



Spotlight Halal: **Sushi** (寿司)

Spotlight Halal is a collection of food and ingredient articles from IsItHaram.com.

This article can be found online at: <http://www.isitharam.com/features/sushi.jsp>.

WHAT IS IT?

Sushi (寿司) is a Japanese dish of vinegared rice topped with other ingredients, notably raw fish, seafood and/or vegetables.

There are various types of sushi. In America, the most familiar kinds are maki rolls (*makizushi*, 巻き) which are rolled in sheets of *nori* (dried, pressed seaweed), and *nigirizushi* (にぎり) which are clumps of hand-formed sushi rice topped with fish, seafood, fresh vegetables and/or egg. Sliced raw fish alone is called *sashimi* (刺身), not sushi.

Common toppings for sushi are: saltwater eel (*anago*, 穴子); amberjack (*hamachi*, はまち); mackerel (*hikari-mono*, 光り物); tuna (*kihada*, きはだ); fatty tuna (*toro*, とろ); salmon (*sake*, 鮭); avocado; cucumber; cod (*tara*, 鱈); shrimp (*ebi*, 海老); octopus (*tako*, たこ); squid (*ika*, いか); sweet egg (*tamago*, 玉子), and freshwater eel (*unagi*, 鰻).

HOW IS IT MADE?

Sushi is made with sushi rice — white, short-grained, Japanese rice mixed with a dressing made of rice vinegar, sugar, and salt. Commonly either **sake** (酒) (pronounced: *sa-ki*), a traditional Japanese **rice wine**, or **mirin** (みりん), a sweet Japanese **cooking wine**, are added to the sushi rice. Sushi rice is served topped with fresh fish, seafood, egg, fresh vegetables or pickles and served alongside slices of tender pickled ginger, wasabi paste and soy sauce.

Sake is a traditional Japanese **rice wine**. Its color is clear to white. **Sake** has an **alcohol content of 18-20%**, compared to an **alcohol content of 12%** for typical **grape wines**. **Mirin** is a **rice wine** similar to **sake**, but very sweet. **Mirin** has an **alcohol content of 14%**. When called for, the typical sushi rice recipe uses $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of **sake** or **mirin**.

— Love smoked salmon, but hate the price? Try our **Swedish Gravlax** (cured salmon) recipe.
Make it at home and save a bundle! Recipe next page! —

WARNING LEVEL: HIGH

Seafood dishes are often ordered by Muslims who want to avoid eating non-*zabiha* meat. However, Muslims unfamiliar with Japanese cuisine may not be aware that sushi rice is commonly made with **sake** or **mirin** — both Japanese **rice wines**.

As we have learned in previous issues of **Spotlight Halal**, Muslims should not automatically assume seafood dishes to be *halal*. **Clam Chowder**¹ most often contains **pork fat**, and **Shrimp Scampi**² is made with **white wine**.



ALCOHOL(?)

Sake and **mirin**, both Japanese **rice wines**, are common ingredients in sushi rice.



A plate of various sushi.



AMNA RECOMMENDS

Before ordering, ask your waiter to check if that restaurant uses *sake* or *mirin* in their sushi rice. *Sake* is almost never listed as an ingredient of sushi on restaurant menus.

Avoid sushi with deep-fried toppings such as deep fried soft shell crab ('spider roll'), fried tempura shrimp roll ('crunchy roll', *ebifuraimaki*), and fried oyster rolls. These are likely deep-fried in the same fryer oil as *tonkatsu* — deep-fried, breaded **pork chops**.

Food prepared by the **People of the Book**³ (Christians, Jews) is *halal* for us, so long as it does not contain a prohibited substance such as **pork** or **alcohol**. When eating out at a restaurant, it is not possible to know if the person preparing your meal is atheist, pagan, Buddhist or Hindu. You can, however, avoid restaurants that prominently display statues or paintings of Buddha or Hindu gods, placing the cookstaff in doubt.

SPECIAL NOTE: ALCOHOL AND COOKING

AMNA classifies any food that is usually, but not always, made with an **alcoholic product** as **ALCOHOL(?)**, even if it has been sautéed, simmered, baked or set on fire. The conventional wisdom accepted by just about everyone is that all the **alcohol** you add to a dish evaporates during cooking. It's wrong.

In fact, according to a study conducted by the **US Department of Agriculture's Nutrient Data Laboratory**,⁴ you have to cook something for a good three hours to remove virtually all traces of **alcohol**. After it has cooked for 30 minutes, **35% of the alcohol** remains in the Sushi Rice.

– Learn more about Alcohol cook-off times on the *IslHaram.com* web site at:
http://www.IslHaram.com/our_criteria/prohibited/alcohol_cooking.jsp –

SPECIAL NOTE: ARE SHRIMP, OCTOPUS & SQUID HALAL?

Sunni: These foods are *halal* food in the Malaki, Hanbali and Shafa'i Schools. Within the Hanafi School, there are varying opinions.
Shi'a: These foods are not *halal* in the Jafari School.

WHAT DOES **ALCOHOL(?)** MEAN?

ALCOHOL(?) is the rating that we give to any food that likely, but not always, contains **alcohol** or an **alcohol-derived** product. The **"?"** next to the wineglass on the icon prompts you to take a second look at foods that you otherwise may not have suspected. Ask informed questions of your waiter when dining out. Take a closer look at the Ingredients list on food packaging. **AMNA Muslim Food Advisor**, a service of *IslHaram.com*, rates **Sushi** as **ALCOHOL(?)** because *sake* and *mirin* are common ingredients in sushi rice.



Whether or not you insist on *zabihah*, our flexible and informative approach allows you to make informed decisions on what to buy and eat. At *IslHaram.com*, our Guiding Principle is to provide the diverse Muslim communities living in Western countries with practical information about the wide range of food choices they face on a daily basis, but from an Islamic perspective. We don't say a food is *haram* or *halal*; we say: "This food is made with alcohol and pork," or, "That food normally contains chicken."

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REFERENCES:

- [1] *Spotlight Halal: Clam Chowder*. <http://www.IslHaram.com/features/nechowder.jsp>
- [2] *Spotlight Halal: Shrimp Scampi*. <http://www.isitharam.com/features/shrimpscampi.jsp>
- [3] *IslHaram.com: Quran & Ahadith: SHIRK*. http://www.isitharam.com/our_criteria/quran_hadith/shirk_qh
- [4] **USDA Agricultural Research Service**. Source link unavailable

RECIPE: HOMEMADE SWEDISH GRAVLAX (CURED SALMON)

Forget about spending \$12 a pound for Norwegian smoked salmon! Try this simple recipe for Swedish gravad lax to make at home. Our version yields a tastier slice and firmer texture that you can really sink your teeth into.

Serve it the traditional Scandinavian way, thinly sliced with mustard on crispbread. You can also try sliced gravlax with cream cheese on a bagel, over a green salad, or as a sushi topping.

YOU'LL NEED...

- 1 lb. filet of fresh salmon or steelhead trout, skin off
(Choose a thick, firm and smooth filet. Wild-caught sockeye salmon is best.)
- ¼ cup coarse kosher or sea salt
(Do not use fine table salt, reduced sodium or lite salt.)
- ¼ cup unbleached sugar
(Turbinado, or "Sugar in the Raw" brand)
- 6 sprigs fresh dill, or 1/8 cup dried dill
- 1 teas. whole or crushed white pepper seeds
- 1 teas. juniper berries (optional)
- sealable plastic bag or container



Thin slices of Gravlax, cured salmon.

DIRECTIONS

When handling the salmon, be sure that your hands are absolutely clean. You'll need 3 days to prepare. If you are not going to eat it directly (it lasts a couple of days) move it to a fresh plastic bag or jar, removing the salty liquid that have formed in the original bag. If you keep it in the original bag the risk is that it may be too salty once you are about to serve it.

1. WASH fish filet in cold water. Pat dry with paper towels.
2. (REMOVE skin from unskinned filet, using a sharp knife.)
3. MIX together salt and sugar in a jar. CHOP dill finely.
4. PLACE salmon filet on a plate.
5. RUB a generous amount of sugar/salt mixture on both sides of the filet.
6. COVER the first, then the other, side of filet with dill, white pepper, and juniper berries.
7. PLACE salmon in plastic bag. SEAL. PLACE in refrigerator.
8. TURN OVER plastic bag twice a day for three days.
9. AFTER three days the salmon is ready to serve.
10. SLICE thinly with a sharp knife and serve.