



eating out with Sarah Wilson

Whether you're a raw beginner or you just like it raw, there's a Japanese joint out there to suit you

JAPANESE dining can often seem too much like hard work. When you've pointed your chopsticks in the wrong direction, offended your dining partner by pouring your own sake and dipped the wrong end of your nigiri-zushi in the wasabi, you're ready to pack it in and head out for Chinese. But there's no need to

commit hari-kari. These days the clean, elegant flavours of this time-honoured cuisine can be yours to enjoy free of intimidating rules. Melbourne's Japanese restaurants have relaxed their style over the years, offering accessible and affordable menus – and some will even provide a knife and fork.



Birdcage

129 Fitzroy St,
St Kilda
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When I set off for a fusion Japanese feed at Birdcage I like to wear raw-edged streetwear and chat graffiti art and Margaret River riesling. I don't know, I guess it helps me blend in with the fashion-fickle St Kilda patrons who "pop in" at this modernist, converted-warehouse-style eatery. Which is not to say Birdcage is all scene and no substance.

Sushi chef Mitsuo rolls up some great sushi and the varied menu boasts "street food" favourites, like steamed salted soy beans (\$4) and octopus dumplings (\$15). Birdcage is also one of the places in town to savour wagyu – a succulent, marbled beef produced from over-indulged cattle. So be sure to try the wagyu soba broth (\$18.50).