

35 unique ice cream flavors you can try in Japan 25

BYFOOD

umid weather throughout most of the country is the perfect breeding ground for creative twists on a classic frozen treat. Japanese companies and independent producers take their ice cream

game very seriously you're visiting Japan, you can expect to be spoiled for choice when it comes to flavors.

9 byFood

It goes without saying that you'll easily find classic ice cream flavors like vanilla, chocolate, and the extremely controversial chocolate mint. But if the opportunity presents itself, traveling foodies should give one of these 35 unique twists, ranging from fruity varieties to there's-no-way-that's-good flavors.



1. Ramune (Japanese soda)

Let's start with one you probably already know about: ramune. This Japanese soda, one of Japan's **MUST-TRY** must-try drinks, is a popular flavor **DRINKS** for all types of sweet treats, but it is especially popular among children and adults alike when it comes in ice cream form.



Milk-flavored ice cream may not be exclusive to Japan, but it can be hard to find outside of Asia. Milk ice cream is creamy (duh), rich and filling. It's also a perfect flavor to pair with almost any other ice cream flavor, including ramune and fruit sorbets. It's best used as a mixer if you're ordering a double or triple cone.

3. Shirasu

Shirasu (or Japanese whitebait) are small white fish. In the Kanto region, they are most commonly associated with



Kamakura in Kanagawa Prefecture. Typically, you'll find shirasu as a topping in kaisendon (seafood bowls) or mixed in a tamagoyaki batter as a savory street food, but you can also find ice cream topped with shirasu in select shops in Kamakura and Enoshima. This one is definitely for adventurous eaters!

Photo courtesy of Stripes Okinawa

4. Gyoza

Yes, you read that right. Gyoza izakaya Dandadan Sakaba has gyoza ice cream on its menu. This unique dessert comes with two gyoza skin senbei, in case you crave the

crunch. Definitely a flavor that's out there and makes for a great night-out story.

Dandadan Sakaba is a chain with locations around Japan, but here's a quick list of their locations in Japan's top destinations:

- Dandadan Sakaba Shibuya (Tokyo)
- Dandadan Sakaba Naka-ku (Nagoya)
- Dandadan Sakaba Namba (Osaka)
- Dandadan Sakaba Chuo-ku (Fukuoka)



5. Adzuki (Japanese red beans)

Adzuki is a quintessential ingredient in wagashi. It's not overwhelmingly sweet but still satisfies if you're in the mood for a treat. Japanese company Imuraya's adzuki bar has consistently been one of Japan's bestselling ice cream products. If you're already planning to travel to Hokkaido, chances are you can find hard or soft-serve ice cream, too.

6. Shine Muscat grape

Grape is another staple summer flavor in Japan specifically the Shine Muscat variety, which was first grown and harvested in Japan in the late 1980s. This luxurious Japanese fruit is generally considered a late summer flavor, though you can find Shine Muscat ice cream throughout the warm season.



7. Lavender

Did you know you can find lavender-flavored ice cream if you visit a lavender farm? Furano in central Hokkaido is famous for its lavender fields, but you can visit these three lavender farms around Tokyo to get a taste of creamy, lavender goodness without leaving Kanto.

8. Yubari melon

Yubari melon is a type of cantaloupe melon grown in Hokkaido in the town of Yubari, not too far from Sapporo. This melon is known to be especially sweet and fragrant — and also particularly pricey. Definitely on the top of the list of Japan's luxury fruit lineup, but you can taste Yubari melon without splurging too much by searching for Yubari melon ice cream.

9. Kyoho grape

That's right, there are not one but two Japanese grape ice cream flavors on this list. Kyoho grapes are purple grapes that have been cultivated in Japan since the 1930s. They are significantly



more sweet than the Shine Muscat varieties. If you like grapes and you like sweetness, then opt for Kyoho grape ice cream!

10. Sakura (cherry blossom)

It'll come as no surprise to know that in the spring, you might also find sakura-flavored ice cream (sometimes even sakura mochi-flavored ice cream). The flavor will be subtle and light, much like the shade of pink this ice cream tends to be, but it makes for a refreshing dessert nonetheless.

11. Chestnut

Continuing with seasonal flavors, around September and October, keep your eyes peeled with chestnut-flavored ice cream. Like some of the others on this list, this flavor is usually seasonal and available for a limited time only!

12. Miyazaki mango

Another luxury fruit flavor on this list (yes, there are many) is Miyazaki mango. Nissei, one of Japan's leading producers of soft cream, produces an array of limited-edition premium flavors under its Japan Premium brand, and one of its summer flavors is Miyazaki mango. You need to plan a trip to Miyazaki Prefecture to try this one, but it might just be the best mango ice cream you'll ever taste.

13. Amaou (Japanese strawberries)

Strawberry ice cream is obviously available in plenty of other countries, but only in Japan can you find Amaou-flavored ice cream. If you're thinking that Japanese strawberries are not that different, think again. These strawberries, primarily grown in Fukuoka, are known for their size and rich flavor.

14. Corn

Japan does have a penchant for savory ice cream flavors. Nissei has an Aomori-exclusive corn flavor. If you like sweet corn, you might like corn ice cream. Sure. it's a bit of a trip to get there, but hey, northern Japan is way cooler in the summer.

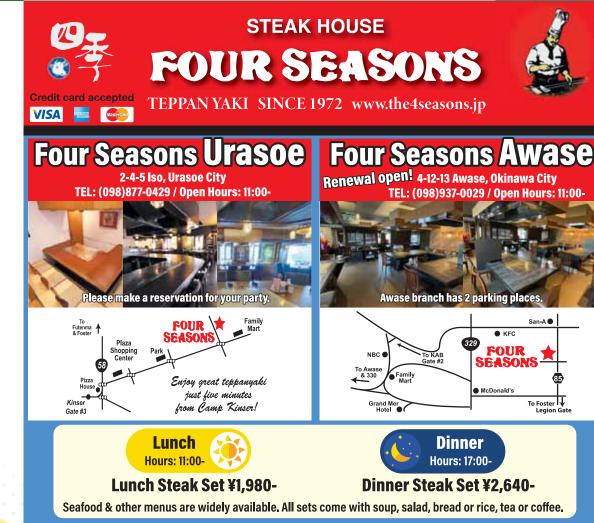
> See ICE CREAM on Page 7



Four Seasons will dazzle you in Awase & Urasoe

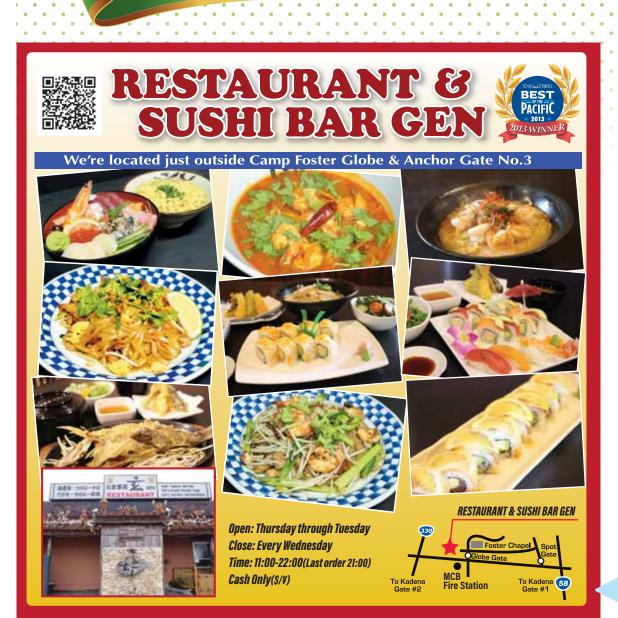
Four Seasons Teppanyaki Steak House in Awase and Urasoe will not only dazzle you, but also tingle your taste buds! Watch as our talented chefs slice, dice and cook up your entrees right at your table. It's more than a meal, It's a special event! Our restaurant is the perfect place to relax, unwind and simply enjoy some foodie fun with your family, friends or that special someone. If you haven't had the pleasure of enjoying Japanese teppanyaki, come in for a visit! We promise that you won't be disappointed, so what are you waiting for? Reservations recommended.

RESTAURANT INFO



A Taste of Okinawa

Four Seasons Okinawa City







Four Seasons Mihama

Gen a real gem on Okinawa

Offering authentic Japanese and Okinawan cuisine at a reasonable price, Gen was recognized in Stripes' Best of the Pacific 2013 as the best restaurant to experience the local culture on Okinawa. Owner and Head Chef Naoki Tsukayama highly recommends the "Fish Garlic Butter Combo," a popular dish among American customers. Tsukayama and his staff make you feel at home, so stop by and enjoy a delicious meal. Gen is located across from Camp Foster's fire station. Just look for shi-shi dogs on a traditional Okinawan tile roof outside Foster's Fire Station Gate.

RESTAURANT INFO

Shaved ice a tasty Japanese summer treat

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES OKINAWA

ummer in Japan gets scorching and steamy. Mid-summer Temperatures often reach 95 F or higher depending on the region. Along with beer, watermelon and soomen (cold udon noodle), kakigoori (shaved ice) is a popular cold food that cools us down during summer.

For many Japanese, the memories of a banner with the red kanji letter of koori (ice) in white and a blue background are fond ones. These banners are seen outside shops offering kakigoori and often meant a sweet, snow-like treat to help us cool

Besides at local sweets stores, kakigoori can be found at matsuri and bon odori festivals or fireworks events, along with other festive foods.

"Kakigoori is one of the most popular traditional cold sweets throughout history," says Ryusuke Koike, managing director of Japan Kakigoori Association. "This cold food goes back to more than 1,000 years and has been enjoyed as festive food for special occasions."

Kakigoori is not only available during the summer, but it is a year-around cold dessert, according to Koike.

"Since a lot of kakigoori joints make their syrups and sauces using fruits in season, they offer different types of throughout the year," Koike said.

In fact, there are countless types of syrups and sauces. While many places offer the standard strawberry, cherry, lemon, green tea, melon and colorless syrup, others offer unique syrups made from vegetables, sake, wine, or even vinegar, miso or soy

Japanese kakigoori may remind many of a snow cone, but there are few significant differences between the two iced sweets.'

"Japanese kakigoori has a really fine, smooth fluffy ice consistency, just like fresh fallen snow," Koike said. "While Americans make snow cones with extreme hard ice, we would never do that to keep it soft and fluffy."

Besides the difference of ice, snow cones usually come with artificial flavors, while kakigoori uses more natural syrups and ingredients, such as sweet beans, matcha and brown sugar.

But, despite a key difference in the flavoring, the main part of kakigoori is actually the ice, according to Koike.

Most of kakigoori joints pay more attention on the quality of ice, rather than varieties of syrups, since quality and condition of ice determines the taste of kakigoori," Koike said.

For Japanese kakigoori, extreme cold ice is not good. For a fluffy snow-like soft texture, the ice temperature needs to be kept around 14 F.

"Since ice in freezer is usually around - 4 F, we need to take out the ice and warm it up before we shave it," Koike said.

Clean and transparent ice is ideal, as it can make smooth, fluffy kakigoori. Water that takes a long time to freeze can make clean ice.

"Natural ice is considered the best," Koike said.

Why not make kakigoori yourself?

You can make a transparent ice yourself. Wrap an ice tray with a towel before putting it into a freezer. This will make the ice take longer to freeze which should ensure the ice is transparent, according to Koike.

Then, you can shave it by using a hand-spinning ice shaver, which can be found at various stores for around

The hand-cranked ice shaver is a popular kitchen item in Ja-

pan. It is fun making kakigoori by spinning a block of ice over a blade by turning the lever by hands. Syrups for kakigoori are available at most of supermarkets or grocery stores.

According to Japan Kakigoori Association, there are some tips to making tasty kakigoori at nome: Use mineral water instead of tap water when you make ice. Serve it in a glass bowl to make the colors stand out, and be sure not to put on too many toppings as it can spoil the fluffy texture.

Now that you know, get out and enjoy the hot Japan summer with some cool kakigoori!

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Make your own

BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES OKINAWA

doesn't get much better than eating shaved ice during the summer. But making the cold sweets at home offers a different sense of joy.

Kakigoori-ki (shave ice machine) is a common item for families with children in this country. Just like many flavors are introduced at shops every year, shaved iced machines are also evolving to show great variety. But there is a trend commonly seen in many of them: nostalgia.

"Kyoro-chan" is a shaved ice machine

that looks like a cubby bear doll.

Originally released in 1976, this cute looking machine became a hit back then. When the handle on the top is turned, the cubby's eyes move

left and right. The name Kyoro-c to this gimmick, which was very to kids.

Although it was discontinued for Kyro-chan was brought back in the same design.

"Ice Robo III Hatsuyuki" is







Normally, the word "zenzai" refers



Kakigoori is a popular cold treat in ball parks.

okohama Stadium offers Mikan Goori (ice orange) while Jingu Stadium (Tokyo) offers Pine Goori (pineapple Ice) during ball games. Koshien Stadium (near Osaka) offers simple "Kachiwari" (literally shaved ice).









popular shaved ice machine with a retro look. At first glance, the yellow, red and green machine almost looks like a character out of an old Nintendo game. But, on the inside, this machine has an advanced system that can automatically make shaved ice, even allowing to adjust sizes.

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Kakigori-Ki" (electric-powered machine for totally fluffy shaved ice) goes further back in time to dig up people's memory of shaved

It is said that Kakigori-ki became commonly available in the Showa era (1926 -1989). This machine has wheels and a logo that can remind Japanese of when they ate



shaved ice at stores in their neighborhood back in the

Thanks to an updated system, this retro-looking machine can shave ice to fluffy flakes, something only stores could provide back then.

These shaved ice machines are closely associated with people's happy memories of having the cold sweets as a child. The sense of fun and nostalgia is so strong that you could feel it even if you didn't live in Japan in those days.

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Ichigo Milk

awa's cool scene

to sweet red bean soup in Japan. But on Okinawa, it commonly means shaved ice topped with red kidney beans and white rice cake balls. Many local stores serve up this unique dessert, with banners and flags with the word "ぜんざい (zenzai)"often seen along streets.

Tamaya is one of the stores where people can see the zenzai boom - where the cold sweets are evolving into something special.

At first glance, the store's shaved ice looks like cotton candy because of its exceptional size and fluffy texture. The heap of shaved ice is almost three times the size of a plastic cup, presenting a

look of a small snow mountain. "Many customers are surprised with the size," said the store owner. "It is my motto to satisfy customers as much as possible for a reasonable price (450 yen for zenzai) even though it takes more time and effort."

His dedication to zenzai goes deep. Once digging in, customers find out the sweet taste of the beans and syrup from top to bottom. The texture and taste don't stop entertaining customers' taste buds from the beginning to the end.

There are a couple of clues the shop owner shared with me as to how to make tasty shaved ice. First, ice blocks should not be shaved immediately after being taken out of a freezer. Giving it 10 minutes or so before shaving is a key to making fluffy flakes. Plus, stacking shaved ice should not be done all at once, but in a couple of parts. This way, syrup can be poured in each part at a time.

Sounds easy? Maybe not.

Making a big, fluffy and tasty zenzai shaved ice like Tamaya's takes experience, skills and dedication.

"I had an experience of carving ice before launching the shop," the owner said. "Some knowledge I learned through the experience and my expertise as a professional cook helped me a

Plus, the beans used for his zenzai are specific ones bought at a certain store in Naha. They need to be cooked carefully so that they have enough sweetness.

The owner's dedication to zenzai translates to other varieties offered at the store. Flavors such as strawberry, dragon fruit (seasonal) and mango are available there. Although zenzai is a hard sell for Americans, fruit-flavored shaved ice is popular among them, according to the owner.

"When it comes to fruit-flavored shaved ice, Americans eat more than Japanese do," said the owner. "Ichigo milk (strawberry milk) is the most popular.'

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Did you know?

Colorful artificial syrups for kakigoori are sold in most of grocery stores throughout the ation. Although they are sold with different names, including lemon (yellow), strawberry (red), melon (green) and Blue Hawaii (blue), their tastes are all the same.

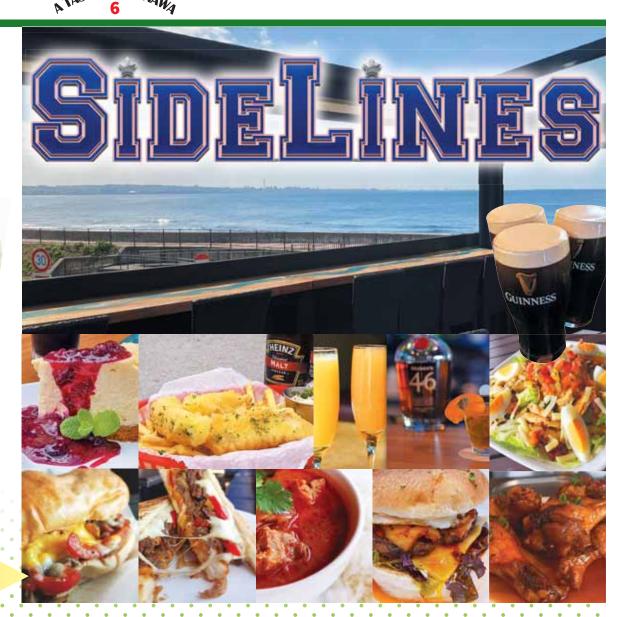




Tasty food, great drinks, fun events at Sidelines

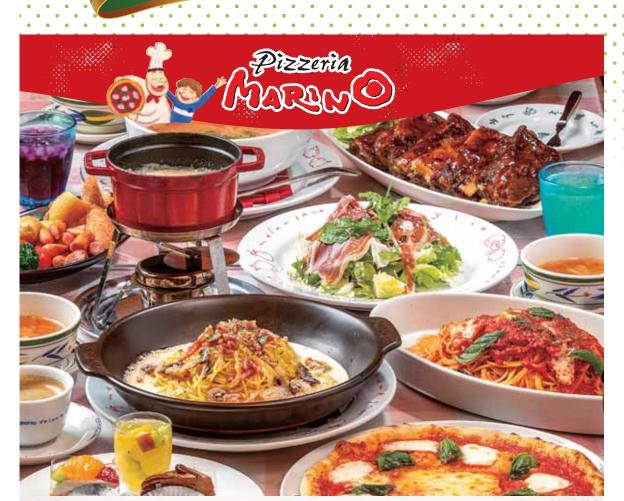
Est. 2012, Sidelines is a family-owned, upscale sports themed restaurant. Our menu offers delicious homemade Classic American Food, Vegan dishes, kids' options and fantastic weekly Specials. Try our Fish & Chips and Creamy Homemade Cheesecake, both undoubtedly the best in Okinawa. Join us for Trivia Tuesday, Wednesday's Humpday Super-Specials, Tourney Thursdays, Friday's Happy Hour, Weekend Bottomless Mimosas & to watch Live Sporting Events on our 20 indoor & outdoor TVs! You'll love our unrivalled service, full bar, ample outdoor seating, and the fabulous Ocean View from our upstairs bar! Visit us soon and become part of the Sidelines Family!

RESTAURANT INFO





A Taste of Okinawa



Gushikawa Main City Branch



Naha Main Place Branch



Urasoe West Coast Parco City Branch





Stone-oven-baked pizza, pasta, spare ribs and more

Have you heard of Pizzeria MARINO, renowned for our delicious cuisine in Okinawa? At Pizzeria MARINO, you can savor a wide variety of dishes, including stone-oven-baked pizzas, pasta, cheese fondue, and spare ribs. Our freshly baked pizzas are a must-try, offering a unique and irresistible flavor that you won't find anywhere else. Treat yourself to one of our set menus and choose your favorite pizza and pasta combination for an unforgettable dining experience. At Pizzeria MARINO, we're here to give you a taste of home that will leave your tastes begging for more. We can't wait to serve you!

RESTAURANT INFO

JUNE 19 – JULY 2, 2025 — STRIPES OKINAWA

ICE CREAM: Acquired tastes

30. Okinawa salt cookies

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

15. Rice

Continuing with exclusive flavors, in Akita, you can find rice ice cream, also courtesy of Nissei. This Tohoku prefecture is known for its high-quality rice, so of course, the natural course of action is to turn its top export into a not-savory-but-not-too-sweet dessert.



16. Squid ink

Another fishy flavor makes the list! This time, it's squid ink, an exclusive Nissei flavor that you can only find in Fukui. Unlike shirasu ice cream, squid ink ice cream is more visually striking than it is an attack on the taste buds — makes for a cool photo, though!

17. Olive

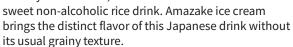
Shodoshima, an island off the coast of Kagawa, is Japan's leading producer of olive oil. If you want to know how it claimed the number one spot, you should visit the Shodoshima Olive Park and learn about the island's rare characteristics that make it a prime location for growing and tending to olive trees. Here, you can also find olive ice cream. Try it in a cone or in a cup. If you've feeling extra adventurous, opt for an extra dash of olive oil.



Did you really think there would be no soy sauce flavor on this list? Often thought of as a simple pantry staple, soy sauce comes in different variations. Soy sauce makers who offer factory visits will also offer eclectic soy sauce treats, including (you guessed it) ice cream.

19. Amazake

Amazake ice cream (sometimes amazake sorbet) is less commonly found at the grocery store but not uncommon at wagashi specialty stores. Amazake, literally "sweet sake," is a



20. Onion

This next flavor might just be the rarest on this list. You can find onion ice cream in Hyogo Prefecture. Onions are a beloved ingredient for a good reason: their sweetness is key to most of your favorite Japanese dishes! You can even order onion ice cream.



21. Unagi

We're back at it again with a sweet and salty combination! One Japanese company is almost entirely dedicated to making unagi-flavored ice cream — yes, unagi like the eel. You can buy this eel-flavored ice cream online.



22. Sal

Occasionally, you'll find salt ice cream, which is essentially milk ice cream with double or triple the amount of salt. For lovers of snacks that combine sweet and savory, this one is for you.

23. Tofu

Recently, you can find soy milk ice cream in supermarkets and convenience stores, but did you know you can also find tofu ice cream? If you visit Nikko in Tochigi, you'll find local shops with tofu ice cream on offer since the area is known for its yuba (tofu skin)!

24. Soba (buckwheat)

Savory buckwheat noodle ice cream is a surprisingly popular flavor in Japan. It has a nutty taste with a hint of bitterness.

of bitterness.
It's tricky to
find, but
your best
bet is to

bet is to
hit traditional neighborhoods and
roadside stations in rural areas.



The same company sells wasabi ice cream, though wasabi ice cream is fairly common all around Japan. You can find wasabi soft cream or vanilla soft cream with a plop of freshly grated wasabi. This spicy dessert is especially easy to find throughout the Izu Peninsula.

26. Mountain yam (tororo)

One last shoutout to Unagi Ice, this time to share that they also make a mountain yam (tororo) ice cream. If creamy potato soup works, why wouldn't creamy potato... ice cream?

ice cream. If ato soup works, it creamy cream?

27. Sea grapes

Sea grapes, a type of seaweed, add a puchi puchi or "bursting" texture to this unique ice cream. They also have a slightly salty flavor.
This one is definitely more of a novelty flavor, but if you see it in the wild (most likely in Okinawa), don't hesitate to try it!

28. Wakame

Another seaweed-infused ice cream, wakame adds a refreshing taste of the sea. It has a mild seaweed flavor and something like a crisp texture. You can find it at Shiokazeno-sato Tsunoshima in Yamaguchi.



29. Hibiscus

Hibiscus ice cream offers a tart and floral flavor, perfect for a summer day. It's made from the hibiscus flower and has a beautiful pink or red color. The easiest way to find this flavor is to look at Blue Seal's offerings at one of their stores. Being a brand that's most commonly associated with Okinawa, Blue Seal sells Okinawan shortbread-flavored ice cream. These sweet and salty

cookies are one of the most popular food souvenirs to bring back from Japan's tropical region.

31. Ube

Ube (or purple sweet potato) is a delicious vegetable that's widely consumed in Asia, and its vibrant purple color makes it a great ingredient to add a pop of color to any sweet. Ube is a popular topping for baked foods and even as an ice cream topping, budie-hard fans should

foods and even as an ice cream topping, but ube die-hard fans should just go full steam ahead and get ube-flavored ice cream.

32. Ryukyu tea warabi mochi

Our last Blue Seal recommendation is the brand's Ryukyu tea warabi mochi flavor. Just as you might expect, this is essentially wagashi in a cup. With swirls of kuromitsu (brown sugar syrup) and chucks of warabimochi, this one is for those who like texture in their ice creams.

33. Royal milk tea

A popular flavor year-round, if you love royal milk tea's comforting sweetness, you'll love it in ice cream form. In 2024, Häagen-Dazs released a limited-edition caramel royal milk tea flavor, which you can find in select convenience stores and supermarkets.

34. Yuzu

Though yuzu is usually considered a winter citrus, many still prefer its bitter and sweet taste over lemon or even orange. It's not uncommon to find yuzu-flavored ice cream at specialty shops or even among limitededition flavors in the ice cream section of a Japanese supermarket.

35. Chocobanana (frozen chocolate banana)

If you attend a summer festival in Japan, in addition to coolers filled to the brim with ice and ramune bottles, you'll also find chocobanana stands. This frozen

treat is a hot weather staple and has become such a nostalgic flavor for older Japan citizens that you can find chocobanana-flavored ice cream, too. Same cooling effect, significantly reduced risk of it sliding off the stick and falling on the sidewalk.



USHIGOYAICE

Chocobanana is a flavor offered at Ushigoyaice, an eclectic ice cream shop in Hokkaido that offers 16 different flavors every day pooled from a rotation of 50-plus recipes!

byFood is a platform for food events in Tokyo, with over 80 experiences to choose from and a fantastic resource for learning about Japan's thriving food culture! What's more, byFood runs a charitable outreach program, the Food for Happiness Project, which donates 10 meals to children in Cambodia for each person who books a food event through our platform!



Wafutei serving up delicious traditional Japanese cuisine

Enjoy the taste of Japan at Wafutei, with 20 locations across Okinawa! Our diverse menu, featuring sushi, tempura, yakiniku and tonkatsu, satisfies a wide range of palates. Perfect for families, friends and groups - everyone can find their favorite dish. Experience the flavor and quality loved by both Americans and Japanese at all our convenient San-A shopping mall locations. Visit our website for detailed menu and location information. Your genuine Japanese culinary experience awaits just around the corner! Let the caring and talented staffs at our Wafutei locations show you what Japanese cuisine is all about!

RESTAURANT INFO





A Taste of Okinawa







Osaka Ohsho serves tasty Chinese dishes on Okinawa

If you are search of a variety of delicious Chinese cuisine on Okinawa, look no further that Osaka Ohsho. Indulge in our signature gyoza, flavorful fried rice, and savory mabo tofu. Our crispy, juicy dumplings are irresistible! Enjoy high-quality Chinese dishes in a casual setting at reasonable prices. Don't miss our popular lunch specials featuring our tasty gyoza sets. Our staff is ready to show you why people say the best Chinese cuisine on Okinawa is served at Osaka Ohsho! So, stop by and let us take care of you and your taste buds!

RESTAURANT INFO