



# Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar Reopens

By Bryce Parks

We're not afraid to say we're a little biased about Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar in Dubuque. Before they closed for remodeling in March of this year, the *365ink* crew found ourselves bellied up to the sushi bar at least once a week. We've been impatiently awaiting one of our favorite places to finally reopen, and that glorious day has now arrived.

Ichiban originally opened on March 17, 2013, with owners Sam Chen; his sister, Cici; and his wife, Cindy. After looking at other options for moving to expand their footprint, they ultimately decided to make that investment right where they are now, and it looks to have been a great decision.

After COVID-19 closed indoor dining across Dubuque, Ichiban was one

of the most careful eateries in Dubuque for stressing safety protocols and safe interaction when continuing to serve their dedicated customer base. Even when other venues re-opened, they remained a to-go-only establishment right up until all of the long-awaited plans for their massive remodel were set and the demo could begin.

If you've been to Ichiban before, prepare to recognize NOTHING when you come back. This was a top to bottom renovation, completely re-envisioning the layout and operation of the restaurant. Only the bathrooms are still in the same place, but even they are all new inside.

The biggest change is clearly the occupancy of the restaurant. Where as many as 50 to 60 people could dine here

in the past, it looks like closer to 150 could fit in here today. The footprint of the building increased considerably. The teppanyaki (hibachi) room, which used to feature four tables, is now doubled to eight tables of 8 to 10 diners each. And the sushi side of the restaurant is equally expanded with many massive comfy booths that can seat six people easily as well as a number of two and four tops.

The bar has moved, with eight seats and a gigantic selection of spirits available. The sushi bar is in a different spot as well and probably at least one-third longer in addition to being well-featured against the back wall of the new open dining area. With that signature roll menu, they're going to need all the workspace they can get!



TEPPANYAKI ROOM



PRIVATE DINING ROOM

A private room with seating for 10 is tucked away behind the host stand with a sliding door and a west-facing window. Unlike its noisier teppanyaki counterpart, this group dining room is quieter and secluded, perfect for a small party or company meeting.

The entryway is a big, comfortable transition from the outdoors to the bustling interior with new signage and decor. The finishes feature a modern, naturally Asian-influenced design aesthetic with ceramic tiles and mirrored surfaces as well as wood and leather with some attractive blue-infused lighting enhancements.

The ceilings have a lovely suspended wooden slat and metal trellis effect that accentuates the hanging lanterns below them.





SALMON CARPACCIO



HUSKER AND FUTO MAKI SIGNATURE ROLLS



ASIAN CRISPY CHICKEN

We know things have gotten more streamlined in the kitchen as well. One thing is obvious: a big new walk-in cooler has been added to the back of the building, likely making life a lot smoother for everyone in the kitchen.

You will also be thrilled to see that, while losing some parking on the right side of the building where the restaurant expanded, they have added a ton of parking in the back thanks to some significant grading of the site to turn two levels of parking into one gently sloping lot. So even when it's busy, you'll likely be able to find a spot.

We haven't even talked about the food yet, but honestly, that has not changed a great deal. We won't spend a lot of time re-explaining what sashimi and bento boxes are. If you're not hip to that lingo yet, then come in and get caught up. But you will find all of those expected favorites back on the menu. It is still excellent, and a great, diverse array of options are back in our community palate. More than 30 simpler, smaller rolls are joined by almost 50 larger, signature rolls. Oh, and there are more than 20 varieties of sushi or sashimi available, the simplest way to get right to the fish. The signature rolls have a few new additions, and we are working our way through that delicious list as fast as we can. I still feel very stupid asking for a Sex on the Beach roll, but damn it's tasty. And the toasted leeks on that Lobster Lover roll keep us coming back for more.

So many people make a special event even better by bringing the party to the teppanyaki table at Ichiban. With expanded seating, more people can join for dinner and a show with protein options still including

steak, chicken, shrimp, scallop, salmon, walleye, swordfish, tuna, filet mignon, and lobster tails. A vegetable-only option is also available for non-meat eaters. The flavor of teppanyaki is unlike any other because lots of butter, garlic, soybean oil, and teriyaki sauce are mixed in. The vegetables are a meal by themselves and include broccoli, mushrooms, onions, and zucchini. If you like garlic, request your chef to chop some up for you when you order. You can also get this kind of dinner served at your table on the sushi side, they'll just make it in the back for you. It's just as good; you just don't get to see the onion volcano do its thing.

Other dinners from the kitchen include teriyaki and tempura versions of most meat and vegetable options, chicken and pork katsu, sukiyaki steak, fried rice, three kinds of noodles, and nabe yaki udon—a hearty soup with thick udon noodles, chicken, fish cake, egg, vegetable, and two pieces of shrimp tempura.

Some of the additions we did spot on the menu include the Asian Crispy Chicken served with fried rice. We just tried it for lunch. I would say this is a great option for when you take Dad to dinner and he is scared of the whole menu. It's about as close to his safe General Tso's Chicken as you'll find. Tasty, but safe.

And as for the signature rolls we mentioned earlier, there are at least three additions: a vegetarian Futo Maki roll, an intriguing Banana roll, and a deep-fried Husker roll. The Banana and Husker rolls contain raw fish while the Futo Maki roll is stuffed with vegetables and fruit. Although it's topped with eel sauce, the sauce doesn't actually contain eel.

The sushi and sashimi options remain mostly unchanged with the exception of a new addition: Kobe beef. A delicacy, this high-grade, marbled beef is served raw on top of rice (sushi) or alone (sashimi). A Chicken Teriyaki roll and Crunchy California roll are new, fully-cooked options available as rolls or hand rolls.

For the herbivores, you can now order a mango avocado roll or hand roll in addition to previous offerings such as the crunchy peanut avocado roll and green-centric A.A.C. roll (avocado, asparagus, and cucumber).

The appetizers now list king crab rangoons full time, and salmon carpaccio joins the sushi bar list. It's a light option with seared salmon, salmon eggs, fried garlic, and green onions with a house special sauce. The Hawaiian, served with lettuce wraps, also features seared salmon in addition to spicy tuna, crab, mango, and avocado with chef's sauce.

A more recent addition that you may have missed is the Jalapeño Pocket, Ichiban's version of a jalapeño popper: fried and stuffed with spicy crab, spicy salmon, and cream cheese, with eel sauce and spicy mayo on top. We also noticed that an old favorite, the squid salad has changed a bit, and we like it.

The two- or three-roll lunch special and bento boxes remain great solutions for a tasty lunch.

Perhaps the biggest challenge ahead for Sam, Cici, and Cindy is scaling up the operation to accommodate two or three times as many guests. And in this job climate, they are surely facing the same challenges as everyone else in the food service

industry. So we will be patient as they put both the new ordering system as well as an early huge demand from an anticipation-heavy audience to the test. All the pieces are in place for a vibrant future. We hope you get the chance soon to find out for yourself why Ichiban is the favorite restaurant in town for so many Dubuquers. ■



**Ichiban Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar**

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**Hours:** Mon–Thu: 11 AM–2:30 PM and 4–9:30 PM; Fri–Sat: 11 AM–9:30 PM; Sun: 11:30 AM–9 PM

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