

Worth the wait?

How a Calabasas staple keeps sushi-lovers coming back for more.

By Hannah Drake Litman



Toasting the Sushi chefs at Shibuya Sushi in Calabasas, October 10, 2024.
(Photo/Hannah Litman)

Tucked into a tiny, unassuming Calabasas strip mall, you'll start to notice dozens of people sitting on benches, curbs and in their cars. A certain "hangry" energy permeates in the sun soaked parking lot. Congratulations—you've found Shibuya Sushi. At any time of day, guests can expect to wait one to three hours to be seated. It's a frustrating reality that has people asking, "Is it worth it?"

I'm happy to tell you that it absolutely is.

The popularity surrounding Shibuya is not new. The restaurant opened in 1996 and has had a cult following ever since, gaining even more traction thanks to Los Angeles-based food influencers. Rick Lox (@ricklox) proudly labeled Shibuya his favorite restaurant in the world. He's even partnered with the restaurant, creating branded hats that display a "9.8" embroidered on the side—the highest "Lox Level" given to a restaurant.

Shibuya does not boast any modern conveniences of a typical L.A. hotspot. Yes, they accept credit cards. But a crinkled piece of paper secured to the wall with Scotch tape clearly states, “NO ApplePay.”

Upon arrival, guests must handwrite their name and party size on a clipboard. You will find yourself checking in on that list multiple times, assessing your wait status. You’re only 40 minutes (20 minutes without traffic) away from Sushi Row, rumored to be the highest concentration of sushi restaurants in a square mile outside of Japan. And Sugarfish is right around the corner—are you sure you want to wait? You should.

And while the sushi is immaculate, though not inexpensive, what makes the wait worthwhile is an intangible quality encapsulated by a word you will hear the sushi chefs echo time and time again: “Kazoku.” Family.



Another packed dinner service at Shibuya Sushi, October 10, 2024. (Photo/Hannah Litman)

Maybe it’s the parking lot anticipation that gives the complimentary cucumber salad an unexplainably crave-worthy zip, but from the moment you sit at one of the fewer than 30 seats inside Shibuya, you will want to take your time.



Seabream sushi at Shibuya Sushi, October 10, 2024. (Photo/Hannah Litman)

You may become transfixed as four of the five sushi chefs on staff work together seamlessly behind the bar, swiftly preparing sushi, sashimi and nigiri. The fifth chef has the night off. Mustachioed brothers named Adrian and Moises, who appear to be identical twins but swear they are not, seat guests while also running credit cards, clearing plates and somehow remembering the first name of every single guest they meet. Lena and Na squeeze between tightly packed tables to deliver plates and glasses and to also take your drink order and clean away your chopstick wrappers, all

while greeting you with, “It’s so good to see you again! Last time you got Orion beer—do you want that again? Okay, and you prefer the taller glasses, right?”

A white board with a handwritten menu acts as your guide. You order salmon sushi, albacore sashimi and—trust me on this—bluefin hagashi with three sauces. And fish bone chips. You *must* order fish bone chips. You stare in amazement as the chefs slice and assemble succulent, jewel-toned works of art while holding out their glasses any time a guest shouts “kanpai!” You decide they must somehow be performing a “Coyote Ugly” trick, disposing of beer and sake without actually swallowing it. They crack jokes, ask questions and inquire about your life. And they will refer back to your answers the next time you’re sitting at their bar.



A group of patient guests wait to be seated at Shibuya Sushi, October 10, 2024. (Photo/Hannah Litman)