

Friday, May 3, 2002

Izmi Sure To Make Splash in Sushi World

By Anne Hillerman

For the Journal

Izmi is unimposing from the outside. You'd think it was just another storefront restaurant in a shopping center with a red neon "sushi" sign. Inside, you'll find delicious fresh sushi, friendly service and a serene space in which to enjoy it.

Santa Fe already had at least four Japanese restaurants before Izmi opened about four months ago. Competition for people's out-to-eat money is intense. To survive, you have to know what you're doing, especially if you're the new kid in the game. Watch for Izmi to pull ahead of some of its rivals and introduce more Santa Fe diners to the pleasures of sushi.

If the idea of raw fish leaves you cold, you can still eat sushi. Many wonderful varieties come to you warm, have no fish at all or are made with cooked fish. The popular California roll, for instance, has crab and avocado among its ingredients.

Izmi has applied for a license to serve beer and sake and for now offers a variety of hot tea, iced tea and soft drinks. With our beverages we received a small bowl of kimpira gobo, marinated burdock root, to share. The chestnut colored matchstick pieces were mildly flavored, a little salty with a slight crunch.

Next came bowls of miso soup with spoons for us Americans. The warm savory broth was just right.

Since we knew we wanted sushi, we started with an appetizer of shrimp tempura selected from about a dozen choices. We received four shrimp magically cut to make long strips. I found the batter a little heavy, but my son had no complaints. Accompanied by a tasty dipping sauce, they disappeared in a hurry.

The menu offers some salad choices — spicy squid and spicy tuna as well as a seaweed salad and the house salad — but we moved on to sushi. Izmi has all the traditional favorites with prices in the standard \$3.50-and-up range. Inspired by the enthusiastic descriptions provided by our waiter, we tried two of Izmi's special rolls. Wow!

The Crazy Train included tempura yellowtail, masago (smelt eggs), spicy tuna, cucumber and cooked eel. At \$12, it seemed pricey, but as soon we saw it, we knew we had our money's worth. A roll sliced into about a dozen pieces, the reddish orange of the spicy

Izmi Sushi Restaurant

WHERE: 720 St.
Michael's Drive, 424-
1311

ATMOSPHERE:
Calming and understated
FOOD: Sushi and other
choices

PRICE: \$3.50 for two
pieces of several sushis;
up to \$42 for a 30-piece
sashimi combination

SERVICE: Friendly
and courteous

HOURS: 11:30-2 p.m.
Monday-Saturday and
5:30-9:30 p.m. Monday-
Thursday and until 10
p.m. Friday and Saturday.
Closed Sundays.

tuna, garnished with sesame seeds, was as attractive as it was delicious. The interior crunch of the yellowtail added a nice textural element.

Our other choice was Paradise, one of the evening's two specials. When sushi lovers go to heaven, they won't be disappointed to find this on the menu. Beginning with scallop tempura, the roll also has crisp cucumber, avocado and other ingredients. The final layer includes more fresh fish and beautiful orange masago mixed with a light Japanese-style mayonnaise that gives them better sticking power. The crunch of the warm, pungent scallops, the cool cucumber, the salty flavor bursts of the masago create a memorable combination. Also priced at \$12, it was more than I could eat.

On an earlier visit, we enjoyed another of Izmi's special sushi, my all-time favorite for now: the Caterpillar. Unagi, or grilled eel, cucumber and masago join the rice inside. Then comes the seaweed wrapper and on top of it more fish and avocado sliced thinly enough to make a green skin for the little fellow. The sushi chef even added some tiny octopus on cucumber slivers as antennae! What an amazing way to play with your food.

Although sushi is king here, Izmi has other choices. Korean barbecued ribs, teriyaki, tempura, ginger beef and panko — fish and seafood rolled in bread crumbs and fried — are on the menu ranging from \$11.95 to \$15.95. They come with soup, salad and rice. On a previous visit, we tried the Udon Tempura, a combination of seven pieces of tempura — three shrimp, four vegetables — and a family-size bowl of warm noodle soup.

We finished our meal with a bowl of ginger ice cream. Its cool, creamy sweetness with a touch of spice added another wonderful flavor to the evening's repertory.

Diners sit at tables, with a few at the sushi bar. You won't find private tatami booths, but the acoustics and spacing allow for private conversations. Fresh flowers and low candles adorn the tables. An attractive wood and paper screen blocks the view of the parking lot. Framed prints and tall potted plants add to the decor. Natural wood, white walls and table cloths give the restaurant a clean, modern look.

As we waited for our check (not long, the service was quick and pleasant), my son noted that most of the diners seemed to know the family who runs the place.

"I bet once you eat here, you keep coming back," he said.
He's right.

Our dinner for two, with shared appetizer, dessert and iced tea, was \$37 before tip.

Copyright 2002 Albuquerque Journal
[Click for permission to reprint \(PRC# 3.4676.671972\)](#)