

Proper sushi at a snip



Musashi Noodles and Sushi Bar 15 Capel Street Music: Low level background jazz Facilities: Small, and downstairs, but perfect Food provenance: None Wheelchair access: Yes, but no wheelchair bathroom

Japanese food at reasonable prices – this Capel Street restaurant could show others how it should be done, writes **CATHERINE CLEARY**

SUSHI MIGHT GO down as a memory from the time of bling. The sushi years: when children helped themselves to lollipop-coloured plates from a conveyor belt until the bill for lunch nudged €100. When a portion of under-ripe avocado rolled in sugared rice tasted as plastic as the box in which it came. A time of thumb splinters from disposable chopsticks, soy sauce dribbles down your silk tie.

Sushi made its way west, shedding the orderly calm of its Japanese origins and becoming a gimmick food. Nothing said “young urbanite” like knowing how to eat your edamame beans with chopsticks. Apart from a few smaller operations, the sushi experience here has been dominated by British chain Yo! Sushi in

Dundrum and Dublin city centre.

Now there's a new minnow in the water, a place where you can sit down in peace and eat good sushi, and very good Japanese food. The real difference, which leaps out at you, is that this is excellent value.

“We must have spent €50 by now,” I say at one point, scanning the small table full of food. “No,” says my more mathematically adept husband, “not even close.”

We're at Musashi Noodles and Sushi Bar on Dublin's Capel Street. It's near the river end of this long street. The grey-fronted place is a simple, long, narrow sushi bar done out with a twin row of pale pine tables and stools that look like they could double as step ladders. Red circular cushions are dotted around to make it a bit more colourful (and comfortable). It's a bring-your-own bottle place (with €4 corkage on wine) and we're directed to the nearby Spar where beer can be bought (with an offer from the friendly waiter to go himself if we wish). We start with china cups of free green tea.

A Sakura sushi selection costs €7. Sakura is the Japanese cherry blossom, the tree that prompts hanami or the spring pilgrimage of families flocking to picnic under the frothy canopy of pink and white blossom. At this time of year the blossom pattern is tracked from south to north like a weather front by Japanese forecasters.

The Sakura sushi comes on a miniature wooden bench with the typical sushi repertoire, including mackerel, strapped on with a safety belt of seaweed, salmon, tuna and a rippling tentacle of squid. There's a mound of pink pickled ginger and small hill of wasabi. It all smells fresh and is very tasty. The salmon has those seams of fat that tell you this was probably a farm-reared fish. But that's sushi in Ireland: most probably farmed, then frozen, sliced and diced.

I feel I might have grown out of sushi, having loved it for years. But the other dishes here are simply great. Liam's house tempura is a huge bamboo platter of delicious vegetables fried in a flaky, crisp batter. Among the flash-fried vegetables are slices of sweet potato, aubergine, red pepper, luscious courgette strips and, magically, a tempura oyster.

The gyoza are gorgeous parcels of flavour that combine the textures of crispness and clamminess just perfectly. In lesser places gyoza have the consistency of meat paste in a condom. Here they've had a combination of steaming and pan-frying, so the base of the wrapper has crisped brilliantly. There are plenty of gyoza on each plate – both pork and prawn (with a fiery chilli content). At less than €5 a plate, they're brilliant value.

Kushikatsu is a deep-fried strip of pork on a stick that's as delicious as it sounds. Edamame beans come with flakes of moreish salt that take the green, healthy edge off them just a bit.

With a large mango smoothie and a bottle of lager from Spar, a dinner that leaves us too full for dessert comes to €38.85.

Musashi (the name comes from a legendary 16th-century Japanese swordsman) loses nothing in translation, delivering great Japanese food, without gimmicks, for the price of a burger and chips.