

EAT + DRINK

OSAKA

— Known as “the nation’s kitchen”, this Japanese city boasts 96 Michelin-starred restaurants as well as countless hole-in-the-wall gems. Katie Lockhart seeks out the best of both —



SAUCE BOSS



> SAUCE BOSS.

Oozing hipster cool, this bar in the Shinsaibashi shopping hub boasts one of the largest craft beer selections in town. That's not all, their gourmet chicken wings are epic. Pair a local beer like Doppo with burgers, fresh cut fries or one of their signature wings – they have 18 different flavours to choose from – and you're all set.

sauceboss.jp

> BAR CUE'S.

Located in the heart of uptown Kita, this Osaka institution has been serving delicious cocktails with fruit and herbal liquors for nearly 30 years. Sleek yet relaxed, the 20-seat bar is perfect for a post-dinner nightcap.

cues-club.com/bar

> BAR K.

Styled like a moody New York bar with dark wood counters, this intimate venue, located a 10-minute walk from Osaka Station, is one of the city's best whisky bars. Find an impressive selection from around the world and quality Japanese whiskeys, plus impeccable cocktails. A cover charge applies (about \$7.50).

bar-k.jp/index.php

best bars

> GAME BAR GEEBEE.

A recent addition to the Shinsaibashi neighbourhood's game bar scene, this community-focused arcade offers a fun vibe and affordable prices. For about \$6 per hour, you can play all the modern electronic games or old-school board games you want, with unlimited soda and small portions of traditional Japanese curry and rice. The alcoholic drinks cost a measly \$4.80 extra. Come here for a truly authentic experience with local food and drinks.

> ROOFTOP BAR OO.

A huge outdoor terrace in a luxury in the bustling Dotonbori district, so this seventh-floor sports bar and club is a rare find. A good time is guaranteed, whether you are cheering with fellow fans as you watch a baseball match on the 500-inch projector near the outdoor pool, dancing or just kicking back with a vodka tonic and a board game on one of the many couches.

oo-u.jp



BAR K

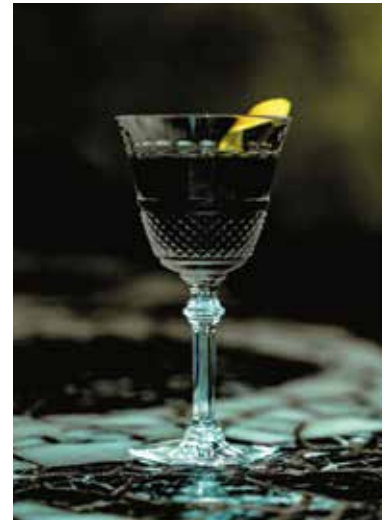


GET YOUR BEARINGS

Osaka is divided into two major urban districts, Kita and Minami, meaning north and south respectively. Most of the action is centred around these areas, with smaller neighbourhoods emerging around them.

secret

BAR NAYUTA



EK CHUAH

> OIMATSU KITAGAWA.

Located in a quiet, residential suburb of Kita, this Michelin-star restaurant serves kappo-style omakase kaiseki – a multi-course meal left up to the chef, using seasonal fish and local ingredients. The mystery of lifting the white cloth hanging over the door to walk down the cobblestone path into the warm, eight-seater dining room only enhances how special the whole experience feels.

oimatsukitagawa.com

> EK CHUAH.

Quality chocolate is not easy to find in Japan but this specialty shop and café is worth hunting down – just follow your nose to the aromas of sugar and chocolate wafting around the charming area of Karahori, Minami. Housed in a traditional two-storey wooden building, the cocoa haven stocks limited-edition chocolates in flavours such as hot wine and apple. The café's Theobroma cake made of milk chocolate with orange (kind of like a Jaffa) is not to be missed.

ek-chuah.co.jp

spots

> GANKO RAMEN JUHACHIDAIME.

Head to this locals' favourite tucked away down a small alley of the lively Namba neighbourhood (in lower Minami) for ramen ordered from a machine. Select perfectly cooked miso or salt ramen – an ideal pairing with fatty pork – and once you're done slurping it up, you may well be rewarded with a printout of personal Osaka recommendations from the helpful owner.

> GINZAYA.

It's standing room only at this hole in the wall, found down on the basement floor of the Osaka Ekimae Daiichi office building, a short hop from Osaka Station. Make like the local businessmen who come here after work for a few pints of Sapporo and izakaya (informal Japanese pub grub) and try the chicken karaage, beef tataki or calamari – you'll see why it's so popular.

> BAR NAYUTA.

If you can find it, one of the coolest underground bars in Osaka is hidden behind a tiny door at the end of a dark hallway, which you can identify from a cryptic emblem on the wall. Once you're inside this eclectic speakeasy in the flashy Shinsaibashi neighbourhood, tell the owner Hiro what type of alcohol you like, whether you like it sweet, savory, spicy or bitter and he will whip up a top-notch cocktail.

bar-nayuta.com



TRENDING

Gin cocktails are Japan's latest alcohol craze and at **Adee** in the Intercontinental Osaka hotel, you can sip on them while taking in jaw-dropping views of the city. icosaka.com/en/restaurant/adee



sushi central

> ENDO SUSHI.

Serving some of the city's finest fish for more than 100 years, this cosy, no-frills sushi mecca draws in the crowds for its top-quality market-fresh produce and attractive prices – you can get five pieces for about \$12. The original is located in the Central Fish Market but the newer outpost in Kyobashi's Keihan Mall, north of Osaka Castle, is just as good.

endo-sushi.com

> HARUKOMA SUSHI.

Join the queues outside this unpretentious eatery on the city's longest shopping street, Tenjinbashisuji Shotengai, to gain access into a bustling hub where chefs expertly prepare sushi and sashimi for the constant cycle of locals and tourists occupying the 30 or so seats. While the food and (potent) wasabi is as authentic as it gets, they have an English menu.



A STAR-STUDED SUPPER

One of four Osaka restaurants awarded three Michelin stars this year, **Taian** offers elaborate meals of gourmet dishes such as Japanese yellowtail sashimi served in an inviting setting, complete with a zen garden.

> SUSHIYOSHI.

With two Michelin stars, this Kita restaurant is a coveted reservation so make sure you book in advance (and save up) for one of only eight seats at the minimalist wooden table. Not exactly a traditional sushi experience, here it is a degustation-style three hour meal served by the friendly chef who explains each dish (with a few jokes thrown in).

> MAWARU GENROKU SUSHI.

The idea for the now ubiquitous sushi train, known as "kaiten", was created in 1958 after Yoshiaki Shiraishi – the founder of this shop – saw beer on a conveyor belt at an Asahi brewery and decided to implement it in his sushi restaurant. If you can't make it to the original in East Osaka, try one of its numerous offshoots dotted throughout the city to stack as many empty sushi plates as possible for as little as \$1.50 a pop. mawaru-genrokuzusi.co.jp

> KAWAUME.

Overseen by chef Takagi Kazuo, whose eponymous restaurant Takagi has held two Michelin stars eight years in a row, this new eatery in the Hilton Osaka in downtown Kita, offers sushi and kaiseki (multi-course meals). Watching the chefs beautifully plate each piece is as important a part of the experience as the food.

hiltonosaka.com



the classics

ZUBORAYA



DOTONBORI AKAONI

> CHIGUSA.

Specialising in okonomiyaki – savoury pancakes filled with cabbage, pork, tempura scraps and topped with mayo, bonito flakes, seaweed and deliciously sweet sauce – this Kita hotspot tucked away in a narrow side street is loved by locals and well off the typical tourist trail. The food is freshly cooked in front of you and super authentic.

> SUNSHINE CAFE.

This café has been cranking out fluffy, eggy Japanese-style pancakes for decades. Located in a basement near Umeda Station in Kita, it's become a no-frills breakfast institution (with great coffee). kissa-sunshine.jp

> DOTONBORI AKAONI.

Takoyaki is another insanely popular Osaka creation – a wheat flour ball filled with octopus and spring onion, topped with mayo, takoyaki sauce and bonito flakes. This one-dish wonder counter in the heart of lively Dotonbori has a red devil standing guard outside and was awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand (for eateries that offer good quality, good value food). The secret to their gastronomic success is probably the use of raw octopus instead of boiled (which is standard for this dish) in all their piping hot, made-to-order takoyaki. doutonbori-akaoni.com

> ZUBORAYA.

Fugu, or blowfish, is one of Japan's most dangerous foods and if prepared incorrectly it could mean a trip to the hospital. But at Zuboraya – the premier place in Dotonbori for expertly cut fugu since 1920 – you're in safe hands. Order the fish as sashimi or try a multi-course menu with fugu cooked several different ways – best enjoyed sitting crossed legged on tatami floor mats.



BIG IN JAPAN

Awajishima Burger in Nishinomiya (a 20-minute metro ride from Osaka Station) is known for having some of the best burgers in Japan. Made with Awaji Island beef (where Kobe comes from), these burgers are worth the trek. web-joho.com/awaji

> KUSHIKATSU DARUMA.

The Japanese dish kushikatsu – deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables, usually served with a communal dipping sauce – was born right here in the gritty Shinsekai neighborhood of Minami. You can find them on just about every street corner here but this chain, dating back to 1929, is one of the most famous. They also do mean a deep-fried cheese (mmm!). Whatever you do, don't double dip – it's a sanitary rule strictly enforced by the staff. kushikatsu-daruma.com/tenpo_doutonbori.html