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Tokyo Sugoi! - Episode 1 by Steve Gillick

Lunchtime Umai in Tokyo



Vegetable curry at Curry no mise hachigatsu in Shimokitazawa. Photo by Steve Gillick, Talking Travel

In Japanese, Umai is a casual way of saying 'oishi' or 'delicious'. You might taste a piece of ultra-fresh sushi composed of delicate ikura (salmon eggs) on vinegared rice, wrapped in fresh nori (seaweed), and remark to the chef, "Umai", as you close your eyes and savour the delicate mouthfeel.

On our 21st visit in November 2023, we followed our routine of trying new foods, visiting favourite restaurants from past visits, and finding plentiful opportunities to say "Umai".



Cold Soba Noodles at Okina Soba in Asakusa. Photo by Steve Gillick, Talking Travel

Our choice for evening dinners is seafood, but for lunch, we like to expand our food horizons by checking out neighbourhood hot spots, often identified by the lineups to get in. At Okina Soba in Asakusa, the speciality is handmade cold soba noodles (made with buckwheat flour). They top the dish with thick dollops of nori and provide a special soy-based sauce (tsuyu) for dipping the noodles. The portions are impressive, and the taste is massive.

Another noteworthy Soba place in Shimbashi has the humorous name, "Why do people put spicy oil in their soba?" (Naze sobani raayu wo irerunoka). Cold soba noodles are mixed with spicy oil and topped with seaweed, bamboo, sesame seeds, scallions, a raw egg, and Shrimp Tempura. So good!



Soba in Spicy Oil, at Naze sobani raayu wo irerunoka, in Shimbashi. Photo by Steve Gillick, Talking Travel

In Ningyocho, the tiny, highly-rated restaurant Tempura Nakayama serves Tendon (Tempura Donburi). This tempura (lightly battered) seafood dish is on a fluffy bed of rice with vegetables and a mouthwatering sauce. It's incredibly tasty.



Chicken Curry at Curry no mise hachigatsu in Shimokitazawa. Photo by Steve Gillick, Talking Travel

And in Shimokitazawa, Tokyo's curry capital, lunch at Curry no mise Hachigatsu features flavourful, mildly spicy, creamy-textured chicken and vegetable curry. You want to say 'wow' after each bite.

Culinary bliss is part of the joy of visiting Tokyo, one of the world's top foodie destinations. Adventurous travellers can create opportunities to say "Umai" at every meal.



Steve Gillick loves to travel and loves to talk to people who love to talk about travel. He's been at it since 1967 when he visited nine European destinations on a school trip. Steve has had over 360 articles published in consumer and travel trade publications. To date he has explored 85 countries and over 750 destinations. He recently returned from his 21st trip to Japan. Steve is the author of *A Symphony of Camels: Travel Adventures & Conversations Around the World*, available on Amazon.com

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