

Japanese Food Culture of Japan Japan Food List Question

What are some of the weirdest things the Japanese cuisine has to offer?

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18 Answers



James Calbraith, Wrote a series of novels about Japan's history, visited Japan several times

Written Apr 13, 2014

My personal favourite: savoury ice-cream parfait in Karafuneya, Kyoto :)

一風変わったパフェはいかがですか・・・？



Fench fries Parfait

もりもりポテトフライパフェ

メガランチポテトのパフェが完成しました！
あつあつポテトとソフトクリームやチョコアイ
ス、ホイップクリームとの相性は抜群です。
フルーツいっぱいのかわいらしいパフェです。



American dog Parfait

魅惑のアメリカンドッグパフェ

まさかのアメリカンドッグをパフェに乗せて
しました！！
サクサクの衣がパフェと良く合います！



Fried prawns Parfait

最強エビフライパフェ

贅沢に、エビを2尾乗せました！！
ソースとタルタルソースももちろんかかって
います。試す価値アリの美味しさです！！



Fried chicken Parfait

からあげパフェ

各メディアでも取上げて頂いた、ジューシーな
からあげと、サクサクな食感が嬉しい鶏皮チッ
プスを乗せた、からあげパフェ。
ファンのお客様も多く、もはやからふね屋の

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定番アイテムとなりました。



Fried pork cutlet Parfait
サクサクローズかつパフェ

サクサクのローズかつを乗せた、これまた定番となったローズかつパフェ。ソースのしょっぱさとアイスの甘味が良く合うのです。

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Stuart J Walton, lives in Japan

Written Jan 27, 2015 · Upvoted by Garrick Saito, [the Katsu King](#), a highly accomplished student of Japanese food and cooking.



My first (and only) experience eating *ikizukuri* (*eaten while live*) fish, still haunts me over 30 years later.



Typical Tokyo sushi restaurant

I was at a sushi restaurant with a Japanese friend who had previously displayed an interest in outraging my western sensibilities with all kinds of rarities such as those suggested by [Sed Chapman](#), above.

My friend asked if I'd ever tried *ikizukuri sashimi*. Reluctant to confess I didn't know what "ikizukuri" meant, I said no, but offered that I'll try anything once.

He informed the chef who plucked a fish from a tank, plonked it down on his cutting board and with a few swift strokes proceeded to slice the meat from the bone all down one side.



First cut, skimming the backbone

He flipped the fish over and did the same on the other side, leaving a head and tail joined by a clearly visible backbone.



Edible fillets prior to being finished

The fish was frantically writhing, opening and closing its mouth in what looked like (and probably was) sheer horror. To me, it seemed he was looking right at me and directing the blame for his current, terrible predicament onto me.

The chef cleaned the two fillets in moments and began chopping them into perfectly formed, equal-sized morsels. He then pierced the head and tail with a bamboo skewer, forming a bowl, into which he dropped the still-writhing flesh of the fish.



The end result

Less than 2 minutes before, that fish had been swimming around in a tank with his

mates, enjoying life. Now he was dying on a plate a foot from my face, enduring the ultimate indignity of watching me and my friend eat his still-quivering flesh. As the life slowly but visibly ebbed from the fish he seemed to take one last look at me and opened his mouth. I'm no fish lip-reader, and maybe I am just tarding up this tale, but it sure looked like he was saying "You bastard! You could've said no! "



You could've said no!

Verdict

It was exceptionally fresh and it really did almost melt in the mouth. Some of the cuts even gave a slight tingle on the tongue, like an almost exhausted 9 volt D-battery. I reckon that was caused by frantic messages zapping up and down through the dying nerves. It was a sharpish, somewhat pleasant sensation, not at all like the deadening effect of eating puffer fish (fugu) which reduces your tongue to a thick block of felt and your lips to two big floppy inner tubes.



Puffer fish (before)



Puffer fish (after)

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Kiyo Ouchida-Sharif, Half-Japanese raised in a Japanese household.

Updated Aug 29 · Upvoted by Garrick Saito, the Katsu King, a highly accomplished student of Japanese food and cooking.



Imagine a beverage concocted from partially masticated (chewed) rice, spit into a vessel where it reacts to mold? Or how about gutted raw fish packed into wooden crates with salt, rice, and vinegar and then fermented for six months to year?

Sound weird? I've just described the origins of Sake and Sushi, two of the most popular Japanese culinary creations to westerners.

Sake is said to originate in the Nara period (710-794 AD) as "[Kuchikami-zake](#)" (liquor made by chewing with one's mouth)." Ancient Japanese would chew boiled rice with saliva in their mouths in order to take in wild yeast from the air to ferment the mixture, then spit it out into large barrels to make alcohol, a primitive brewing method that is in fact still used today by Peruvians to make the traditional alcoholic corn drink "[chicha](#)". Rest assured, modern day sake is NOT brewed according to this method any longer, but from a mechanical process utilizing a mix of polished and cooked rice, water, and *kōji* mold (麹), similar to brewing beer (but with Japanese mold in place of yeast, if you find that weird you can throw out your cheese and yogurt too, anyway)

As for the rotted fish carcasses fermented for a half year- that's [Narezushi](#), an ancient descendent of today's modern sushi which IS still made and enjoyed, particularly in [Shiga Prefecture](#). In ancient Japan, gutted fish was preserved and fermented in salted rice (the rice was later thrown out) to preserve a supply of protein for the winter months. Later, the development of rice vinegar sped the fermentation process and eliminated the need to salt and throw out the rice. The Edo period (16 and 1700s) saw the creation of *haya-zushi* (早寿司, 早ずし,) or "fast sushi" and nigiri sushi (individual rice balls with topping) : unfermented sushi made with fish rice, fish, and sometimes vegetables in vinegar, designed to be eaten quickly with fingers or chopsticks, and the sushi we eat today is a "fast food" based on this Edo period invention.

Now, as you can see, many of the most common Japanese foods have "weird" origins, but what about the weirdest thing you can sit down and order today? That would probably be [sea urchin](#): you are, after all, eating the (often raw and live) reproductive organs of a spiny undersea creature, possibly [straight out of its spiked exoskeleton](#).

Another contender would be [fugu](#), or blowfish. As any [Simpson fan](#) worth their

salt knows: that shit can kill you. If that wasn't wierd enough, there's the attendant death fetishism that surrounds a traditional fugu meal in Japan: you enter a restaurant bedecked with lanterns made from dead, puffed up fugu, you start with a main course of venomous spines soaked in sake which temporarily paralyz and sting the mouth and lips (its also said to be an aphrodisiac...) and a main course may consist of [myriad thin layers of raw fugu spread out in the shape of a chrysanthemum, the Japanese flower symbolizing death](#). ☞In the west we typically don't like to think of death while we eat, Japan makes it part of the attraction!(just don't drop your chopsticks, it's a symptom of fugu poisoning and people WILL freak out).

Finally, I'd like to close this answer with a look on a few other Japanese foods and what they tell us of "relative" levels of weirdness and how whether a food is "weird" or "normal" is something very culturally conditioned:

First up is... fried octopus balls or Takoyaki (蛸焼) They are tiny pieces of octopus meat drenched in batter then fried in little round molds, topped with mayo and soy sauce and eaten with a toothpick. If that sounds gross or weird, I GUARANTEE you've never tried them: takoyaki are fucking awesome, they taste like the most amazing perfect little cornpup balls full of yummy and win you will ever popped in your mouth... but to many westerners the concept of "deep fried octopus balls" sounds bizarre. That's ironic because the actual flavor and texture of takoyaki (deep fried, crunchy, drizzled with fatty mayo and salty nori) is far more similar to western fast foods than anything you could order at a sushi restaurant. My advice is to try some sometime.

Finally... consider tempura. One of the most accessible Japanese dishes (basically rice-flour fried shrimp and vegetables) is not only not really Japanese in origin, but has its roots in perceived culinary "weirdness" on two sides: you see, in the 16th century, the Japanese welcomed a group of Portuguese traders onto the island. Being strict Catholics, the Portuguese were forbidden from eating meat on Fridays, and so turning to the Japanese were given raw sashimi, the Portuguese in turn said "fuck that" and proceeded to fry the raw fish into little fritters using eggs and flour. The Japanese were taken with the novelty and "weirdness" of fried seafood and the dish spread, known today as "tempura" for either the Latin "tempora" or possibly "temple"- equated with the sailors "temporal" weekly dietary restrictions and the religious nature of those restrictions, tempura as we know it became popular in the same era of food stall "fast food" as did the modern nigiri and roll sushi.

Finally, if we define "wierdness" as something unique to a particular culture as opposed to other dominant cultures, I would say the "wierdest", as in, most "Japanese" foods (bugs and living sea monsters aside) would actually be these:



Umeboshi 梅干 ☞, a notorious form of Japanese Tskemono (pickle). we take one of the sweetest fruits in nature, the plum, bury it in salt and vinegar, and transform it into this salty sour monster, turning it into an intense "war-head" type of salivary shock-bomb, and then eat them followed up immediately with a mouthful of rice. I would also point to the "weird" Japanese practice of ending a meal with a Tskukemono or pickle course, rather than desert- although this is on the decline (I

remember my grandmother lamenting at a well-known San Jose Japantown restaurant serving tsukemono pickles as an appetizer rather than a post-meal aperitif- truly a “sign of the times”.)

Finally, something I consider the MOST uniquely Japanese dish, yet one slightly more accessible to western palates, I present this lovely bowl of nom: Chazuke, literally just “green tea over rice”- consisting of gen mai green tea (brewed with toasted rice bran), white rice, and chazuke mix- usually including nori, salt, and krisp rice biscuit:



Now, this dish is possibly not the wierdest”, but definitely the Japanese-est- it’s what my mother would describe as “Japanese soul food”, and it is really unique- you wouldn’t imagine westerners pouring a cafinated beverage like hot coffee over their cornflakes and adding lots of salt, would you? Yet the flavor is simple, elegant, and very much like the Japanese soul, so much so that Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu (basically the Terrence Malick to Kuwosawa’s Spielberg) titled one of his films **The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice** or *Ochazuke no aji* (お茶漬けの味) (Kuwosawa, years later, made a snide comment that foriegners found Japanese films to dry and bland like- you guessed it- green tea over rice) . You can enjoy chazuke at home, too, no acquired taste required (unlike ume): you simply need good Japanese white rice (botan or koshuko rose are good), genmaicha green tea (the cheap Japanese green tea with puffed rice and sometimes popcorn in it), and a bag like this of delicious chazuke mix:



Well! I hope that helps in some way and sheds some light on different cultural norms of “weirdness” and what I consider some of the “wierder”, most Japanese foods. Now I’m hungry, probably gonna heat up some white rice and polish off a couple homemade Ume :p

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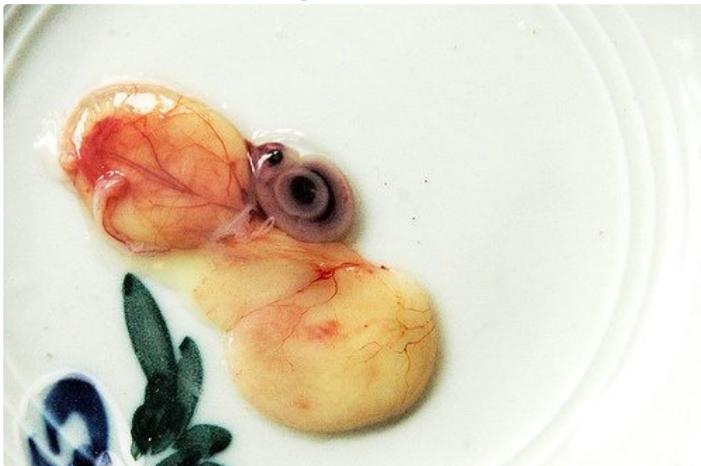
Written Jan 11, 2015 · Upvoted by Garrick Saito, the Katsu King, a highly accomplished student of Japanese food and cooking.

I address the "weird" food at the end, but as far as "interesting" food that has not been mentioned in previous answers, one of my favorites was a whole raw squid that came out on the plate cut into slices, but still shaped like the squid. Each piece was completely severed from the others, but each of them moved perfectly in time as if the squid was swimming - i.e. the first slice moved, then the second, then the third, fourth, etc. When you put the tentacles on your tongue, they wrap around and suction to it. It was very interesting, but I have to admit it did not taste "special", it simply tasted like the soy sauce it was dipped in. This video is prepared and presented a little differently than what I experienced, but give the basic idea



Another memorable one was Mamushi (a poison snake). When it was skinned we found its still developing egg sacks. This was delicious. We also had the pleasure of eating the raw gall-bladder which is supposed to be pretty good for you.

[What Gaijin Eat: Cute Little Viper Babies \(and their mothers\)](#) ↗





As for "weird", considering how much amazing food is affordable and available, I have to say the some of the "weirdest" things I have seen people eat in Japan is McDonalds (just... why?) and other low quality fast food, including Japanese chains such as Yoshinoya Gyudon (beef on rice that tastes even cheaper than it costs, and is therefore quite frightening). Instant ramen? Again... when there is so much great ramen here, WHY?

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 **Isaac Hsu**, lived in Japan
Written Jan 4



I used think that Chinese eat weird stuff. Then I got introduced to some food in Japan. Here were a few things that I had trouble swallowing, even with the help of lots of alcohol...

Basashi (馬刺し · raw horse meat) - Originated in Kyushu during the battle for Kumamoto Castle in 1877 when samurais were under siege in the castle for 53 days. With no food left, they resorted to eating raw horse meat so it became a Kyushu delicacy. It's now pretty common throughout Japan. How would I describe it? One word, "chewy".



Nankotsu Kurokoshou Itame (軟骨黒胡椒炒め · stir fry black pepper chicken)

cartilage) - The only cooked dish on this list, it was a soft/crunchy texture. After one or two pieces, you're ready to move onto the next dish... It's a late night drinking food (and hopefully you're already pretty drunk by then.)



Koi no arai (鯉の洗い · carp sashimi) - The carp is sliced up and “washed” in ice water to lock in a “crunchy” texture. Popular in Kyoto, it is served in the summer as a cooling food. It definitely had what the Japanese call 泥臭い (*dorokusai* / mud stench.) I don't think I managed more than three slices before calling it quits. BTW, while carp is considered a garbage fish in the US, it is a prized fish in Asia.



Nama rebaa (生レバー · raw pork/beef liver) - A friend took me to one of those narrow, back alleys in Shinjuku and told me I had to try it because it's sooo good... I knew it would be fresh and safe, but that was not the point. I got queasy just looking at it. Not wanting to be a bad sport, I stared at it for a long while then put it in my mouth and chewed. Then I washed it down with lots of *shochu*. It was definitely “crunchy”...



Kobukuro sashi (子袋刺し · raw pork uterus) - Yup, you read that correctly! The same guy who had me eat the raw liver introduced me to this in the same joint. I was starting to question my choice in friends... You sprinkle some *shichimi* (七味 · 7 color chili pepper) on it and wash it down with lots and lots of *shochu*, or at least I did! And what does it taste like you might ask? One word - "crunchy". Starting to see a pattern here with these food?



Buta no Kougan zashi (豚の睾丸刺し · raw pig testicle) - Yes, I'm admitting here to my fellow Quorans that I actually ate this. Remember, by this point I'd already had the raw liver and uterus - so what's one more right? Same friend, same joint, lots of *Shochu* AND, yes, it was "crunchy"!!! But hey, I lived to talk about it, right?



And once you know that these delicacies exist, you will start to realize that they're offered in way too many *Izakayas*... which means that Japanese are eating them!

And you thought the Chinese eat weird stuff - the majority of them would not touch any of the above.

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Sed Chapman, lives in Japan

Updated Jan 11, 2015 · Upvoted by Garrick Saito, the Katsu King, a highly accomplished student of Japanese food and cooking.



Weird Japanese food!

You know what they say, "when the eating gets weird, the pros go out to eat Japanese".

You've never heard that?



The following food AND story is true. Much of my stuff is fiction, this is not. Caution - not for the squeamish.

Japan has A LOT of weird and strange food. From the unfortunately named, 'octopus balls'



to sashimi places where you point at the fish you want to eat and zip-zip there it is cut up and still twitching.

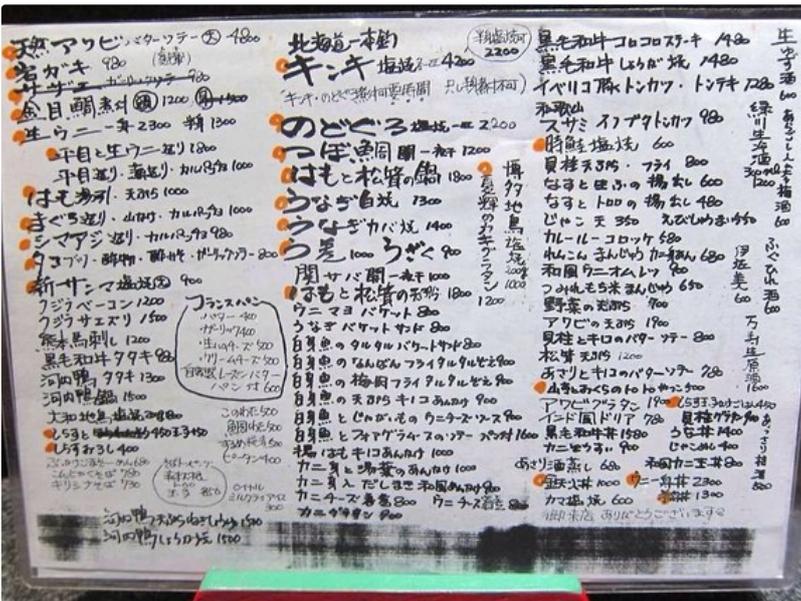


Sort of a death row meets fast food concept.

With so many to choose from I will choose just a few.

True story-

Many years ago I lived in a smallish town and when a new gaijin (foreigner) washed up, we would take them to an izakaya type place. It's a restaurant that has a large and sometimes exotic menu.



We would start with recognizable items and get gradually more exotic. Start with beer, chicken, and fries.



After a while we would bust out the weirdness and see how the newbie would react. The first weird item was often a bit of horse meat stew.



It is pretty innocuous and doesn't raise suspicion when viewed. We had some blanch a bit as they were asked, "So, how did you like the horse?" But it had already been eaten, so there wasn't much of a challenge to it.

Next we would order a plate of sparrows (Eurasian Tree Sparrow).



Looks like hell, but tastes like chicken. If they got by this it was time to up the ante.

So, how about some miso covered grasshoppers?



This plate was delivered as far away from the newbie as possible and calmly passed along, everyone taking a few mouthfuls, until it was placed in front of the victim, er...new guy. Now these badboys look like what they are. Eating this requires some positive ATTITUDE!

If the newbie gets some of them down they were alright in our book. By this time it is getting on and we order a last drink. Last call! What'll it be?

How about Japanese loaches in a cup of sake?

Now eating horse, sparrows, and grasshoppers is pretty weird, but some people, wimps mostly, strenuously object to eating food that is still moving.

Oh, I forgot to mention that these little eel like things, and there's 10 or 15 of them in the glass, are still alive. ... [\(more\)](#)

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A software developer I know recently got a call from a recruiter at Google, asking what it would take for him to come to work for them. This developer had actually already worked for Google, but he

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