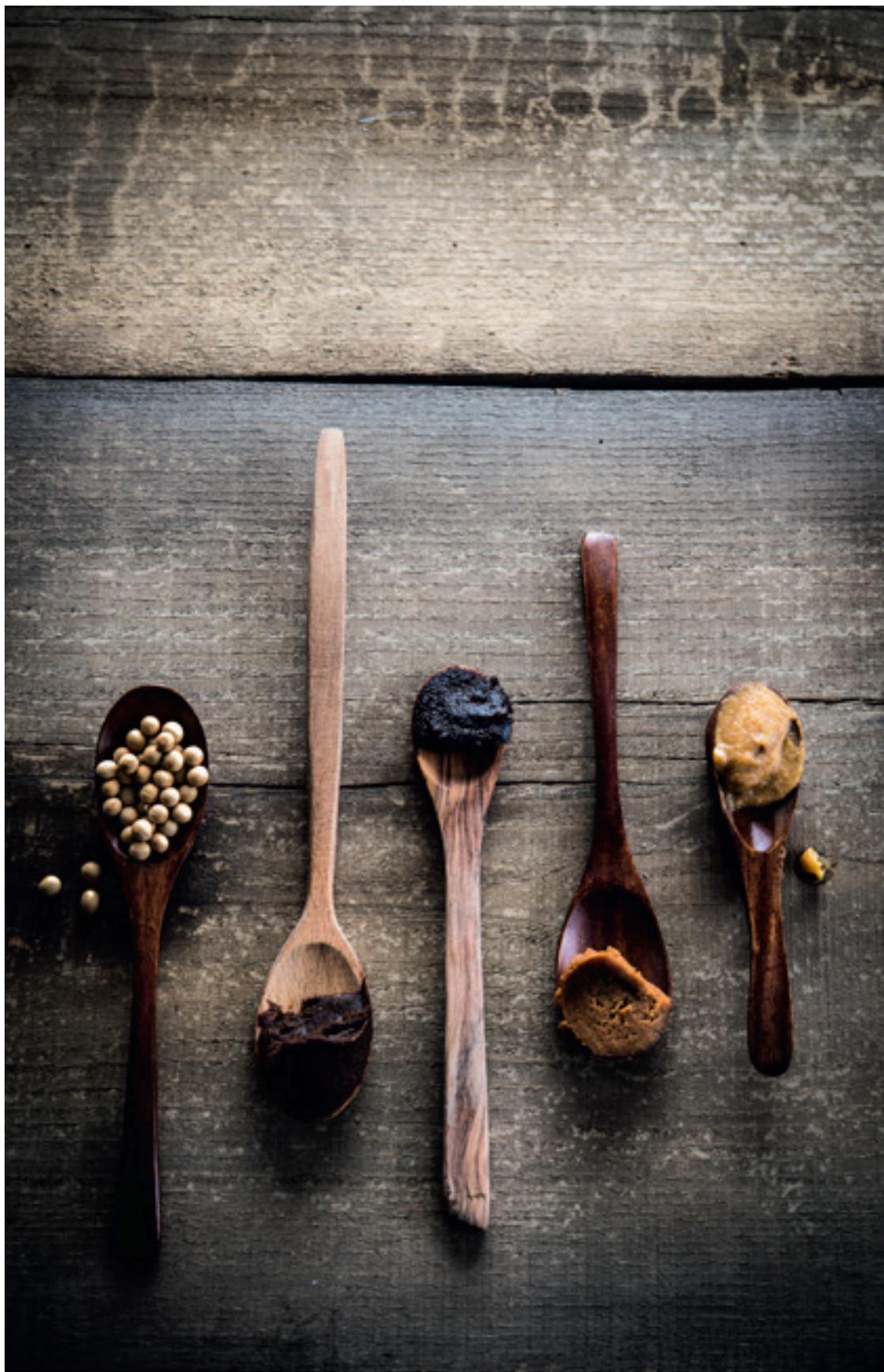
HIROSHIMA

- 126 Steamed bun *Nikuman*
- 129 Cake with sweetened adzuki beans *Taiyaki*
- 130 Japanese-style grilled eel / conger eel *Unagi / anago no kabayaki*
- 134 Savoury Japanese pancakes with cabbage (Hiroshima-style) *Okonomiyaki (Hiroshima-yaki)*

GHENT

- 87 Vegetarian ramen *Vege ramen*





MISO 味噌

My grandparents' house in Hiroshima had a huge store room with wooden sliding doors. Inside the store room there was always a large porcelain pitcher of miso that my grandmother had made.

The house was originally built as a tea house, so it had two rooms that were intended for the tea ceremony, one on the ground floor and another on the first floor, both with a *rodan* (sunken hearth) and a low *shoji* (sliding door with wooden frame, across which white paper is stretched). The garden was also very Japanese, with large ornamental stones and beautifully trimmed trees. In order to go to the toilet, I had to use an exterior corridor, which bordered the garden with its lovely view. In the evenings, it was very scary. When it was dark, I did not dare look into the garden. My grandmother taught *ikebana* (flower arranging) at home and my grandfather's hobby was growing bonsai and vegetables.

When I think about the taste and smell of my grandmother's miso, all these things merge in my mind and make me quite nostalgic. When I was a child, I was amazed at how the colour of the miso changed from pale to dark over the month-long process. Now I know that the miso was in fact "alive".

It is a known fact that miso is made from soy beans but in the West it is perhaps not as well known that there are different varieties. To start with, there are three types of *koji* fungus (yeast): rice koji, wheat koji and soy koji. They also vary in taste, from salty to sweet. The taste is determined primarily by the amount of salt, but also by the amount of koji fungus. The more koji is added, the sweeter the flavour. Previously, miso was also used inland – where there was no sea – as a means of storing salt. Then there are also different shades of colour. When the amino acid in soy beans reacts with sugar, the colour becomes darker.

Miso originally came from China, about thirteen hundred years ago, so it has a long history in Japan. Today, miso soup is well-known all over the world but miso only became popular as a soup from the twelfth century onwards, as part of a plain but healthy meal. Nowadays, miso can be prepared in many ways, including as a marinade for fish and meat, *tare* (dipping sauce) or vinaigrette. It is used every day in Japanese cuisine and increasingly in Western cooking.

ASARI NO MISOSHIRU

あさりの味噌汁

MISO SOUP WITH CLAMS

During spring and summer in Japan, “hunting” for clams is a popular activity. Japanese people head for the coast at this time and, at low tide, they scoop clams out of the sand and collect them. Back at home, the first meal that Miho’s father always made was miso soup with the freshly-collected clams. So, for her, the strong, pure taste of that miso soup with fresh clams is still one of the best meals ever.

500 g (1 pound) clams

*800 ml (4 cups) dashi
(see p. 196)*

2 to 4 tablespoons miso

*a handful of
spring onions, finely
chopped in rings*

To remove sand, place the clams in salt water for 3 hours (500 ml (1 pint) water with 1 tablespoon salt). The shells will then open and expel the sand. Then rinse the clams another 3 times in salt water.

Bring the dashi to the boil. Put the miso in a deep ladle and place it just into the soup. Stirring constantly with chopsticks, dissolve the miso in the spoon. Stir the dissolved miso gradually into the soup so as not to create any lumps.

Drain the clams and add to the boiling stock. Turn off the heat when the shells open. Distribute them among the serving dishes and garnish with spring onion.

If clams are not available, other shellfish can be used, such as cockles or scallops, etc.







TOMOROKOSHI NO SATSUMA-AGE

とうもろこしのさつま揚げ

FISHCAKE WITH CORN

A basic fishcake is traditionally eaten just with soy sauce, but you can also stir-fry it in a wok or boil it in stock. In this dish, the basic fishcake is combined with corn. Not only does this make it more attractive in terms of colour and shape, but it also combines sweet and sour to create a more complex flavour. This is Tomoko's favourite dish!

*300 g (10 ounces) cod,
skinless and boneless*

1 egg

½ teaspoon salt

a pinch of sugar

1 tablespoon sake

2 tablespoons potato starch

2 teaspoons ginger, grated

*300 g (10 ounces)
corn niblets*

Place all the ingredients except the corn niblets into the blender and blend into a smooth fish paste. Shape the paste into a disc 1 cm (½ inch) thick and 4 cm (1 ½ inches) in diameter. Cover the disc entirely with corn niblets. Heat the frying oil to 160 °C (320 °F) and fry it for 4 to 5 minutes. Drain on paper towel and serve with soy sauce, if desired.

To make a basic fishcake, just omit the corn from this recipe. It will be just as delicious!



NIGIRI SUSHI にぎり寿司

SUSHI BALLS TOPPED WITH FISH

You need years of experience to make good sushi. A true sushi master is akin to an artist. We all love watching as he makes a rice ball in one swift movement and immediately tops it with fish. This recipe is an easy version in which you make the rice balls first and then place the fish on top. Try not to make the rice balls or the fish too big, so that the pieces can be eaten in one bite.

*500 g (1 pound)
fresh fish fillet (salmon,
tuna, scallops,
bass, etc.)*

*6 small bowls sushi
rice (see p. 199)*

soy sauce

wasabi

Cut the fish fillet into slices approximately 5 mm (¼ inch) thick, 3 cm x 5 cm (1 x 2 inches). Store them in the refrigerator. Wet your hands and shape the rice into oval balls, approximately 2 cm x 3 cm (1 x 1.5 inches) and 1.5 cm (¾ inch) high. Take a rice ball in your left hand and place a slice of fish on it. Push down on the fish with the index and middle fingers of your right hand. Place the sushi on a plate and serve with soy sauce and wasabi.

Sushi rolls wrapped in nori leaves are known as gunkan-sushi. You can fill these with small pieces of fish, salmon roe, cucumber, etc..



