



Top Left:
Sashimi Appetizer
Top Right:
Snapping
Samurai Roll

Genki Noodles and Sushi

My introduction to the world of sushi came more than a decade ago with a friend who also happened to be a former chef at one of the best sushi restaurants in Los Angeles at the time. With all of his chef friends behind the sushi bar, one Japanese dish after the other made its way in front of me until all parties felt that I had been properly initiated. That's also coincidentally the first night I ever tried sake, and though it's hard to say for sure which came first the raw quail egg or the sake, one thing is for certain: If there's one culinary category that causes my heart to significantly rise above the average pitter-patter, it's sushi — well, at least until cookies become a bona fide culinary category.

In the meantime, I am perfectly content with a pair of chopsticks in hand and copious amounts of Japanese food in sight. My latest discovery happens to be an old favorite for many. Anchoring the recently renovated commercial space now known as The Prado, located just inside I-285 on Roswell Road, is Genki Noodles and Sushi. Following in the footsteps of its highly successful 13-year-old predecessor of the same name, Genki's sister dining destination in Sandy Springs delivers to the

suburbs what Buckhead residents have known since 1996: The food here is fabulous. Both ventures are owned by Reid Zeising, who fell in love with Japanese cuisine as a youngster living in Tokyo and vowed to share his passion with Atlantans by serving some of the very same food that enriched his own life years ago. At Genki, aptly named for the feelings of comfort, health and happiness, patrons are treated to a downright delicious dose of each.

Start your Japanese journey with an appetizer, or two, beginning with the Citrus *Ponzu* Escolar. Refreshing with a perfectly balanced flavorful kick at the end, it is easy to see why these thinly sliced rectangles of escolar served with a cilantro and *ponzu* sauce are such a crowd favorite. Another recommendation from our well-versed waitress was the Cheese *Kari Kari*, a blend of crab, cream cheese and scallions wrapped in a light pastry and served with wasabi cream and sweet ginger soy sauce. These were good and perhaps best described as what I imagine to be the Japanese version of an American mozzarella stick, only creamy instead of stringy. It's worth noting here that the appetizers alone could constitute a fine meal considering the range of options, but resist this temptation as more gastronomic gems await.

While my husband was scooping Hawaiian marinated tuna sashimi from his *Ahi Poki* dish onto crispy house-made wonton chips, I was fishing for noodles. Allowing my adventurous palate to wander, I chose the *Nabeyaki Udon*, a traditional Japanese soup in which Tempura fried shrimp, spinach, shitake mushrooms, chicken and a fish cake all share space in a broth-filled cast iron bowl topped with an egg. It was here after several courses that I decided to take a break and

throughout this 3,500-square foot restaurant decorated in bright colors and playful prints, nothing will draw your attention away from the menu more quickly than the visually arresting jellyfish tank.

That is until a plate of specialty rolls enters your line of sight and instantly entices you to order a few of your own.

The toughest decision is simply deciding which of the many specialty rolls to try. To that, I wish you good luck. The Reid roll, for example, boasts spicy chopped salmon and lettuce topped with seared Angus filet and avocado with spicy garlic sauce. In addition to the countless specialty rolls available daily, new roll creations that are not found on the menu debut each month. According to Genki sushi chefs, the monthly masterpiece for March will be the Blossom Roll.

While creatively inspired and artfully presented meals are to be expected, one surprise for me was the impressive wine list. Getting wine that revolves around varietal integrity and value isn't what you'd expect of a Japanese restaurant, yet as luck would have it, Zeising is a wine aficionado who enjoys sharing his finds. *Vino* lovers are the norm mid-week at both Genki locations for Wine Wednesdays, where you can explore a number of options like handpicked organic and sustainable wines priced from \$12 to \$24.

As a mom of a 4-year-old sushi lover, I love Genki just as much for its children's menu as for the adult menu. Rather than the unhealthy and oh-so-boring options typically offered for children regardless of the type of restaurant, Genki truly tries to involve them in the dining experience. Choices range from a kid's California Roll packed with shrimp, avocado and crab to Chicken *Yakitori* Sticks, grilled chicken on a stick with sweet sauce accompanied by noodles or rice. Of course, a scoop of fried ice cream comes with the kids' meal and is one of the divine dessert options for adults as well. If only I had room.

— Reviewed by Heather KW Brown

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