



CLOCKWISE: An edible work of art at Sydney's Jugemu & Shimbashi, making okonomiyaki is a labour-intensive affair, the finishing touches.

# Okonomiyaki

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Move over ramen, stand aside sashimi, *okonomiyaki* deserves its time in the spotlight

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A traditional and long-time favourite dish across Japan, *okonomiyaki* is yet to see the same recognition outside of the country that other iconic dishes have received. But while katsu, sushi, bento and even *onigiri* (rice balls) have earned themselves emojis, *okonomiyaki* brings its own talents to the table – it's variable, often inexpensive, sometimes an interactive experience and, most importantly, delicious.

## The bare bones

Sometimes referred to as 'Japanese pizza', *okonomiyaki* is often likened to a savoury pancake or an omelette. *Yaki* means 'cooked over direct heat' – as in *yakitori* (grilled skewers) and *yakisoba* (fried noodles) – while *okonomi* means 'to your liking'.

In Japan, you'll find the dish at dedicated *okonomiyaki* restaurants, where chefs often cook in front of diners on a large iron griddle, or *teppan*. Some restaurants offer a DIY scenario, where the diner is given a bowl with the raw ingredients to mix and grill at a table with its own *teppan* fitted.

## Kansai-style

There are two main styles of *okonomiyaki*, each originating from different regions. Kansai style, also known as Osaka style, is the most common across Japan, and abroad.

The savoury batter is made up of flour, water, eggs and shredded cabbage, while fillings often include octopus, »





CLOCKWISE: Eat out counter style in Hiroshima, a fried egg topping at Jugemu & Shimbashi, convenience store food isn't to be sniffed at in Japan, Hiroshima-yaki.



shrimp, pork or beef (or all of the above).

Toppings are of utmost importance, and applied generously. First on is a thick brown glaze of okonomiyaki sauce, followed with zigzags of local Kewpie mayonnaise, finishing with *aonori* (seaweed flakes) and *katsuobushi* (dried fish flakes), which dance on top through the heat.

### Head to Hiroshima

Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki, or *Hiroshima-yaki*, is a little harder to find this side of the equator. The key difference is that ingredients are layered, instead of mixed in with the batter.

The batter in this case is more like a thin crêpe, and cooked separately to the toppings, which include double the cabbage of the Kansai-style. All the elements are placed on top of the cooked pancake, before the whole thing is flipped onto a sizzling pile of yakisoba noodles (an element distinct to

Hiroshima-yaki).

Some of the city's most popular okonomiyaki shops are located inside Hiroshima Station and Okonomimura – a food park in the city centre. In times past street vendors would gather here, but now you'll find more than a dozen bricks and mortar okonomiyaki eateries.

### Wait ... monjayaki?

If you're in Tokyo, you'll find okonomiyaki shops in Shibuya, Harajuku and Shinjuku in particular, mostly serving up Kansai style. What you'll also find is *monjayaki*, sometimes nicknamed '*monja*'. This variety is referred to as 'liquid okonomiyaki', thanks to its runnier batter. The Tsukishima district is home to Monja Street, which (surprise!) has many monjayaki shops. In these restaurants, you'll often find regular okonomiyaki on the menu, too.

If you've been to Japan before you'll know some of the best food is found in convenience stores.



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### Try it here

In the Melbourne suburb of Collingwood, **Papirica** is led by Yutaka "Matsu" Matsuda from Osaka. The humble menu offers pork, vegetarian or vegan okonomiyaki, and Matsu makes his own okonomiyaki sauce with natural ingredients.

In Sydney, head to **Jugemu & Shimbashi**, specialising in teppanyaki, and specifically Osaka-style okonomiyaki. Seat yourself at the counter to be front and centre for the cooking process.

So if you're short on time or are eating on the run then pop into a convenience store and check the fridge for packaged okonomiyaki, which can usually be heated up on the spot. Keep in mind, walking and eating is considered quite rude in Japan.

There are many other regional variations – such as *hirayachi* in Okinawa – and countless restaurants delivering their own take on this dish outside of Japan.

And who knows? Okonomiyaki may just be part of the next emoji update. ✈

