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Freshness of Hokkaido all year round

NEW RESTAURANT

Hokkaido Sushi Restaurant

M Hotel Level 9

81 Anson Road

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TWICE a week, or even more, Japanese restaurants will tell you, shipments of glistening fresh seafood are flown in from Tsukiji market in Tokyo - the mecca of fish, the place that all tuna go to and proclaim 'I have arrived', albeit reluctantly.

Move over Tsukiji, because seafood from Hokkaido is finding its way directly into town without having to transit through Tokyo - and that means a year round supply of that prefecture's bountiful produce without having to wait for an Isetan promotion.

A little over a month old, Hokkaido Sushi does as its name says - almost all its seafood, fruit and vegetables come directly from Hokkaido via a supplier in Sapporo and by the end of this month, a chef from Hokkaido will also start work creating sushi that is indigenous to the area.

Although August isn't the best month for seasonal produce - the best is autumn - there's still a lot of good stuff to eat. Top of the list would be the famous Hokkaido crab, served cold with no sauce or condiments - just sweet succulent flesh accentuated with rich creamy roe. There are two kinds available - the more familiar Alaskan king crab and the horsehair crab, that is, the Japanese equivalent of hairy crab.

While the restaurant menu is a comprehensive one offering everything from sashimi to teppanyaki to robatayaki, one should ideally spring for the omakase to get the best of the season.

The price ranges from \$80 to \$200 and besides the crab, you get opening nibbles such as some very addictive deep fried baby shrimp and strips of dried leatherjacket fish. For a touch of luxury, there is a flat claypot filled with foie gras and crabmeat chawanmushi - this muddy brown custard doesn't have the smooth silken texture of regular egg custard, but its intense foie gras flavour with bits of crabmeat in a slight grainy textured custard is delicious, if not refined.

A highlight would have to be the sashimi. An ala carte \$60 plate will get you a decent sized assortment of thickly cut pieces of white fish from Hokkaido, sweet prawn, fatty toro (tuna), crunchy deep fried prawn heads and the piece de resistance: clean, fresh, sublime uni (sea urchin). With no trace of smell, just a

clean taste of the sea, this is the best season for uni, and Hokkaido has the best of the lot. You don't find this quality anywhere except the super high-end restaurants, and here. Incidentally, fresh fish days are Tuesday and Friday, if you want to be guaranteed of the freshness.

The seafood is best enjoyed sashimi style, because while the sushi is adequate, the rice texture and temperature aren't in the optimum range to do justice to the fish.

If raw fish isn't your thing, the cooked food here should do the trick. A grilled pacific saury is clean, sweet and super fresh, if chock full of bones, but as executive chef/owner Thomas Kok gently admonishes, 'If it doesn't have bones it's not a fish, it's a jelly fish!'

Chef Kok has been in the Japanese restaurant business since 1981 when he started as a 17-year-old apprentice. He also owns Tomo Fine Dining in Marina Square and is one of the pioneer local sushi chefs, along with the other chefs at Hokkaido Sushi. Still, because Hokkaido has so much seafood 'that I haven't seen before', it's imperative to bring in a native chef who knows exactly what to do with them.

You can of course wait for him to come. But even if you don't, a session at Hokkaido Sushi - or at least the uni - will still be worth it now.

Rating: **7/10**

By **Jaime Ee**

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