# Sheffield chip shop owner’s sushi challenge exposes UK’s culinary authenticity gap



Dinner at Maru in Mayfair features an extravagant 'tasting menu' of sushi comprising 20 bite-sized portions of raw fish and shellfish, with a price tag of £210 per head. The allure of sushi, with its delicate presentation and emphasis on freshness, often prompts diners to overlook the steep costs, particularly when compared to traditional British fare. For a fraction of that price, patrons could enjoy a generous serving of battered fish and chips, an iconic British meal.

Rani, a 48-year-old chip shop owner from Sheffield, embodies the juxtaposition of British culinary tradition and the global sushi craze. As the owner of the popular Ranmoor Friary, she is used to the steady flow of customers eager for traditional takeaways. Nonetheless, she embarked on a four-week journey on the show "Faking It," during which she aimed to master the art of sushi making. The premise was compelling: a fish-and-chip proprietor immersing herself in a culinary world vastly different from her own. Yet, her initial reactions to sushi were anything but enthusiastic. Unfamiliar with raw fish, Rani found herself repulsed at the sight of ingredients like slimy prawn innards, a response that culminated in her fleeing the set on more than one occasion.

Rani's struggle resonates with research conducted by Salford University that revealed sushi enthusiasts in cities like Manchester and Liverpool often lack basic fish knowledge. Many could only identify two out of six common fish varieties presented to them. This gap highlights a broader issue within British dining culture: the prevalence of 'fake sushi', which raises questions about authenticity and consumer awareness. In Japan, diners typically focus on the overall experience rather than the specific types of fish used, a stark contrast to the culinary preferences expressed in cities around the UK.

Interestingly, a pushback against the trend of culinary inauthenticity has emerged globally. Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries initiated a certification program in 2016 that aimed to ensure Japanese restaurants abroad adhered to traditional culinary practices. The initiative seeks to educate consumers on what constitutes authentic Japanese cuisine, an effort that underscores rising concerns about the dilution of traditional dishes and the cultural significance attached to them.

While Rani grappled with the daunting challenge of faking a sushi chef's skill set, a broader conversation about culinary authenticity is taking place across the world. Notably, Rob Ruiz, a sushi chef in San Diego, deployed an innovative solution to combat fish fraud by introducing edible QR codes on sushi. This development allows diners to trace the origins of their meal, addressing high rates of seafood mislabeling and ensuring diners receive what they pay for.

Through her immersion in sushi preparation, Rani not only challenged her culinary limits but also inadvertently highlighted the wider socio-cultural implications of cuisine and authenticity. Her transformation underscores the often performative nature of fine dining, where the perception of skill and presentation can sometimes overshadow the essence and roots of the dishes themselves. It begs the question: in a world where culinary boundaries are increasingly blurred, how do we define the authenticity of a culinary experience?

Ultimately, "Faking It" serves as a microcosm of the conflict between traditional culinary practices and contemporary dining trends, pushing its participants—and viewers—to reconsider what they truly value on their plates. As Rani navigates this unpredictable culinary terrain, one thing remains clear: whether it's a plate of sushi or a fish supper, food is not just sustenance; it is steeped in tradition, identity, and complex cultural narratives.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tv/article-14755315/This-chippie-owner-took-battering-trying-learn-make-sushi-CHRISTOPHER-STEVENS-reviews-nights-TV.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tv/article-14755315/This-chippie-owner-took-battering-trying-learn-make-sushi-CHRISTOPHER-STEVENS-reviews-nights-TV.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2017/jul/17/what-would-the-japanese-make-of-britains-fake-sushi-scandal)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2017/jul/17/what-would-the-japanese-make-of-britains-fake-sushi-scandal), [[4]](https://www.wgbh.org/news/2016-02-08/sorry-sushi-burrito-japanese-program-certifies-authentic-cuisine), [[7]](https://japantoday.com/category/features/kuchikomi/japanese-restaurants-are-springing-up-all-over-the-world-most-of-them-fake)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/groupthink/2013/07/12/first-ever-sushi-tech-combats-disturbing-fish-fraud/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tv/article-14755315/This-chippie-owner-took-battering-trying-learn-make-sushi-CHRISTOPHER-STEVENS-reviews-nights-TV.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tv/article-14755315/This-chippie-owner-took-battering-trying-learn-make-sushi-CHRISTOPHER-STEVENS-reviews-nights-TV.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2017/jul/17/what-would-the-japanese-make-of-britains-fake-sushi-scandal> - A 2017 study by Salford University revealed that sushi enthusiasts in Manchester and Liverpool struggled to identify common fish varieties, with many only recognising two out of six presented. Professor Stefano Mariani attributed this to a general lack of fish knowledge among the British public, highlighting the prevalence of 'fake sushi' in the UK. The article also notes that in Japan, diners are less concerned about the exact species of fish used, focusing more on the overall dining experience.
3. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Palo-Alto-sushi-restaurant-owner-speaks-out-after-16382868.php> - In August 2021, Lumi Gardner, owner of Fuki Sushi in Palo Alto, California, was subjected to a racist tirade by a customer upset over the restaurant's contactless payment policy. The customer accused Gardner of being 'un-American' and told her to 'go back to your country.' The incident prompted local officials to consider elevating the case to a hate crime, reflecting broader concerns about racism in the restaurant industry.
4. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/2016-02-08/sorry-sushi-burrito-japanese-program-certifies-authentic-cuisine> - In 2016, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries introduced a certification program to ensure that Japanese restaurants abroad adhere to traditional culinary practices. This initiative aimed to address the rise of non-authentic Japanese dishes, such as sushi burritos, and to maintain the integrity of Japanese cuisine worldwide. The program also sought to educate consumers about authentic Japanese dining experiences.
5. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/groupthink/2013/07/12/first-ever-sushi-tech-combats-disturbing-fish-fraud/> - In 2013, Rob Ruiz, executive chef at San Diego's Harney Sushi, introduced edible QR codes on sushi to combat fish fraud. These codes, printed on rice paper, allowed diners to scan and access information about the fish's origin, sustainability, and the fishermen involved. This innovation aimed to address the high rates of seafood mislabeling in the U.S., with studies showing that one-third of sushi was not what restaurants claimed it to be.
6. <https://notalwaysright.com/enough-make-sushi-roll-eyes/92550/> - A humorous anecdote from a U.S. sushi restaurant where a customer orders a specialty roll that had been discontinued years prior. The waiter, unfamiliar with the roll, consults the owner, who reveals it was removed from the menu due to low popularity. The story highlights the challenges restaurants face in managing menu items and customer expectations.
7. <https://japantoday.com/category/features/kuchikomi/japanese-restaurants-are-springing-up-all-over-the-world-most-of-them-fake> - An article discussing the proliferation of Japanese restaurants worldwide, many of which are not authentic. It highlights the challenges in defining 'authentic' Japanese cuisine and the debates surrounding fusion dishes. The piece also touches on the cultural significance of sushi and the importance of preserving its traditional preparation methods.