

Shmanners 470: Sushi

Published September 4, 2025

[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: Hello! And I'm Teresa McElroy. Your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: [amused] And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: [through laughter] It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove. Ah!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What's happening!?

Teresa: I'm sorry! Sorry.

Travis: [groans]

Teresa: The panic on your— on your face. [laughs]

Travis: Routine broken! Oh!

Teresa: Sorry.

Travis: No, it's okay. It's— You know, we're living in an alternate universe of allergies right now...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Where I am *just swimming* inside my head.

Teresa: Oh, well, the weather changed.

Travis: Well, the weather outside's delightful.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And the allergies sure are frightful.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: The snot has no place to go... In my throat, it'll flow, it'll flow.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: How about that, yeah?

Teresa: Gross, *and* also... [laughs]

Travis: Gross, and evocative. That's what good poetry is.

Teresa: [laughter grows]

Travis: Welcome to *Wonderful!* Good poetry...

Teresa: No.

Travis: ... powers the soul *and* grosses out the mind.

Teresa: Don't you dare. [laughs] Don't you dare.

Travis: I've never listened. Um, I've heard it's good. I don't know.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: No, I've listened, it's great. But I'm sure they talk about poetry about snot a lot. That, in itself, is a little poem.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's not a lot, when you think about it.

Teresa: Oh, dear.

Travis: It's great.

Teresa: You're great.

Travis: It's also wonderful to watch seasonal change allergies run rampant through our daughters. Because they have no context for it, and they're like, "Well... This is the end."

Teresa: [chuckles] Yeah.

Travis: "I feel 5% bad, and so everyone must feel bad with me."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "Enjoy! Yay!" Kids are great.

Teresa: Well, I think Dotty has escaped most of it. She's...

Travis: To be fair, Dotty's always just doing her own thing anyways. So she might not even notice if she has allergies.

Teresa: She needs a rich inner life!

Travis: She has a rich inner life, constantly performing to an invisible audience. And we love it, frankly.

Teresa: We love it.

Travis: But speaking of invisible audiences... What are we doing for—

Teresa: [laughs hard]

Travis: I realized, even as I said it, that *I'm* constantly performing for an invisible audience, so who am I to judge?

Teresa: Yes, you are. [laughs]

Travis: Um...

Teresa: Oh, man.

Travis: What are we bringing to our invisible audience this week?

Teresa: Sushi etiquette.

Travis: Sushi etiquette.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: When you become sushi...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: ... this is how you show good manners.

Teresa: Well, okay. So sushi is—

Travis: No, don't say it!

Teresa: What?

Travis: I'm gonna use my deductive reasoning... Quite old?

Teresa: [bursts out laughing] Yes, indeed. But I was gonna say, a lot of people's favorite foods.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Alexx's favorite food.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And we also quite enjoy sushi. Well, we enjoy Americanized sushi.

Travis: I would also say, though, it's interesting. Because, listen, if sushi's your favorite food, I'm not gonna tell you you're wrong. I love sushi. What I am gonna say, is it's kind of— It's one of those where, to me, it's almost more of a delivery method of food, a version of food, than a specific food.

Teresa: Mm, okay. Okay.

Travis: Right? Because if you say...

Teresa: It's a genre of food.

Travis: A genre of food, yes!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Because if I were to say, "My favorite food is French fries," right, I might get different *kinds* of French fries...

Teresa: Different cuts?

Travis: Right. But the elements of them are the same every time.

Teresa: Fried potato.

Travis: Right. Whereas *sushi* could contain and be formed in so many different ways.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? It's almost more of a *preparation* than a specific food *type*.

Teresa: And, I mean, it's almost— It's even a food shape, sometimes.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Although sushi does come in different shapes.

Travis: Yeah. It reminds me a lot of pizza, in that way.

Teresa: Okay. Yeah.

Travis: Of, like, the delivery method...

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: ... is the pizza. What you choose to top it with, and fill it with, right?

Teresa: I'm picking this up! Yeah. Yeah, I get it!

Travis: It's that kind of thing, right?

Teresa: Yeah, totally. Let's talk about sushis.

Travis: It's been around for at least 50 years.

Teresa: Longer than that.

Travis: 70?

Teresa: Roughly 1,300 years ago, during the Nara period in Japan, Japanese people ate what then was called *narezushi*.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: This dish was made by taking salt-cured fish and mixing it with rice, placing it in a container covered with heavy stone so that the two foods could ferment together over a period of months. Nare actually—

Travis: So, slow food, if you will.

Teresa: Well, it translates to “ripening” or “acclimating” in Japanese, so that’s kind of where the original name came from.

Travis: I feel like this is like America, because of our relative youth compared to other countries, never got the period of food history that’s like, “Listen, we need some way to preserve this food. We’re just gonna let it get old safely.” Right? Like, we have *some* of that, but when you think of fermented fish like lutefisk, or um... So many other things that are now blanking on me ‘cause my brain’s full of snot.

But that idea of, “We just soaked it in salt for a long time,” or, “We fermented the food in these barrels,” or, “We wrapped it in these leaves and set it in the sun, and we were still able to eat it forever later,” that wasn’t really as much of a thing— I mean, in European-colonized America.

Teresa: Okay. Right, yes. *European-colonized* America. I think that there were lots of food preservation techniques that the original people...

Travis: Yes. The indigenous people of America definitely had those, and I don’t mean to discount that. I mean in the Anglicized America, right, there was a lot of, like... I don’t know, bread? [chuckles]

Teresa: Well, we didn’t really need to, because we brought it over from other places.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: Right? And there’s a long history of preserving food before refrigeration. There’s salt cures, sugar cures, drying things out like jerky. Right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: You mentioned pickling.

Travis: I love pickling.

Teresa: In the sort of— Well, is ludefisk pickled? It's—

Travis: Fermented, isn't it?

Teresa: Fermented, but it's in like a lye solution, right?

Travis: It's all science magic to me. Who knows— No one knows how it works.

Teresa: But so, like... The rice—

Travis: People know how it works.

Teresa: People do.

Travis: People are— People know how— *I* don't know.

Teresa: [laughs] The rice part of this dish was actually often thrown out, after it was done doing its thing.

Travis: So it was just kind of like the storage method.

Teresa: Kind of? I mean, it aided in the fermentation. But—

Travis: Like drying out your iPhone when you drop it in water?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Then you put it in rice, like that?

Teresa: I mean, but think about fermenting rice for *months*. It just turns to mush, right? It doesn't really have any kind of texture to it, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So they usually just kind of threw it out, right? So it was a really great way to further the life of the protein, fish, that goes bad quite quickly.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Famously.

Teresa: Famously quickly. And so the preservation method that we're talking about isn't even actually original to the Japanese tradition. It's actually more likely that the first form of sushi as we know it wasn't actually developed on the island of Japan, but in the Mekong River basin in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: There's evidence that a similar fermented river fish dish was eaten in Myanmar, as well. And the very first narezushi wasn't even documented in Japan, but in ancient China around the 4th Century, when the dish was adopted from these regions in Southeast Asia.

Travis: It's also a little bit— 'Cause we've touched on pasta before, as well. This idea of rice as a fermenting method for fish...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Wasn't like— We've talked about this a lot with food, right? Where it's not a complicated invention, that it took one person to finally eureka moment, figure it out.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: You can see why this would be spontaneously kind of asynchronously— What's the word I'm looking for? Happening at the same time...

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: ... in many different places.

Teresa: Right, yes. It is not centralized.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But... why? Why, then, when we think of sushi, do we think of Japan?

Travis: Good PR?

Teresa: Sure! Sure. So narezushi was the Japanese take on the food preservation, right? And the popularity grew with the introduction of wet field rice cultivation, and so it shares a lot of the history of the rice farming in Japan. And so the word "sushi" is believed to have come from the Japanese word *suppai*, which refers to the sour taste of something that's been fermented.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. Here is the reason why it is so popular.

Travis: Tell me.

Teresa: We found it described on tax documents.

Travis: Get out of the town.

Teresa: Taxpayers in Japan often paid what they owed in goods or services. So all adult males were required to offer some kind of tax payment to the central government, whether that was in form of rice, or cloth, or even military service.

Travis: Can I tell you how wonderful it would be if I, when filing my taxes, could be like, “And here’s eight podcasts for you”?

Teresa: Indeed!

Travis: “Done and done. And we’re square.”

Teresa: So, on this ancient tax document, there was a record of people who paid their taxes in sushi!

Travis: And it’s not too late. That’s actually— This is a loophole, but that’s still accepted by the American government today.

Teresa: [laughs heartily] There’s historical proof that the Japanese—

Travis: They don’t want you to find out this one trick.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: The IRS doesn’t know that I know this one trick.

Teresa: The Japanese government received sushi made of abalone, mussels, carp, sea bream, and shad, which is still used in a lot of sushi preparations today.

Now, that’s the ancient history of it. In the 15th Century, sushi started to slowly evolve into what we would recognize it as today. The coastal cities of Japan, fish are very plentiful.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so as a result, Japanese cooks began to age the fish for *much* /less time. If you don’t need to hold onto it so long, you don’t need to age it as long, right?

Travis: Yeah. I also imagine that, as just the actual fishing technologies are

advancing in technology, you're able to do more net casting and stuff, you're— It's not just that the fish in the water are plentiful, but we're getting better at pulling it out of the water.

Teresa: Yes. Yes, indeed. And so when you don't have to age it for so long, you can actually eat the rice, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Because it doesn't turn to mush over months. If you don't have to age it for months, then you can just eat the fermented rice too.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So then, it turns out, you don't even have to *leave* it for six months in a jar, right? It takes on this pleasantly tangy, kind of vinegary taste, and it doesn't take very long at all. Over the next 200 years, sushi demand became so great that the entire process was simply cut short by adding vinegar to sushi rice.

Travis: That's a great idea.

Teresa: [amused] So they were like, "We can eat the fish, the fish as it is," right? That's how we know sushi as, we understand it as raw fish, right? And then the vinegary rice.

Travis: That does make sense. Because I think if someone was preparing a meal, and I was like, "That looks delicious, I can't wait to eat it." And they were like, "Yep, check back in November," that would be... off-putting.

Teresa: Right. Right. Well—

Travis: But that's because I'm not *used* to waiting six months...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: ... to eat dinner. Maybe if I trained myself, I'd get better at it.

Teresa: This idea, of the fresh fish and the vinegar rice, happened around the 1820s in Tokyo. Where they were kind of like, "Let's just put these two things that we like together."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: "We like fish. We like this fermented rice. Let's use the fresh fish, and we'll get this going here." Modern-day sushi was born, and it was referred to at the time as Haya sushi. *Su* referred to the vinegar rice. *Shi* meant raw, and *Haya* meant fast.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So it was a little nod to the fact that they were speeding at the traditional process, right? And it was *explosively* popular.

Travis: That's so— It's so interesting to me, because the evolution of it, to go from this thing of long preservation, right? Of, like, "This is a thing that we're gonna set in this thing. And it'll be months, and months, and months before it's ready." Two, a food that *I* know consider... not fast food in the, you know, what we think of. But more of a very quick-to-prepare, you could watch them do it at the sushi bar, wherever you order from...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it's like, "Yeah. No, it's pretty quick to do." Right? It's—

Teresa: Yeah, the process is quick. But the technique is... is long. [chuckles] Right? Because you need to be very properly skilled, in order to do it well.

Travis: Indeed. And we'll talk more about that after a word from another Max Fun show!

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Emily: I'm Emily Fleming!

Jordan: I'm Jordan Morris!

Matt: And I'm Matt Lieb!

Emily: We are real comedy writers.

Matt: Real friends.

Jordan: And real cheapskates.

Matt: On every episode of our podcast, *Free With Ads*, we ask, "Why pay for expensive streaming services, when you can get free movies from apps with weird names?"

Emily: Each week, we review the freest movies the internet has to offer! Classics like *Pride and Prejudice*.

Jordan: Cult classics like *Point Break*.

Matt: And "Holy [censored beep], what did I just watch?" classics like *Teen Witch*.

Emily: Tune in every week, as we take a deep dive into the internet's bargain bin.

Jordan: Every Tuesday on MaximumFun.org, or your favorite pod place.

[ad changes]

[comedic music plays in background]

Speaker 1: *The Flop House* is a podcast where we watch a bad movie, and then we talk about it.

Speaker 2: Robert Shaw in *Jaws*. They're trying to figure out how to get rid of the buoys, and he scratches his nails. And he goes, "I'll get you."

Speaker 1: He's just standing above the toilet, with a harpoon. [wheeze-laugh]

Speaker 2: [laughs]

Speaker 1: No, I'm just looking forward to you going through the other ways in which the *Wild Wild West* is [holding back laughter] historically inaccurate.

Speaker 3: You know how *much* movies cost nowadays?

Speaker 2: [laughs]

Speaker 3: When you add in your popcorn, and your bagel bites, and your cheese fritters?

Speaker 1: [laughs] Sure.

Speaker 2: You can't go wrong with a Henry Cavill mustache. Here at Henry Cavill Mustaches, [through laughter] the only supplier...

Voiceover: *The Flop House*. New episodes every Saturday. Find it at MaximumFun.org.

[ad break ends]

Travis: [sing-song] Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba, we're back!

Teresa: [amused] Okay. I didn't know that we had interstitial music.

Travis: Trying it out.

Teresa: So...

Travis: [sing-song] *Shma-na-na-na-na-ners!* What do you think?

Teresa: No. I don't like that one.

Travis: No. Okay.

Teresa: No.

Travis: *Shma-nanners!*

Teresa: It sounds like "banana."

Travis: Well, yeah!

Teresa: No, I don't want that.

Travis: You don't want it to sound like "banana"?

Teresa: No. I don't really like bananas.

Travis: Get out of this house! [sing-song] And into my car!

Teresa: [bursts out laughing] You're full of music today!

Travis: Listen. I'm full of snot, but go on!

Teresa: [wheeze-laughs] Alright. So, Japan was quite isolated from the rest of the world, until around the 1850s. And in 1854, westerners – Americans in particular – began to visit Japan. For, like, the first time. And so the late Victorian period is when the rest of the world was introduced to Japanese culture, and sushi along with it, right? And the westerners loved the dish. And it became—

Travis: This is— To be fair, this is something historically that happens of the *second*...

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah...

Travis: The *second* Europeans and Americans discover— Like, “discover,” quote unquote. Like, visit a new country for the first time, it’s like, “Oh, I’ve always loved this.”

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: “Oh. Oh, this is great, yeah.” Whether it’s, I don’t know, cinnamon, or vanilla, or sushi, or whatever. It’s like...

Teresa: Sugar.

Travis: “This is the best thing!”

Teresa: Yeah. [laughs]

Travis: “This is the best thing ever! We all agree. We all agree it’s the best— Okay. Cool, we’re gonna throw whole parties where we just eat pepper. Okay, great.”

Teresa: [laughs] So the thing is, right, like I mentioned before, preparation is key.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because if you don’t do it right—

Travis: Preparation is H.

Teresa: No. I won’t have that on my show.

Travis: Okay. That’s for a different show.

Teresa: If you don't do it right, it could make you sick, or even kill you. Right? Even today, certain fish, like puffer fish and lion fish, are highly regulated because poor preparation can straight-up poison someone who eats it. Right?

Travis: No good.

Teresa: And so, because of the high skill needed, sushi was not a very accessible food item to those outside of Japan. But, lucky for the world, countless talented Japanese chefs began to bring sushi off of the Japanese archipelago, sharing the delicacy with countless countries across the planet. We are going to fast-forward...

Travis: [makes warbling noise]

Teresa: ... to California.

Travis: I'm sorry, that was a turkey. Sorry.

Teresa: [crosstalk], but [laughs] to California.

Travis: I've heard of it.

Teresa: So the West coast of the United States at the time had been—

Travis: It's still the West coast of the United States.

Teresa: No, no, no. At this time, the West coast of the United—

Travis: Oh, sorry, yeah, okay.

Teresa: Right. Had been using underpaid Asian laborers to build railroads, and work in mines, and farm fruit fields, and sew in the garment industry. And because racism doesn't make sense, and never really has, it just so happens that in the mid-19th Century, legislation was passed banning Chinese immigrants from accessing these jobs that they had always worked,

in the United States. And because of that, employees actively encouraged Japanese immigrants to come over and fill these jobs.
Your eye roll?

Travis: No...

Teresa: We can't hear it on the—

Travis: I *know*.

Teresa: On the podcast.

Travis: It's just... the cycle of relying on labor...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and then demonizing that labor.

Teresa: I know.

Travis: And then being like, "So now, we're gonna cycle through other people that, in a decade or so, we're going to be incredibly terrible towards."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And then just keep that cycle going.

Teresa: That's true. Let's not open this particular can of worms right *this* second.

Travis: Yes. But it does need to be acknowledged.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: 'Cause as we're— I think that any time we talk about a topic where it's celebrating the— how specifically in America and Europe, they will

embrace these things that they find, that they import from other countries, while simultaneously demonizing the people from those places.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: It's just— Like, you can fill a book with it, and many people have. You know?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It must be acknowledged that that is often the pattern of things.

Teresa: And we are acknowledging it.

Travis: And I'm just gonna say, I think it's bad.

Teresa: Yes! Indeed.

Okay, so, and what these Japanese immigrants brought with them, one of the things was sushi, right? And lots of Japanese citizens were keeping sushi business alive, and it took Americans almost 100 years to understand that this stuff was great. Because initially, Californians were aghast at the idea of eating raw fish. Because we had always been taught—

Travis: They're cowards.

Teresa: Well, we'd always been taught that's bad for you, right? Won't that get you sick? But—

Travis: There are still people, to this day, that when we say, "Oh, yeah, we love sushi!" They're like, "Ooh, raw fish? I don't know if I'd..."

Teresa: Mm, my parents. [bursts out laughing]

Travis: I wasn't gonna say it! I wasn't gonna say it! But yeah! That's who I was thinking about.

Teresa: So it wasn't that the sushi chefs didn't want to serve Americans. It's that they didn't know how to get them to even try it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? And so here we have, in the 1960s, a very talented sushi chef named Ichiro Mashita, who wanted to introduce the cuisine to the American palate. Now, he knew he was gonna have to change a few things, to get people to even want to put it in their mouths, right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: The marketing ploy that he used, to appease his wimpy American neighbors...

Travis: Yup.

Teresa: Was he made a role with cooked crab, avocado, cucumber, and mayonnaise.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: These are all things that he knew these people would eat.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: So let us make it into the form of sushi.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So that they will eat it.

Travis: Ah.

Teresa: So...

Travis: A gateway sushi, if you will.

Teresa: A gateway sushi. So, if you weren't familiar with sushi, maybe you could actually convince someone to eat this. Right? Because they knew all the stuff in it. And Mashita also began serving the roll with rice on the outside, instead of the inside of the seaweed wrap. And it became such a massive hit, you'll find a version of it at every single American sushi restaurant today.

Travis: Is it the California roll?

Teresa: It *is* the California roll! Indeed. By the mid-20th Century, sushi was booming all over America. And sushi culture in the United States became highly Westernized, due to this American fear of raw fish. Right? So, like you were saying earlier, sushi is sushi-shaped, right? But not necessarily sushi taste.

Travis: It's a lot of the same— like what we consider Chinese food.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Right? Where it's very Americanized Chinese food.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Very Americanized sushi, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like the Americanized taco, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: This idea of, like... "Yeah, I love it!"
Where it's like, "Cool, man. That has been adapted to fit what you expect it to be."

Teresa: Yes. And not only was it the tastes that sushi was changing for. It's also, there are a lot of more stricter regulations on how sushi is made in the United States, due to the fear of the potential health risks. Right? Not everybody lives near the ocean, or a lake, or a pond, where they can get the fresh fish. So fish needs to be contained properly, to keep it from going off.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And so, if you think that you're getting top-tier sushi in, I don't know, Idaho, you probably either have to pay an exorbitant amount to get that really fresh fish, or it's... It's cooked. Right?

Travis: Is Idaho landlocked?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: How confident are you in that?

Teresa: Pretty confident.

Travis: Then you're not thinking of Iowa?

Teresa: No. I mean, but Iowa also is. All those states in the middle, there.

Travis: No, 'cause I'm pretty sure Iowa is the face of the elf, where—

Teresa: What?

Travis: Louisiana's the boot.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And then you go up the leg, I think Iowa's the face.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And then I *think* Minnesota's the hat?

Teresa: Okay. And Minnesota's on the lakes.

Travis: Yeah. But Minnesota's the hat.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: We all know *that*. Come on, Teresa.

Teresa: Okay. Would you like me to pick a different landlocked state?

Travis: No, it's fine!

Teresa: Utah!

Travis: You could've said West Virginia. And we all would've agreed.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: No one should be getting sushi out of the Ohio River.

Teresa: No one should.

Travis: No one.

Teresa: No one.

So chefs had to get creative. They used things like cooked prawns, smoked fish, egg, sweet potato, and lots of other things, right? One of our favorite sushi dishes is, quote, "sweet shrimp," which is cooked. Right? And so that is just something that, if you want to even have the sushi shape, you have to adapt it. And a lot of the specialized Japanese sauces were also reduced to simple soy sauce, wasabi, and ginger.

And, I mean, I think that it makes it a lot more palatable for people who are not used to the kind of nuances of a lot of different spices, and different preparations and things. The way that it has evolved in the United States has made it, certainly, watered down. Right? But also more accessible. We have sushi joints here in Ohio that we love to do, and go to.

Travis: Okay. I'm willing to bet you might have some etiquette tips?

Teresa: I do.

Travis: Some mannerly behaviors? What should people be doing? And not doing, I guess?

Teresa: So, it's important to know what you're eating. I've talked about sushi—

Travis: That's always true.

Teresa: Yes. Sushi shape, and there are different sushi shapes that you should know. So first of all, there's sashimi, which is just the fish. It's just the meat, okay? And then you have nigiri, sometimes called sushi nigiri, right? Because that is the seafood on rice.

Travis: Right. Not the thing with the roll.

Teresa: Right. Which, the round rolls with the seaweed on the outside is called maki. And then, with seafood on the outside, right, it is called uramaki.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And then you've got the cone, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Which is called temaki.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And then the bowl, which is chirashi.

Travis: Got it.

Teresa: Right. I really like the maki. I like the rolls.

Travis: I do, too.

Teresa: Here's something that a lot of people often do when they're first starting out, eating sushi, is they add wasabi. Which, in the United States, is usually just horseradish, right? It's not actual wasabi root. They add it into the soy sauce, to kind of spice up the sauce. That's a real rookie move.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: So don't do that, because you're messing with the flavor of the roll a lot, by doing that.

Travis: You just wanna eat that big wad of wasabi, straight up.

Teresa: [giggles] No.

Travis: Just warm yourself up. Just really start your palate going...

Teresa: No, but—

Travis: Big bite full of wasabi.

Teresa: No, don't do that. But you—

Travis: Put it right up your nose!

Teresa: You can add a tiny dab, with your chopstick, to your roll of wasabi. Right? Or you can dip your roll into the soy sauce. If you have a roll, you can

dip it, kind of the side, into it. But if you have the sushi nigiri, you wanna turn it over, and dip the fish into the soy sauce. You can do this by, if you use your chopsticks. And you probably should, with the sushi nigiri.

Travis: So I should use chopsticks? 'Cause I've also heard people say, like, you don't need chopsticks to eat sushi.

Teresa: No, you don't need it. You can use it a finger food, as well.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But if you're gonna dip it in your soy sauce, I'd recommend that you use the chopsticks, so you can turn the sushi nigiri on the side. And then pick it up, so that it's upside-down, and dip the fish in.

Travis: Is that so you're not just soaking up all of the soy sauce into the rice, and just getting a mouthful of soy sauce?

Teresa: Not only that, but also, it'll make the rice all fall apart, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It'll make a mess. Most rolls, especially nigiri, should be eaten in a single bite.

Travis: Got it. Done and done! Don't even worry about it.

Teresa: You're so good at that! I am not.

Travis: Thank you, babe! I've trained my whole life for this.

Teresa: [laughs] I am not as good at is. It's more difficult for me, especially with some of these Americanized rolls that have all of the stuff on the top, right? They have roe, or they have like—

Travis: You just gotta believe.

Teresa: Like... [wheeze-laugh]

Travis: You second-guess yourself, you just— Sometimes, you just gotta throw it up...

Teresa: Shredded crab, or sauces.

Travis: Throw it up in the air, catch it in your mouth, and just accept it's gonna be rough, you know what I mean?

Teresa: It's so hard for me. I complete— I really—

Travis: You just gotta commit. You can do it. I believe in you.

Teresa: Okay. A couple more things about chopstick etiquette. You're not supposed to rub your chopsticks together. It's considered an insult, because the gesture implies that your chopsticks aren't high quality, right? That you're kind of rubbing them together to get rid of the splinters. You really shouldn't do that in front of your sushi chef, okay?

And you're allowed to ask for another set, if you drop them. Or if the wood is splintered, right? If you see that there's a big chunk missing, or something sticking out, you can ask for another pair. And when you're done with your chopsticks, be mindful how you place them on the table. A lot of places will have a chopstick holder. Perfect.

Do not stick your chopsticks vertically, in a bowl of rice, or in any way where they are straight up, as it indicates you are wishing bad luck on your hosts.

Travis: Oh, boy! Can I just say, though, unless you *do* do— Unless you are wishing bad luck on your host, if you're like, "This party has been terrible." And then you're just like, "Boom!" Slam it in. And while you're making eye contact with them, *that's* power.

Teresa: That is power.

Travis: I'm just saying, like, I could see— If you want to, if that's your intention...

Teresa: Keep in mind, sushi experience is about so much more than just the fish. The ingredients are important, but chefs in Japan can spend up to a decade simply perfecting the art of making sushi rice. Balancing of the rice with the vinegar, or the seaweed and the soy sauce, and wasabi and the ginger, is an art form. So if you wanna show appreciation for the chef, complimenting one of the non-fish elements of the dish can make you look like a dream sushi guest!

Here are some personal tips—

Travis: Or tell them they have a kind smile.

Teresa: Aw!

Travis: You know, everybody likes that.

Teresa: Personal tips from chef and owner of sushi bar, Yasuda, in Tokyo. Do not put ginger on top of your sushi; the ginger is a palate cleanser. Eat it between your courses, not in addition to your rolls.

Travis: Love it.

Teresa: Like we said, you can eat it with your fingers – yes, to even dip it – and actually, some people say that eating it with your fingers is better for appreciating the temperature and texture of the roll.

Travis: Also, faster. If you're like me? Oh! I just wanna— Oh, I just wanna— [sighs] I wanna just get it in my mouth. And I'm sorry [laughs] for that sentence. I had already committed to it, and I just had to finish saying it. Sorry, everyone! Hey, thank you for listening!

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: And thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not do this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not do this show.

Also, before I forget, everybody, if you are in the Cincinnati area at all, coming up this holiday season, *Die Hard is a Christmas Movie*, written in part by Alexx Rouse. It's returning for its second year, after it was a huge hit last year. It's gonna be the holiday show at the Know Theatre of Cincinnati, K-N-O-W Theatre of Cincinnati. Check that out, get your tickets.

Also, *King James* is coming up, opening September 11th there, and it is the story of two friends and their 14-year-long obsession with the career of LeBron James. Go to Know Theatre of Cincinnati and check that out. I'm on their board, and I support them, and they're great.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners! If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

And as always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms! Send those all to shmannerscast@gmail.com. And say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*! Get it?

[theme music plays]

[acoustic sting]

Maximum Fun.

A worker-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.