

# Dining with locals on a visit to Japan

By **DONNA BRYSON**  
Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Some of my most treasured travel memories involve food. Like the time my husband and I went to what was billed as New Delhi's best rumali roti stall, where we turned the hood of a car into a table so that the extravagantly thin and succulent flatbread could be wolfed down before it cooled. Or the time I introduced my in-laws to a Johannesburg street vendor's vetkoeks, slightly sweet, slightly sour dollops of fried dough.

So when we were planning a trip to Japan and my husband heard about EatWith.com, we knew we had to try it.

EatWith links travelers to chefs and talented home cooks around the world to share a meal. It's one of several sites, including EatFeastly, VizEat and PlateCulture, offering opportunities to dine informally with locals. The price is set by the chef, typically comparable to a mid-range restaurant meal.

We used EatWith to book a date with Shino Fukuyama, a marketing manager who loves to share her country's cuisine and culture. I, my husband, our tween daughter, my father-in-law and his wife experienced what felt like a homestay for an evening.

Fukuyama's father was a foreign correspondent and their family lived in Mexico and South Korea. In 2002, her husband's job took them to New York. They devoted much of their spare time to exploring restaurants with a Zagat guide. But it was a Thanksgiving dinner in the suburbs with the family of her husband's co-worker that gave her a taste for sharing worlds over a meal in someone's home.

She studied how to teach sushi-making in 2010, and opened her home to visitors after Japan's tourism industry began to revive following the 2011 tsunami.

We scheduled our visit with Fukuyama toward the end of our stay in Japan's capital. That gave us a few days to get to know our way around the city a bit before venturing by subway from the sleek Roppongi embas-



In this Oct. 31 photo, Shino Fukuyama, standing, teaches U.S. and Swiss tourists how to roll sushi as she hosts a dinner at her home in Tokyo. Tourists can learn about sushi, kimonos and enjoy dining with locals thanks to EatWith.com, which links travelers to chefs and talented home cooks around the world.



In this Oct. 31 photo, tourists are taught to make nigiri sushi with sushi rice, top left, and slices of fish, as they prepare dinner at the home of Shino Fukuyama in Tokyo.

sy-and-nightclub district where our hotel was located to her more down-to-earth Meguro neighborhood in central Tokyo.

Fukuyama and her friend Akiko Yamauchi, an auction company art buyer, met us as we emerged from the subway station. They first ushered us to a nearby supermarket, where they answered questions about meats, vegetables and fruits we had until then only seen on restaurant menus. Fukuyama agreed to add whale bacon, spotted in the prepared meat case by my husband, to our menu. We would come to see how gracious that was when we realized just how meticulously she had planned the evening. Fukuyama told me later she usually spends two days preparing for her guests.

The supermarket was a five-minute stroll to Fukuyama's home, a modern concrete box that was a fitting setting for her traditional touches — tatami mats, paper sliding screens, minimal decor. Along the way, Fukuyama pointed out local landmarks. The Shinto shrine. The liquor shop that's been in the same family for three generations. The kimono consignment shop where we bought a delicately woven, lightly used kimono. The textures, patterns and stories of fabric make it, like food, one of our family obsessions. It turned out Fukuyama is a kimono connoisseur. She and Yamauchi met in a kimono club, where people who like to look at and talk about the traditional clothing gather. That night,

she wore a chic dress cut from an old kimono that she had ordered off the Internet.

Once we got to Fukuyama's house, we learned how to roll sushi using fish she had bought ahead of time. We also learned to set a Japanese table, with pottery handed down in Fukuyama's family. Chopsticks are placed horizontally in front of diners, with the narrow ends that touch the food pointing left.

Dinner stretched from our sushi, mine ineptly rolled, to fruit cut into the rabbit shapes that dotting Japanese moms put in their kids' bento boxes. We had plum pickled by Yamauchi's mother-in-law. Fukuyama's husband was out socializing with workmates, but he left us a vegetable dish he had prepared the night before. The whale bacon, more a textural experience than anything else, didn't clash with Fukuyama's carefully curated menu. (I've never eaten a rubber ducky, but I imagine it tastes like the whale bacon did.) After dinner, Fukuyama dressed my 11-year-old daughter in a kimono, delighting her grandfather.

Fukuyama said such moments when she can surprise and charm her guests, along with those when she learns something about another culture are among "the joys of my life."

## Entertaining this holiday season? You need our cheese puffs

By **ALISON LADMAN**  
Associated Press

It's holiday entertaining season, so we say bring on the fat and carbs!

After all, navigating the minefield of office parties and in-laws and dinner parties and cookie swaps (when you'd rather be on the couch with Netflix and a pint of ice cream) requires a bit of comfort food (not to mention a stiff drink, but that's another recipe for another time). Still, if you're entertaining, you can't totally slack off. You just need to marry your need for fatty comforting carbs with something dressy enough to serve in polite company.

So we give you blue cheese and mushroom cheese gougeres. Or just call them cheese puffs; they're delicious no matter what you call them. They're basically dough balls studded with chopped mushrooms and crumbled blue cheese. They are delicious right from the oven or at room temperature. And as an entertaining bonus, they can be prepped ahead and frozen on the baking sheet. Just add a few minutes baking time when you're ready to cook them off.

Blue cheese and mushrooms not



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

### Blue cheese and mushroom gougeres.

your style? Substitute pretty much any cheese you like, ditch the mushrooms, add fresh herbs or scallions. Whatever. It all works.

And while your mother-in-law or boss may judge you, we promise to look the other way if you feel the need to power eat these like popcorn

during the party. Our gougeres are a judgment-free zone.

*Alison Ladman is a chef, food writer and recipe developer for The Associated Press. She also owns The Crust and Crumb Baking Company in Concord, New Hampshire.*

### BLUE CHEESE & MUSHROOM GOUGERES

**Start to finish:** 50 minutes  
**Makes** 25 to 30

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, divided
- 8 ounces mixed mushrooms, finely chopped
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- Kosher salt
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup milk
- Ground black pepper
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 eggs
- 3/4 cup crumbled blue cheese

Heat the oven to 400 F. Coat 2 baking sheets with cooking spray.

In a large skillet over medium-high, melt 1 tablespoon of the butter. Add the mushrooms, shallots and a hefty pinch of salt. Cook until tender and lightly browned, 4 to 5 minutes. Set aside.

In a medium saucepan over medium, combine the remaining 7 tablespoons butter, the water, milk and a hefty pinch of each salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer,

then add the flour all at once. Stirring with a wooden spoon, mix well and continue to cook until the mixture becomes a ball that separates from the pan, 1 to 2 minutes.

Scoop the dough ball into the bowl of a stand mixer. Beat on medium speed for 2 minutes to allow the mixture to cool slightly. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly between additions. Stir in the reserved mushroom mixture and the blue cheese. Scooping by the tablespoonful, place walnut-sized dollops on the prepared baking sheets, leaving 1 1/2 inches of space between each.

Alternatively, transfer the dough into a large zip-close plastic bag. Snip off one of the lower corners and pipe (squeeze) the mixture into place on the prepared baking sheets.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden brown. Enjoy warm or at room temperature.

*Nutrition information per serving: 70 calories; 45 calories from fat (64 percent of total calories); 5 g fat (3 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 45 mg cholesterol; 70 mg sodium; 4 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 0 g sugar; 3 g protein.*



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Oct. 19 photo, shows four wines for under \$15, from left to right, "Kungfu Girl," a Columbia Valley Riesling from Washington state, "Zoe" Red Peloponnese, from Greece, Colome, from Argentina, and Colonia, also from Argentina.

## Festive and frugal: Vine values under \$15

By **MICHELLE LOCKE**  
Associated Press

All we really want for Christmas? Help mastering the sweet spot of gifting wine during the holidays.

We don't want to spend too much. We don't want to spend too little. We don't want something so obscure that we leave our recipients befuddled. We don't want something so common it is sold on grocery store endcaps. We want bottles with character and terroir. We want bottles that please the palate as much as the wallet.

And that is the gifted wine sweet spot. And this is your answer: Our team of experts has come up with 15 knockout bottles that sell for around \$15 to help you create a wine shopping list that's easy to buy, easy to drink.

Suggested picks span the world of winemaking regions, from New Mexico to the Old World. And if there is one theme to the recommendations it's this: Drink global.

"Look for wines from lesser-known wine regions such as those in Bulgaria, Turkey or Croatia," says Mike DeSimone, who with Jeff Jensen is author of the recently released book, "Wines of California." "They've been making wines for centuries, and besides using European grape varieties they also make single varietals and blends from indigenous varieties. It's a great way to learn about new grapes."

Alder Yarrow, founder and editor of the popular wine site Vinography.com also recommends looking afar.

"Once upon a time, California abounded with sub-\$15 wines, but these days it more resembles a desert populated by sparse and prickly wines that I don't really feel like drinking. Contrast that with the incredible number of reasonably priced imports coming from Greece, France, Chile, Argentina and more, and you have to feel sorry for most American winemakers," he says.

One domestic wine did make it on to Yarrow's list — the 2014 Charles Smith "Kung Fu Girl" Columbia Valley Riesling from Washington state, an emerging wine region that offers quite a few undiscovered values. He also recommends the 2014 Skouras "Zoe" Red Peloponnese, from Greece and the 2014 Bodegas Colome Torrontes Valle Calchaqui Salta from Argentina.

Two French wines made the list, with one being the 2014 Chateau de Fontenille Bordeaux Blanc recommended by Ray Isle, executive wine editor of Food & Wine magazine. His other two suggestions, both from Italy, were the 2014 Capezzana Barco Reale and one sparkler, the NV (non vintage) Rotari Brut.

One tip for finding reds that won't land you in the red is to experiment with new grape varieties, advises Jonathan Alsop, founder and executive director of the Boston Wine School. "Sometimes you find great values in wine grapes no one has ever heard of before, like gaglioppo." He recommends the 2013 Enotria "Ciro" Gaglioppo from Campania in southern Italy. Light red in color, it's "very juicy and easy to drink."

### Complete list of the wines:

- Charles Smith "Kung Fu Girl" Columbia Valley Riesling 2014
- Skouras "Zoe" Red Peloponnese, Greece 2014
- Bodegas Colome Torrontes Valle Calchaqui Salta, Argentina 2014
- Chateau de Fontenille Bordeaux Blanc 2014
- Capezzana Barco Reale 2014
- NV Rotari Brut
- Enotria "Ciro" Gaglioppo 2013
- Colonia Las Liebres Bonarda 2013
- NV Gruet Blanc de Noirs Brut
- Owen Roe "Lenore" Syrah, Washington
- Pala "I Fiori" Vermentino, Italy, 2013
- Domaine Deupre Morgon Vignes de 1935, France, 2012
- Chateau Burgozone Viognier, Bulgaria
- Enjingi Grasevina, Croatia
- Vinkara Doruk Narince, Turkey

Rounding out his picks were the 2013 Colonia Las Liebres Bonarda from Argentina. Bonarda, a red grape, is "the next red wine from Argentina you're going to be drinking after you grow weary of Malbec," Alsop predicts.

And from the United States he recommends NV Gruet Blanc de Noirs Brut from New Mexico. "Gruet is the best value sparkling wine in the USA from the unlikely hills above Albuquerque." If you can't find the Blanc de Noirs at the \$15 price point, the lower-priced Gruet Brut also is a good choice.

One more U.S. wine made the cut, the Owen Roe "Lenore" Syrah from Columbia Valley, Washington, recommended by David Kravitz, beverage manager of The Smith restaurants in New York City. Loaded with "wild blackberries, pepper, African violets and a hint of bacon," the Syrah is a perfect burger wine, he says.

His other choices are the 2013 Pala "I Fiori" Vermentino from Sardinia, Italy, and the 2012 Domaine Deupre Morgon Vignes de 1935, a French red from the Beaujolais region.

For the intrepid, Jensen and DeSimone have some picks that may take a little hunting down. Chateau Burgozone Viognier from Bulgaria — "aromas of orange zest and pineapple, with flavors of citrus and stone fruits. It's great as an aperitif before dinner or at a stand up cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres," says Jensen.

The two like Enjingi Grasevina from Kutjevo in Croatia's north. A white wine made from 100 percent Grasevina grapes, it's light and fruity and pairs perfectly with lighter holiday recipes, says DeSimone. Another option, he says, is Vinkara Doruk Narince, a "crisp clean white wine from Turkey made from 100 percent Narince grapes."

So make that wine list, check it twice — and don't forget to slip a bottle or two in your own Christmas stocking.

After all, notes Kravitz, "there is no greater joy, when it comes to wine, than finding a bottle that has depth, shows a sense of place and that you can afford on any given night."