

An Evening at Moody Tongue Sushi

Michelin-level omakase, playful beer pairings, and a setting that invites you to linger—this is the West Palm Beach experience you never knew you needed.

REVIEW AND PHOTOS BY PEDRO PENALVER

TIt was one of those December evenings when the city seemed to shimmer with anticipation. Holiday lights in every imaginable color climbed the palm trees, casting playful reflections on the polished floors. Staff in festive attire glided between tables, the sound of Christmas cards floating through the air. All around, people moved in a joyful current—some clutching cocktails, others laughing as they staged impromptu photo shoots against every Instagrammable backdrop.

So was the scene at the Hilton West Palm Beach, a place that pulses with energy year-round. In the heat of summer, I'd come for the pool parties on weekends. But now, the hotel had donned its holiday best, transforming into a wintery spectacle that drew both locals and visitors alike.

On this occasion, I hadn't come for the holiday revelry. I was here in search

of something different—a singular experience promising art you could taste, a story told on each plate.

Destination? Moody Tongue Sushi, a spinoff of the original concept, which became the first wholesale brewery/restaurant in the world to receive an accolade from the MICHELIN Guide, earning Two Stars.

The Restaurant

Right at the entrance of the hotel lobby, there's a minor stand that serves as the reception for Moody Tongue Sushi. Once you check in—whether you have a reservation or are a walk-in—you will be escorted by gracious staff to the restaurant if it is already time to sit. The restaurant seats guests every hour or every half hour, and reservations via OpenTable are required for the omakase experiences.

If you have ever been to an omakase

restaurant, you expect a high-end sushi den with dim lighting. The restaurant greatly achieves this, plus adds a "moody" feel that has been designed by Executive Sushi Chef Hiromi Iwakiri and acclaimed Brewmaster Jared Rouben themselves, so patrons can match the experience to pair hyper-seasonal sushi with unique, chef-driven beers.

Once inside, you'll hear a lot about the Executive Sushi Chef Hiromi Iwakiri. His story is embedded in every dish and storytelling by the chef or the wait staff.

On the night we visited, we were led to our seats by Nora, who greeted us with a gracious smile and a welcoming attitude. We were happy to be seated next to some very friendly young Filipinos from Wellington who were there celebrating one of their birthdays.

The chef that evening was Chen, originally from China, but affectionately



The essence of Moody Tongue - A single piece of sushi, a glass of beer, and a story told through taste.



known as Jose to seamlessly blend with the local spirit. The space itself is intimate, with an omakase counter seating about 14 and a handful of traditional tables. The decor—nature-inspired with coastal undertones—creates an inviting canvas. But what truly sets the room apart is the unexpected soundtrack: a curated playlist of pop and rock, a curated list that infuses the air with energy and breaks from the hushed traditions of the sushi temple. It felt fresh, vibrant, and uniquely of this place.

Everything was set for an intimate, transportive, and exclusive dining experience.

The Experience

Omakase is a Japanese phrase meaning a chef's-choice meal, often served at a counter for around eight guests (as is customary in Japan). As such, Chef Chen stood at his neatly organized prep station, with luxury ingredients and high-quality seafood sourced directly from Japan, ready to offer a dining experience like no other.

Nora placed the 8-course Omakase menu on the insanely minimalist dish setting at our spot—we occupied a corner of the counter and had a perfect view without having to shift our heads.

While the chef prepared the first items on the menu, Nora smilingly explained what the experience would be like and provided more details about the menu, highlighting seasonal seafood and a curated selection of beer pairings for each entry. If you don't like beer, a curated menu

of spirits, wines, and cocktails is available as well; however, it is highly recommended to taste the beers selected with each entry, as the flavor of each one pairs well with the food's taste and texture.

Chef Chen approached our side of

Precision and flair - Chef Chen uses a butane torch to elevate the flavors of his omakase masterpiece.

the counter and started with the party on our left. As an integral part of the interactive omakase experience, Chef Chen personally introduced each of the eight courses as he prepared them. After finishing each dish, he would come to the counter, describe the ingredients, their origins, and explain what to taste first—sometimes suggesting a sip of beer before a particular bite. Listening to him calmly share his techniques and insights into every element of the meal made the evening both educational and memorable.

My first bite, the *Corn Ikura* with white asparagus and chives, felt a bit heavy on the salt for me, since I am used to eating food low in salt. But the guy sitting next to me let a savoring exclamation slide. I brought it up to the chef, and he explained that the saltiness was an intentional part of the culinary design for the specific pairing with the Yuzu Lager, which I hadn't tried thus far. Shame on me.

That's when the philosophy at Moody Tongue truly clicked for me: "culinary brewing," where each dish and beer are meticulously engineered to elevate the other. From this point, I leaned into the pairings, letting the chef's guidance shape each bite and sip. By the fourth course—the *Modo*, a prized Red Sea Bream in Japanese cuisine—the carefully orchestrated flavors, paired with an Orange Blossom Belgian Blonde, created a spectacular burst of taste. Alongside it was the Shima Aji, or Japanese Striped Jack, brightened by Pico de Gallo and cilantro. These two, for me, were the highlight of the night.

Nearly every course was a thoughtfully curated combination of flavor and texture. The only exception (for me) was the Torched Botan Ebi with garlic pesto and parmesan, which fell a bit flat—perhaps due to the lingering notes of the previous beer rather than the Cherry Oud Bruin meant to accompany it.

Overall, the eight-course omakase menu showcased the quality of its ingredients, which were sourced from Japan and included everything from white and red fish to rare varieties, scallops, and vegetarian options. Even the dessert—a bold, unapologetic twist on tiramisu with matcha and cocoa—tempted me into requesting an extra portion before heading home.

And as impressive as the menu was for me, Chef Chen's meticulous dish presentation and elaborate crafting of the dishes, from the smallest details and little items on the sushi to the genius maneuvering of the butane torch to achieve each aburi (the flame-seared effect on the sushi), was a fun spectacle to watch. No one ever put the phone down while Chef Chen was doing it.

Final Thoughts

Moody Tongue Sushi is not just a dinner reservation—it's an occasion. From the moment you step into the restaurant, you're swept into a world bound with culinary tradition and inventive pairings, and every detail feels intentional. The omakase menu, paired with chef-selected beers, is a rare delight in a city better known for its resort-style dining than for this kind of bold culinary adventure.

For those willing to splurge on a memorable night, the experience is worth it. The attentive staff, the intimate setting, and the chef's playful storytelling all elevate Moody Tongue beyond the expected.

By the time we finally pulled ourselves away, the room had filled with new faces—Chef Chen was already immersed in his next round of preparation, orchestrating another eight or perhaps even fourteen-course for the next set of guests. Nora and her team moved gracefully from guest to guest, their smiles promising each newcomer an experience as unforgettable as ours.

It truly was a terrific, Michelin-grade night.

And still, something held me back from leaving: The music. The playlist had only grown more irresistible as the evening went on. Was it curated with the intent to keep us lingering just a little longer? I couldn't help but wonder.

Luckily, the hotel lobby bar was still humming with life. A few guests lounged on couches, lost in conversation or snapping photos, cocktails in hand. So instead of heading straight home, we drifted over, letting the night stretch just a bit further—one last toast to an evening we weren't quite ready to end.

Editor's Note:
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