



Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse and Sushi Bar

by Rich Belmont



Ichiban is pronounced "Itchy-Bon" and is the Japanese word for "First" or "Number One". Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi bar is a chain of restaurants originating in Japan. Ichiban franchises operate autonomously. Individual owners have little corporate oversight and are really independent restaurants. Which is why you can find an Ichiban in most major cities and some are classy and some not so much.

Ichiban Dubuque is one of the classy ones. That's because its young owners and staff are experienced, hard-working and fiercely dedicated to success. If you were to ask them they would say they are committed to doing whatever it takes to make Ichiban Dubuque the Number One Ichiban in the world and the Number One restaurant in Dubuque.



The owners of Ichiban Dubuque are Guang Ming (Sam) Chen, his sister Lan Xiu (Cici) Chen and his wife Yi Mei (Cindy) Chen. They grew up in Fujian, China and immigrated to New York City. At the time they did not speak any English but were able to find work in Asian restaurants. After several years, Sam moved to Tulsa Oklahoma where he opened his own China Buffet. Then he went to Jacksonville, FL and started Kobe Japanese Fusion Style Sushi & Steak. His sister Cici joined with him and together they purchased Ichiban Steakhouse and

Sushi Bar in Jacksonville. About four years later they decided to sell that restaurant and move to Dubuque so they could be closer to their sister Amy Chen and her husband, Michael Zhu, the owners of Little Tokyo in Galena, IL. They opened Ichiban Dubuque on March 17, 2013.

Ever since, it has been one non-stop party. There are a number of signature drinks to get you started: like the Japanese Cherry Blossom made with Gekkeikan Sake, grenadine and Sprite. Other great libations include the Japanese Slipper, made with Midori, Cointreau and lemonade, the Klondike with Frangelico, peppermint and cream and the Sumo containing Midori, Malibu Rum, pineapple juice and Sprite. There are a number of great beers and 7 choices of cold sake. I, myself, prefer hot sake which is always heated to the proper temperature of 98° F.



When you are in a party mood consider ordering a flaming Scorpion Bowl. This is one drink you don't want to drink all by yourself. It is a mix of Southern Comfort, Amaretto, Absolut Vodka, Bacardi Rum, Jim Beam, Sloe Gin and orange juice.

First up on the menu are soups and salads. The soup choices include Clear Soup chicken broth with fried onions, mushrooms and scallions, Gyoza chicken soup with dumplings, and my favorite, Miso Soup. Miso is traditional Japanese seasoning available in many flavors. The one used in this soup is a salty soybean paste that adds a distinct earthy flavor.

The salads are fresh and there are 8 to choose from. The fresh, seasoned, marinated seaweed salad is surprisingly sweet. The House Salad is served with a wonderful ginger dressing. It's homemade and contains celery, apples, ginger, lemons, onions, oranges, Japanese vinegar, vegetable oil, mayonnaise, ketchup and soy sauce.

Now it's time to dig into the fun stuff: Sushi (Sue-She) and Sashimi (Sah-Shee-Mee). The word Sushi means "sour tasting" and refers to specially prepared vinegared rice. Sushi is always a combination of rice



with a topping or filling of fish, seafood, vegetable or even egg. Fish in Sushi can be either raw or cooked.

Sashimi (pictured left) is the art of preparing raw, very fresh seafood cut into thin slices that are then dipped into a mixture of soy sauce and wasabi. Sashimi is not served with rice. The Ichiban menu has fish symbols next to all the raw fish items on the menu. This makes it easy to identify what is cooked and what is not.

Sushi and Sashimi require the absolute freshest sushi-grade seafood. To insure quality and freshness Sam drives to Chicago every Monday so he can inspect the seafood he purchases from a Japanese wholesaler. Then every Friday more fresh fish is delivered from King Food Service in Rock Island, IL.



The taste and the presentation are up to the Itamae or Sushi Chef. And this Sushi Bar has a good one. He is Lin Xing (Franky) Qiu. He has 12 years experience and trained under the well-known Master Sushi Chef, Hashimoto at Sakura Japanese Restaurant in New York City. An Itamae is a true artist and skilled craftsman.

Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar

3187 University Avenue, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-845-0698 • IchibanRestaurant.org & Facebook

HOURS: Lunch: Mon - Thu: 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Fri - Sat: 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Dinner: Mon - Thu: 4:30p.m.-10 p.m.,

Fri - Sat: 3 - 11 p.m., Sun: 11:30 a.m. - 9 p.m.

DINING STYLE: Casual NOISE LEVEL: Conversational

RECOMMENDATIONS: Drinks: Signature cocktails, Hot & Cold Sake, Scorpion Bowl, Appetizers: Sushi and Sashimi, Tuna Tataki, Crispy Tuna Dumpling, Dragon Ball Entrées: Sushi or Sashimi Deluxe, Sushi for Two, Snow Crab Roll, Ichiban Roll, Smoked Salmon w/Avocado, Hibachi Filet Mignon and Shrimp or Scallops, Manhattan Roll, Sukiyaki Steak, Shrimp Tempura, Bento Box with Tempura or Teriyaki

LIQUOR SERVICE: Full Bar

PRICE RANGE: Appetizers: \$3.50-\$11.95; Sushi: \$3.50-\$23.50; Entrées: \$8.95-\$29.95

PAY OPTIONS: Cash, M/C, Visa, Disc, Amex, NO checks

ACCESSIBILITY: Front Door & Restrooms

KIDS POLICY: Menu, Booster, Highchairs

RESERVATIONS: Yes CATERING: No TAKE OUT: Yes

DELIVERY: No PARKING: Private Lot



There are too many Signature Rolls on the menu so I will look closer at one my tasting team likes a lot. The Manhattan Roll is Spicy Tuna, Crunch Avocado inside and is topped with Lobster Tempura, Avocado, Wasabi Tobiko with Wasabi Mayo and Eel Sauce. Just so you know: when you see the word "Spicy" on the menu it usually means fish is mixed with Sriracha Sauce. The crunch refers to tempura batter and wasabi Tobiko is flying fish roe with wasabi.



The Sushi for Two is a delight to behold and to eat. It is literally a wooden boat with 16 pieces of sushi plus shrimp tempura and a spicy tuna roll. The sushi is Chef's choice and our boat contained salmon, white tuna, yellowtail, shrimp and some other assorted fish.



There are several Tempura (tem-pour-ah) and Teriyaki (terry-ack-ee) dishes on the menu as well. Tempura is simply food that has been battered and deep fried. Sam prepares his own tempura by mixing it in small batches with chopsticks and a whisk while keeping it cold by immersing it in a cold water bath.



The teriyaki sauce, served with many bento box options (above), is home made as well and involves a great deal of preparation. Chicken bones, oranges, apples, carrots, celery, green onions, garlic, ginger and bok choy are added to a large pot and simmered for 5 hours. Then soy sauce and sugar are added.



Sitting at a Hibachi table is a lot of fun. The Hibachi is the flat top grill where Teppanyaki style cooking takes place. The head Teppanyaki Chef is Reeza Bheldy. He and his cooks put on a show juggling utensils, spinning eggs, jiggling spices and arranging onion rings into fire-shooting volcanoes or smoking choo choos.



My favorite Hibachi dinner is Filet Mignon with either Shrimp or Scallops. The flavor of Teppanyaki style is unlike any other because lots of butter, garlic, soybean oil and teriyaki sauce is mixed in. The accompanying vegetables are stir-fried enhancing the Black Angus Choice grade steaks and filet mignon, cold water lobsters, chicken, salmon, shrimp or scallops. The vegetables are a meal by themselves and include broccoli, mushrooms, onions, zucchini, carrots, baby corn and asparagus. If you like garlic request your chef to chop some up for you. The Hibachi dinners are served with Clear Soup, salad with ginger dressing, the above listed vegetables, fried rice and two shrimp appetizers.

As you know, I always say a marvelous dinner calls for a luscious dessert. The Bananas, Ice Cream and Cheese Cake Tempura are all good. You will notice ice cream is available in Green Tea, Vanilla, Strawberry and Red Bean flavors. This last one comes from a paste prepared from the red azuki bean and is as popular in Japan as chocolate is here. Mochi Ice Cream is unusual and tantalizing: small ice cream balls are coated with Mochi (pounded sticky rice) and then dusted with corn starch and powdered sugar.



Ichiban is a great place to party. When you are seated at the Sushi Bar or Hibachi grills introduce yourself to your neighbors. You just might make some new friends!

