Popular Japanese snacks

T his has been a trying year in many ways, but one bright spot has been all the specialty tastes that have been released for our favorite Japanese snacks and treats! We underwent a taste test of them all to give you an idea of what they taste like!

1. **Chicago Pizza Flavor Cheetos**

We know that Cheetos are originally an American snack, but Japan has made them their own. They regularly release special, Japan-specific flavors that you can’t find anywhere else. Currently, you can find Chicago Pizza, Prosciutto and Cream Cheese, and Spicy Chicken Wings Cheetos sitting on the shelves of the supermarket.

Over the past few years, Chicago-style pizza has been seeing more and more popularity in Japan, so it’s not surprising that snack manufacturers picked it up too! The Chicago Pizza flavor has a pleasantly mild cheesy flavor and a cheesy, slightly spicy aroma to it. The overpowering taste however comes from the pizza base – tomato. There is also a definite hint of pepperoni. Certainly makes a yummy snack. We have our eye on the Spicy Chicken Wings variety to try next time!

2. **Demon Slayer Kororo**

Kororo gummies are made with real fruit juice and are said to have a very unique texture. According to Japan Crate, they are very divisive, with people either loving them or not for the texture alone! Right now, Demon Slayer (Kimetsu no Yaiba) is one of the biggest hits of 2020, and so we thought it was only right to try the limited edition Demon Slayer Hinokami Cola flavor.

Immediately upon touching the candy, it’s easy to see how the texture baffles people. It is soft on the outside but seems to have a firm inside. Then when you bite into it, it’s actually soft, with a sort of waxy layer on the outside. The taste itself is a nice and tasty cola flavor, but what makes these unique is definitely the texture – if you try it, you’ll understand!

3. **Doritos (Taco flavor)**

Like the Cheetos, Doritos are another American snack that made our list. Doritos came to Japan in 1987, over 20 years after the U.S., but they quickly made the chip their own, producing some interesting flavors that we’ve surprised haven’t become a thing abroad too. 2020 has given us Wasabi, Avocado and Cheese, and Taco flavors to enjoy.

We tried the Taco flavor and we have to say, we came across people all the time who are looking for good Mexican food in Japan – we should simply refer them to these chips! They are both delicious and authentically “taco” tasting. It might not be quite actual Mexican food, but these Doritos are pretty good all the same. If you’re after a mouthwatering snack packed full of flavor, we recommend these Taco Doritos.

4. **Pocky**

Pocky is a ubiquitous Japanese snack, first introduced in 1966. People like them as they are both sweet and savory and not too much of either. Like other snacks, their flavors are numerous, such as the unique Almond Crush, Creamy Vanilla, and Heart-Shaped Strawberry. Did you know that you can also buy GIANT Pocky? It’s like a regular Pocky, only much bigger – double the taste bud pleasure! They come in Sweet Potato, Chocolate, and Strawberry flavors.

After giving these a taste, we can tell you that they taste just like regular Pocky, only significantly thicker. This makes them much more satisfying and you really get a decent helping of chocolate along with the pretzel.

5. **KitKat (Apple pie flavor)**

Despite originally being a British invention, KitKat is probably most famous in Japan, where their hundreds of special flavors serve as the perfect souvenir for those completing their Japan voyage. This year, they released an Apple Pie flavor, which is just had to try, being lovers of all things apple (and chocolate for that matter). Surprisingly, the chocolate was purple – not what you would expect for something that’s supposed to taste like apple pie. The aroma, however, really did smell like a mouthwateringly sweet baked apple. It tastes like apple pie indeed, with strong undertones of cinnamon. We highly recommend these Apple Pie KitKats; they’re definitely a “hit.”

6. **Mystery Pringles**

Another American chip brand, Pringles are famous all over the world. Although partial to the sour cream and onion flavor, we couldn’t resist trying the latest taste released in Japan, the “Mystery Pringles.” The flavor is not specified on the tube, so we had no idea what to expect – which is half the fun! After giving these a taste, we can tell you that they aren’t going to be eating “natto” flavored potato chips! The flavor is not sour and we won’t be posting this flavor. The flavor is a combination of sweet and savory, so we’d recommend these if you’re looking for a new taste.

7. **Oreo (Matcha roll cake flavor)**

If there is any flavor that simply screams “Japan,” it is matcha, or green tea. Therefore it is no surprise that a special edition version of the classic Oreo has been released, featuring “matcha roll cake” on a thin crispy cookie. Made with real green tea powder, the taste is made to be authentic to the real Japanese matcha.

Upon tasting these cookies, we were surprised at just how close the green tea taste is. They’re definitely much less sweet than regular Oreo, and both the biscuit and the cream are thinner. If you are a fan of matcha, you’ll definitely love these, even if you don’t usually go for Oreo.

8. **Pikachu PURE Gummies**

Gummy candy seems to be very popular in Japan. In any convenience store or supermarket, you can find many different tastes and brands. Of course, like everything else in Japan, they have limited edition seasonal varieties. These special Pokemon inspired Pikachu gummies caught our eye, because who doesn’t love Pikachu?

The candy inside is shaped like Pikachu and is covered in a tangy sugar coating. It tastes strongly like lemon, with a nice sour kick to it. Basically these are regular lemon sour gummy candies that happen to be shaped like Pikachu, making them much more cooler than the average gummy. If you like Pokemon and lemon, definitely give these a go.

9. **Puku Puku Taiyaki**

Puku Puku Taiyaki are retro, fish-shaped sweets with an outside biscuit similar to an ice cream cone and a crispy flavored inside. They are said to be a nice and light snack which aren’t too sweet. This year, we found Watermelon, Double Berry Chocolate, and Strawberry flavors.

We tried the Strawberry flavor and were pleasantly surprised by how nice it was! Really light while still being sweet. The water on the outside is crisp and simple but tasty. The strawberry-flavored inside almost doubles the second it enters your mouth, giving true meaning to the phrase “melts in your mouth.” Together, they make an amazing combination!

10. **Chocolate Eggs by Furuta**

Furuta produces a range of chocolate eggs made with rich and creamy Hokkaido milk. Each egg has a small toy inside, similar to a Kinder Surprise. Japan Crate recommended the Animal Crossing and Pokemon editions to us, promising they are all the rage right now.

Inside the Animal Crossing box was a chocolate the size of an egg, with milk chocolate on the outside and white chocolate on the inside. The shell was nice and crisp, and the chocolate was sufficiently milky. One could see themselves getting addicted to these easily. The toy was an added bonus, in our case, a dog named Caramel. Definitely not for small kids as it is quite a choking hazard.

While some of these snacks are seasonally or promotionally limited, if you wish to try them for yourself, you can most likely find them at most supermarkets, convenience stores, and snack shops. Japan Crate also offers them all. Past crates have included the Apple Pie KitKat flavors, the Pikachu gummies, the Puku Puku Taiyaki, the Wasabi Doritos, and the Demon Slayer Kororo. We wonder what will be inside the next crate!
Japanese food is absolutely amazing, but it’s also completely different in taste, presentation, and texture from dishes in many Western countries. From raw fish to stinky (if healthy) natto soybeans, there are many dishes in Japan that might discourage the less adventurous gourmets.

While liking or disliking a dish is a matter of personal taste, fortunately it’s also fairly easy to find Japanese dishes that will amaze even the most Western food-oriented palates — if you know what you are looking for. As an Italian expat who’s re-sided in Japan for years, I’ve had many friends and family who were somewhat picky with what goes on their plate. Here are 8 food suggestions which, in my experience, delighted everyone!

**1 Shabu-shabu** / When you’re tired of ramen

Shabu-shabu is a dish that falls into the nabe category. Nabe are hot-pot dishes. This kind of food is a variety of ingredients boiled into a large ceramic pot. The water can be seasoned with different spices and dressings and the food is then dipped in a variety of sauces.

Shabu-shabu is plain water boiling vegetables such as cabbage and mushrooms, along with tofu. Prime cuts of beef or pork meat are thinly sliced and served. You then dip the meat in the water (it usually takes only a few seconds for it to be ready) and finally add a dressing of ponzu sauce (a citrus-based dressing), or sesame sauce, or spicy oil, or any combination of the three.

The name shabu-shabu derives from the swinging hand movement performed to cook the meat while holding it with chopsticks. The flavor of shabu-shabu usually lays in the quality of the meat, and in most cases, meat in Japan is really good (albeit a little expensive at times). If you like soups, you will love this dish, but you will also enjoy it if you’re looking for a healthy, tasty, and complete meal.

**2 Yakitori** / For when you crave some serious meat

Regardless of where you’re from or what dishes you’re used to eating, chances are that you are familiar with one or more different styles of grilled food.

Yakitori literally means “grilled meat” but actually it could be also grilled veggies or fish, or all of the above. Originally Yakitori is the Japanese version of Korean barbecue restaurants, and while that might sound exotic to some, what yakiniku boils down to is grilled food seasoned to taste. You get to choose what meat you want, what cuts you want, and what seasoning you want to use.

If you prefer to add just salt, and/or pepper, you can, and if you are curious about other seasonings, you will have plenty to choose from.

Depending on the quality of the food you order prices will change, but by and large, the cost won’t be too high, especially considering that many yakitori restaurants offer an “all-you-can-eat” (tabehoudai) option, allowing customers to order as many dishes as they want to, within (usually) a 2-hour time, for a fixed price.

**3 Nikuman** / A quick and tasty dish for those who like a lot of choices in one dish

This is also another kind of grilled food, and like yakitori it has a slightly misleading name. Yakitori literally means for “grilled chicken”, but in reality, these are skewers of all kinds of meat, veggies, fish, and shells. One thing that groups them all up is that they are grilled.

When you go to a yakitori restaurant or to almost any traditional Japanese restaurant (izakaya), you’ll likely find a number of yakitori options. Some may be quite curious (ranging from heart to liver and other organ meats – to dishes with chicken skin and tail), while other choices will be quite familiar sounding.

In fact, most kinds of yakitori are skewers with cuts of chicken breast or thigh, or beef flank, steak, and more. The seasoning once again depends on your order, and on your personal choices, so that you can be on familiar ground or explore more unique (to you) flavors.

**4 Eel** / When you just want a bite of savory ‘cooked sushi’

Japan is probably the king of eel preparation, but Japanese are not new to this dish. Eel is prepared in many different ways in the Mediterranean peninsula and it’s even a staple dish during Christmas and New Years time.

If you like eel, then you’ll be pleasantly surprised by how many delicious choices you’ll have here in Japan. But once again, if you want to stay on familiar grounds, then try a simple, yet fantastic eel over rice dish, where the fish is prepared grilled, or steamed and laid over rice. This typically takes the form of the “unagi-don” or eel bowl. The eel can be glazed or seasoned with a number of spices and sauces, making the experience always tasty, and never boring.

**5 Karaage** / Because who doesn’t like fried chicken

Who doesn’t like some nicely fried chicken? Japanese has developed its own way of preparing fried chicken, and you’ll find karaage almost anywhere you go.

What makes things even better is that while the word ‘kara-age’ technically refers to fried chicken, you can find different kind of food stuffs fried in a similar way. That includes squid. The Italian food lovers among you will surely know of “cala-mari fritti” (fried calamari – Italian style fried squid). A similar dish is also octopus karaage.

Karaage in general is crunchy and flavorful and there are different kinds of batter that are used. It can have a soy cause seasoning, or pepper, or lemon, or even cheese. Karaage is one of the most common Japanese dishes but it’s also familiar in flavor and presentation to Italian fried food. You’ll love it.

**6 Tempura** / For those who want an exotic dish, but a familiar flavor

When it comes to Japanese food very few dishes are as traditional, tasty, and non-adventurous as tempura.

Tempura is often shrimp, fish, vegetables, or chicken dipped in a special batter, fried, and served with a variety of sauces (or simply tempura sauce). The combination of the preparation of the batter and the frying style makes for a crunchy and light texture that is also very flavorful.

While it’s true that tempura does not remind of Italian cuisine, it’s one of those dishes that is very easy to fall in love with regardless of one’s preferred flavors. You will easily find tempura in izakaya restaurants, or in tempura-specialized venues.

**7 Nikuman** / A bit of West and a bit of east in one bite

This particular kind of soul food has its origin in China. It’s a snack that can easily be found in convenience stores (combini) and supermarkets and it’s a steamed bread dumpling filled with pork or beef meat.

The Italians among you may associate it to a sandwich or to oillivioli. The combination of the preparation of the batter and the frying style makes for a crunchy and light texture that is also very flavorful.

Just pay attention when you bite down. It’s got a scrunching hot core!

**8 Gyoza** / For those looking for a quick flavor-packing snack

When people say “Italian dumplings” they are talking about ravioli, and when they say “Japanese dumplings” they mean gyoza. This extremely popular and accessible dish is a dumpling originated in China (but since very much modified into a Japanese staple) made with a lightly or deep-fried dough and a meat (usually pork) and spices filling.

You can have a single gyoza with a variety of sauces. Now, if you’re expecting anything similar to an Italian dumpling, you’ll probably be disappointed, but like the other items on this list not only are gyoza as Japanese as apple pie is American, but they are also tasty, and an easy new food if you’re not a risk taker.

Regardless of how delicious food in other countries can be (and Japan is rightfully famous for many of its specialties), sometimes it can be hard to try flavors that we are not used to or that are excessively different from our national cuisine. Fortunately, while many people think that Japan is a land of almost only fish and dishes that are too exotic, you will find that there are in fact many foods (not including the amazing desserts) that are as traditional as they are familiar.
Instant noodles are great for a quick meal on the run or in between grocery store raids, but they also make great bases for more intricate meals.

Nissin, a major instant noodle maker in Japan, has loads of recipes which use their staple products to upgrade your mealtime. The recipes on the Nissin website include fried rice, Takoyaki, chawanmushi, a steamed egg hotchpotch, and more—all using at least one Nissin product as an ingredient. I took advantage of another work-from-home day to try out the okonomiyaki recipe using Nissin’s UFO instant noodles.

Usually okonomiyaki uses batter, cabbage and ramen or udon noodles as a base. For the Nissin UFO version, I needed the noodles, flour, egg and water.

Cooking this okonomiyaki felt more like playing house rather than following a recipe since no special skills were necessary. Compared with the curry and spaghetti I’ve tried this year, this felt way too easy. So easy, in fact, that it made me question whether or not this recipe would work out.

However, I am happy to report that this UFO okonomiyaki exceeded my expectations!

The noodles were crisp on the surface of the okonomiyaki, but the chewiness added a unique texture, which made it a little different from the usual okonomiyaki you can get at a restaurant or festival.

Though it may be hard to argue that this okonomiyaki made with UFO noodles could match authentic ones served up at restaurants in Osaka or Hiroshima, the flavor of this different recipe was good. I enjoyed changing up the usual okomiyaki, and I think I may just try some more of Nissin’s takes on some of my other favorites.

Try Nissin’s noodle okonomiyaki and upgrade your noodles today!

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**INGREDIENTS**

- UFO fried noodle pack (1 piece)
- 1 Egg
- 80 g sliced cabbage
- 60 cc flour
- 120 ml water
- Oil for pan

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Open UFO package and set the sauce pack and aonori pack aside to use later. Then, place dried noodles and ingredients in a Ziploc bag. Crush the noodles with a rolling pin or wooden spoon until you have crumbs.
2. Mix the crumbs with flour, egg, cabbage, and water in a bowl.
3. Heat a lightly-oiled frying pan over high heat, then turn down to medium-to-low heat.
4. Pour the mixture into the pan and fry until lightly browned on the bottom. You can place a lid over the pan.
5. Flip the okonomiyaki and finish browning the other side.
6. Top the food with sauce, aonori (dried green laver), and red pickled ginger, depending on your taste.

*The pancake took about 10 minutes in total to cook through.*

*You can also add other ingredients to this recipe like squid or pork and other vegetables.*

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Celebrate Cinco de Mayo all month long at Emery Lanes Bowling Complex on Kadena! Every month Striker Café inside Emery Lanes features a burger special, and this month it’s our delicious Quesadilla Burger! Enjoy a Southwest seasoned patty with Pepper Jack cheese, shredded lettuce, pico de gallo, jalapenos, homemade spicy red pepper and sour cream aioli in a tortilla, topped off with shredded cheddar cheese! Stop in for lunch, and don’t forget you can order online for expedited pickup. You can even put your vehicle details in the notes, and they will bring right to you! Striker Café is here for you.

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