



# Kimpura:

A Golden Taste of Manila

Words by Cherie M. del Rio   Photos by Allan Florendo



Unlike other restaurants, Kimpura's sushi bar allows diners to see how their rolls and sushi are excellently prepared.



**From left to right:**

Friendly, kimono-dressed food attendants carefully cook the Sukiyaki right in front of you, and its savory goodness is just incomparable!; The dynamite roll brings spicy tuna to an even higher level of spice---its explosive hot taste explains its name.

**Opposite page, clockwise from left:**

A trio of the most tasteful, freshest tempi you can ever have in the metro; Kimpura offers traditional Japanese cuisine with a modern ambiance---its interiors a classy blend of sophisticated furniture and exquisite lighting; The only restaurant that offers ten teppanyaki tables, Kimpura lets its customers get both a visually and gastronomically unforgettable meal; These golden sushi rolls (unagi wrapped in egg) are among Kimpura's newest additions to the menu; The gindara teriyaki is one of the two ways to cook the codfish (another is teppanyaki), although both are equally delicious; Inside the misono room, groups who prefer a bit of privacy can still enjoy the unique Kimpura dining experience that it has given its customers in the last four decades.



**Amidst** the sparkly stores and bright lights of Greenbelt 5 is a forty year-old culinary legacy that has defined (and continues to define) a distinctive taste of Japanese cuisine in Manila. Going to the Greenbelt 5 branch is like going up to food heaven--- you take one step and the escalator brings you closer to what is a glittering stretch of yellow lights, reflective glass, polished floors, and a huge, red, welcoming sign of KIMPURA. With “kim” meaning golden and added to “pura” that represents tempura, Kimpura stands for “golden tempura.” And anyone who has grown up to enjoying the good food Kimpura offers (including my photographer Allan Florendo) knows that the best tempura in town can be found in any of these three Kimpura branches: Greenbelt 5, Greenhills, or Trinoma. Take your pick, because all these three branches offer the same authentic Japanese cookery that it has offered to four generations already! They also boast of the same sophisticated, zen-like interior: a modern set of stylish tables and chairs arranged in a spacious room adorned with yellow and white radiant light, wood furnishings, and trendy metal embellishments that give the restaurant a tasteful silver and golden glow.

In the advent of innumerable Japanese restaurants that are sprouting like shitake all over the Metro, Kimpura persists to be the premiere restaurant when it comes to first class servings of sukiyaki, teppanyaki, sashimi, and of course, their famed tempura. Kimpura has created memories for its customers and evolved to become more than just a mere Japanese restaurant in the big city, it has become a landmark of gustatory history---Filipinos always look back at Kimpura for one memorable dining experience or two. Generation after generation of loyal patrons would return to the familiar home of tempura goodness. Over the years, Kimpura has preserved the genuine taste of its house bestsellers and its quality service.

When I visited Kimpura on what was a rainy Friday afternoon, I was expecting the same old routine of being served sushi and maki rolls, and perhaps a tray of standard Japanese dishes. But the mood changed and picked up when I was eagerly met by Restaurant Manager Lulu Palileo and Senior Food Service Supervisor Luz Santos. These ladies were the pioneers of Kimpura and they knew just about everything there was to know about the food and the restaurant! Although in the service since its inception in the 1970's, Lulu and Luz fondly speak of their experiences in Kimpura as though it was just a day old memory. And so, what I thought would be just another dining experience turned out to be a relaxed, highly enjoyable conversation with the goddesses of Kimpura over plate after plate and bowl after bowl of the best Japanese cuisine I have ever tried in my life. It's no wonder they have lasted forty years. One bite into their ebi tempura and you'll find yourself concluding that Kimpura will surely have another forty years in the business.

Inside the restaurant, there are ten teppanyaki tables---something that sets Kimpura apart and high above other Japanese tables. Their sushi bar and tempura counter also lets customers see how their food is being prepared, something which makes an ordinary food trip more thrilling. The eating excitement doubles up when you watch the Kimono-dressed food attendants prepare your sukiyaki and Misono chefs cook up the teppanyaki right in front of your watchful eyes!

My unique Kimpura experience, highlighted by the preparation of the teppanyaki, began when me and the ladies sat inside the Misono Room. This room is ideal for groups that require a bit of privacy. The teppanyaki table serves as a silver center on the shiny, black table, with golden light reflected from the wall behind our





The house specialty is Ebi Tempura, with its succulent shrimp enticingly prepared in a crispy golden wrap.



**From left to right:**

Watching the Teppanyaki chef cook up the steak with the vegetables is a rush to both the sense of sight and the sense of taste; Fresh fruit juices are among Kimpura's beverage selection--colorful, yummy, and absolutely healthy!; Two of the must-tries in Kimpura: seafood Teppanyaki (codfish, lobster, and prawns) and the Japanese fried rice (mixed with chicken, beef, egg, onions).

Japanese cooking master for the day, Chef Gregg. The lighting is one of the better qualities of Kimpura, it just sets off that perfect mood for a relaxed, freshly-cooked Japanese meal.

First on my plate was the Dynamite Roll---spicy tuna sashimi rolled and sprinkled with onions. It was one hot explosion, indeed! The tuna was spicy as spicy could get, and I didn't even put wasabi into my dip. Kimpura offers the standard Japanese sushi and rolls menu--from your California maki to the dragon roll. Next up was the renowned sukiyaki---a must-try for all Kimpura newbies. Cooked right in front of us and served in a dainty bowl, the sukiyaki was a savory mix of US beef, bean curd, vegetables, onions, mushrooms, and sotanghon noodles. The beef was tender to the bite and the soup was flavorful.

Midway into my Japanese gustatory fest was their specialty: ebi tempura---fresh, juicy shrimp wrapped in crunchy batter that made a delicious, cracking sound as you bit into the seafood goodness. Lulu told me that in Kimpura, they only use the egg yolk as a batter. Some recipes use the whole egg, they don't. This is also what inspired the name Kimpura---the golden egg yolk wrapped around the shrimp tempura.

The ingredients for teppanyaki were all laid in out front of us: fresh lobster, prawns, gindara (codfish), asparagus sticks, onions, garlic, and butter. For their signature Japanese fried rice, there were strips of beef, pork, chicken, and shrimp, along with chopped carrots, green pepper, and onions. An egg was used for batter. I was really looking forward to watching our chef prepare the teppanyaki, and he did not disappoint me. I remember describing the whole cooking scene as some sort of dance. Every movement was precise, and the way the ingredients were mixed, turned over, and cooked was really just an amazing sight. It's like you're already devouring the teppanyaki just by watching! Your eyes get its fair share of gastronomic delight. And my mouth certainly enjoyed a bigger share: delectable flavors and a distinct, fresh taste that will no doubt get you coming back to Kimpura for more.

According to Luz, the fried rice was best eaten with the ebi tempura, the sukiyaki with plain rice, and the teppanyaki with fried rice as well. I particularly enjoyed the gindara teriyaki with my plain rice. At Kimpura, they serve the codfish in two ways: either as teriyaki or as teppanyaki, both of which were absolutely delicious! Although

“ Memories are formed with every bite and sip, and Kimpura continues to promise its loyal clients and those who are new to the taste that the same Japanese cuisine will endure another four decades, perhaps more. ”

I do have to admit that the gindara teriyaki was a quick favorite--with the smooth sauce adding a dulcified boost to the soft, white meat of the codfish. With ingredients wrapped in nori like an ice cream cone, Kimpura's temaki was both a sight to see and a taste to relish! Slices of tuna and spring onions seemed to be overflowing at the opening of one, salmon roe glistened like small pearls on the other. A third temaki had slices of crab stick, cucumber, lettuce, and mango---a terrific combination for temaki first-timers.

For the drinks, I had the house iced tea while my photographer tried the fruity and colorful four seasons drink. At Kimpura, they have a full range of drinks available---from fresh fruit juices to wine selections. Truly healthy, Kimpura is undoubtedly the top pick for family dinners and gatherings.

Kimpura is an elegant fusion of age-old Japanese food tradition and modern, dining atmosphere. It mixes the old and the new, so to speak, in giving its customers the famous Kimpura recipes that it has upheld since the seventies. Many of Kimpura lovers will attest to the fact that even after so many years, the restaurant still serves the same, familiar, and well-kept Japanese food goodness. It's no longer just the native Pinoy dishes that balikbayans crave for---Kimpura is on that list now. Filipinos who have migrated abroad will come back and look for the Kimpura taste that they've grown up to, the same taste that has become a part of their own respective stories. Memories are formed with every bite and sip, and Kimpura continues to promise its loyal clients and those who are new to the taste that the same Japanese cuisine will endure another four decades, perhaps more.