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FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



The Guapo long roll is served alongside mackerel nigiri at Hiroba Sushi in Sparks.
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

On a roll

A couple of years ago, well-known Hiroba Sushi pulled up stakes from its southwest Reno location and moved to the Marina neighborhood in Sparks. It's been years since I'd been to the original, so I invited a couple of lady friends—and one little lady—to join me on a busy Saturday evening.

Although the bar was full, there was no wait for a table. Kid-sized portions of chicken teriyaki and beef bulgogi are offered, but the kid wanted none of it. A simple bowl of rice (\$1.50) and vanilla mochi dessert (\$2.50) suited her just fine. Her rice, my large hot sake (\$7), and four-piece orders of calamari rings and gyoza quickly arrived, although we did have to remind our server about a missing order of baked mussels well into the meal. The mussels seemed a bit grainy and overcooked, the rings and dumplings average. Not bad, just nothing I'd repeat.

I ordered my nigiri favorites, including fresh and cured and smoked salmon, fresh and seared tuna, snapper, yellowtail, scallop, mackerel, octopus, tobiko (flying fish roe) and a quail egg shooter. I mostly got the salty/tart shooter to freak the kid out; mission accomplished. The fish-to-rice ratio was excellent, and the cuts were more-or-less bite-sized. The octopus was reasonably tender, and the mackerel tasted pretty fresh (always a good sign). I particularly enjoyed the smoked and cured bites of salmon and lightly cooked scallops. Tasty orders of Mickey Mouse—tuna, avocado, krab—and Donald Duck—salmon, avocado, krab—were a bit more than a single bite, but we managed.

For raw long rolls, the ladies selected Rainbow with krab, avocado, cucumber, assorted fish, tobiko; Philadelphia with cream cheese,

salmon, scallion, tobiko; and a Spicy Tuna roll with cucumber, scallion, and hot chili sauce. For cooked, they ordered King Kong with tempura shrimp, cream cheese, krab, panko and teriyaki; and Guapo with cream cheese, crystal shrimp, cilantro, avocado, krab and teriyaki. I tossed in a spider hand roll of soft shell crab, cucumber, krab, teriyaki, mayo; and a crystal shrimp hand roll for good measure.

I'm generally not fond of cooked rolls or cream cheese in sushi, but I was pleasantly surprised by both the Guapo and King Kong. As with the nigiri, the rice ratio was good and the pieces bite-sized. The cheese was used sparingly, and the ingredients fairly balanced with a pleasant, spicy kick. So help me, I might actually order one of those myself. The Rainbow roll was pretty much as expected—nothing fancy. I have never sampled a Philly roll I liked, but this one was a worth a couple of bites. Unfortunately, Spicy Tuna was the one roll that failed to please. The spiced tuna competed with hot sauce and a whole lot of scallion for attention, leaving an overall effect of just being hot. In a blind taste test, I couldn't tell you what kind of fish it contained.

The hand rolls were stuffed full of crunchy goodies, the soft shell crab being particularly good. The kid was entertained by the sheer number of plates involved, and the fact she was the only one not complaining about being stuffed. Smart kid. □

Hiroba Sushi

1495 E. Prater Way, 470-8177

Hiroba Sushi is open Tuesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. All You Can Eat \$24.95 dinner, \$19.95 lunch. For kids 11 and younger: \$18.95, \$13.95.