



## Little Tokyo

by Rich Belmont

Little Tokyo is appropriately named all right. It is located in Galena, IL at the corner of Main and Franklin Streets. When you dine there it is as if you are in a very professional and expensive restaurant in Tokyo, Japan's largest city. But of course without the hassle and the great expense!



We are so fortunate to have a place providing us with authentic Japanese cuisine dedicated to waking up our Midwest taste buds. So I'm perplexed when I speak with local citizens who tell me they will not go there because they don't like Sushi or are afraid to taste raw seafood. Apparently, many people don't understand what Little Tokyo is so perhaps an explanation is in order. Yes, it is a Sushi Bar but it is also a Japanese Restaurant. Besides Sushi and Sashimi there are many beef and chicken dishes on the menu. You can choose Tempura, Teriyaki and Hibachi Style too, but wait... I'm getting ahead of myself.



Little Tokyo was started over 3 years ago by Michael Zhu (left) and his wife Amy Chen. They both grew up in mainland China, Michael in Shanggiu Prefecture and Amy in Fujian. They did not know each other when they immigrated to New York City. As fate would have it they soon found jobs working at Umi Sushi & Hibachi Japanese Restaurant in Toms River, New Jersey. Amy worked in all facets of the restaurant's operations while Michael trained under Yoshi, a renowned Master Sushi Chef. After cupid shot his arrow Michael and Amy got married and proceeded to start a family. They decided to get away from the crowded city and suburban life and had friends in and around Dubuque and Galena. The rest, as they say, is history.

Operating a Sushi Bar and Japanese Restaurant in the Midwest is challenging. Michael and Amy drive to Chicago once or twice a week to buy Sushi Grade seafood from a Japanese wholesaler. They also work with several other suppliers to insure most of the ingredients in their kitchen are the same ones used in those Tokyo restaurants.

The result is a bill of fare featuring all sorts of genuine Japanese cuisine. The menu is extensive, eleven pages to be exact. There are sections for Appetizers from the Kitchen, Appetizers from the Sushi Bar, Soup, Salad, Sushi and Sashimi, Dinners from the Kitchen, Hibachi Dinners, Bento Box Dinners, and Desserts just to name a few.



There are 18 appetizers from the kitchen and six Sushi and Sashimi rolls from the Sushi bar. Each one is excellent in its own right. For example Gyoza (above, left) is pan fried dumplings with a special sauce. Harumaki are Japanese spring rolls stuffed with bok choy and carrots. There is Shrimp Tempura (above, right) and Yaki Tori Chicken on skewers with teriyaki sauce.



Then there is the exquisite Sashimi appetizer with 7 pieces of assorted raw fish each one with its own exciting flavor. My favorite starter is the Beef Tataki: scorched thinly sliced beef bathing in an enticing Ponzu Sauce (below). Ponzu is a popular marinade and dipping sauce. It is basically soy sauce with the addition of dried fish flakes to add richer flavor, mirin, a low alcohol rice wine for a touch of sweetness.



For those of you who are not seafood fans there are wonderful dinners like Chicken Teriyaki (left) with lightly battered sweet potato. There is also, Black Angus Choice Grade Filet Mignon Hibachi dinner, Chicken, Shrimp or Vegetable Tempura dinners or Chicken Katsu. This last one is a chicken cutlet with Tonkatsu which is a honey teriyaki sauce.



Now I see some of you may be wondering what these terms like Hibachi and Teppanyaki mean. Hibachi is actually a heating device containing charcoal but in the US it became to be thought of as an iron hot plate. On the other hand, Teppanyaki is a style of Japanese cooking using an iron griddle to grill, broil or pan fry. In the United States the words Hibachi and Teppanyaki have become synonymous. All of the usual foods cooked on Teppanyaki grills are available at Little Tokyo including beef, shrimp, scallops, lobster, chicken and assorted vegetables. Hibachi Steakhouses cook on Teppanyaki grills so in effect Little Tokyo is a Japanese Steakhouse only your dinners are cooked in the kitchen instead of at your table.



My favorite Hibachi dinner is the Little Tokyo Trio for Two (above). A huge plate of fried rice, chunks of shrimp, filet mignon and chicken plus vegetables is expertly stir fried in soybean oil and brought to the table for two people to enjoy together.

### Little Tokyo

300 N. Main Street, Galena, IL 61036, 815-777-8883

**HOURS:** Sun – Mon: 11 am – 9:00 pm, Tues: Closed, Wed – Thu: 11 am – 9 pm, Fri – Sat: 11 am – 9:30 pm

**DINING STYLE:** Casual **NOISE LEVEL:** Conversational

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Gyoza, Beef Tataki, Sashimi Appetizer, Kani Salad, Chicken Teriyaki, Sweetheart Roll, Tiger Roll, Romeo & Juliet Roll, Little Tokyo Trio, Bento Box, Dynamite Roll, Ice Cream Tempura, Cheese Cake Tempura, Mochi Ice Cream

**LIQUOR SERVICE:** Full Bar; Sake Bomb

**PRICES:** Appetizers: \$3.95 - \$10.95

Entrées: \$12.95 to \$30.00, Sushi: \$3.75 to \$17.95;

**PAY OPTIONS:** Cash, Debit, All Credit. No checks

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Front door and Restrooms

**KIDS POLICY:** Appetizers, Booster

**TAKE OUT:** Yes **DELIVERY:** No **CATERING:** Yes

**RESERVATIONS:** Yes **PARKING:** On street

Tempura is simply food that has been battered and deep fried. Michael prepares his own Tempura batter. He mixes it in small batches making sure it is neither too thin nor too thick and kept very cold by keeping it immersed in a cold water bath.

Teriyaki is a Japanese cooking technique where foods are broiled or grilled while being basted in a marinade. Here too, Michael prepares his own Teriyaki sauce in the traditional way mixing soy sauce, mirin, honey and sugar.

Michael is the Sushi Chef (Itamae) and he is skilled and supremely talented as well. Fresh, high quality fish does not make good Sushi unless it is in the hands of a professional artist.

Little Tokyo has done an excellent job of separating the menu into sections. You can easily identify which items are Sashimi and Sushi and which ones are raw or cooked.

The making of sushi and sashimi is a true art form. The Sushi chef (Itamae) is responsible for the freshness of the seafood, the exquisite slicing and the combinations of fish in each roll. There are subtle pairings of different cuts of seafood that provide for tantalizing flavors and appealing colors as well. This is what separates run of the mill sushi bars from great ones. Itamae Michael and Amy have one of the truly exceptional ones. In their restaurant there are over 60 rolls to choose from and every one is a masterpiece.



For example, the Sweetheart Roll is a combination of shrimp tempura, spicy tuna, avocado, snow crab, fish egg, tempura crunch wrapped in soybean paper with the chef's special sauce. Then there is the Tiger Roll made with tuna, salmon, eel, crunchy masago, and scallion served with eel and avocado sauce.

The Galena Narudo Roll is delicious! (above) It contains tuna, salmon, yellowtail, red snapper, white tuna, flying fish roe wrapped with cucumber. The Fire Dragon has snow crab, cucumber and avocado inside and cooked eel on the outside.

On a recent visit our waitress, Zoe Tang, who is from Shanghai, helped us pick our exciting and scrumptious assortment of Sushi. The 365ink tasting crew and I tried many different seafood items I would not have tried on my own. Not only did I like all of them but I found many to be delightful. Like, for example, Kristina's Romeo and Juliet Roll: a tantalizing lobster tail tempura inside and snow crab on top!



Ordering a Bento Box (above) is a good idea when you want to try a few different things with a tantalizing array of flavors. A Bento is a tray with individual compartments for separating an assortment of delicacies. They are available for lunch or dinner. I recently had an excellent lunch with a Bento containing Teriyaki white meat chicken, fried rice, dumplings, California roll, broccoli, baby corn and orange slices.



Don't forget the desserts! The Cheese Cake Tempura is so creamy and the Mochi Ice Cream Balls are a real treat. Mochi is pounded sticky rice with an ice cream filling. The Ice Cream Tempura is always a good choice too. The ice cream in both of these desserts is red bean. In Japan a paste is prepared from the red azuki bean and is as popular there as chocolate is here.

Oh, and one more rule: have a great time! Start your evening with a beer or sake bomb and then order some hot sake to go with your Teppanyaki or try cold filtered sake with Sushi or sip some green tea (agari).



When drinking sake say "Kanpai" (con-pie) which means "empty your glass" and gulp it down. When you are leaving Little Tokyo say thank you to your Itamae and server by saying Domo Arigato (doe-mow ary-ga-to) or thank you for the meal Gochisosama Deshita (go-chee-so-sama deshee-ta)!

