

No soy sauce on white rice?

It's not a big issue but I guess you may be interested to behave politely in Japan. A lot of Japanese people feel uncomfortable to see the western travelers pour soy sauce over white rice.

Here's a discussion about the subject.

QUESTION

I'm going to Japan in April...I was reading about "How to eat" and it says: "Do not pour soy sauce over white rice", well, that is what I do here in the states and that's the way I like it, so what can I do?

by Surfbeat

Answer

2006/1/8

Many people and restaurant owners in Japan will not care how a foreigner eats his rice, especially in tourist spots where they are used to tourists who do not know local manners. But many people will be shocked to see somebody pour soya sauce over white, cooked rice. If you do it in a good restaurant with a proud owner or chef, it can even be regarded offensive. It is like putting sugar into your wine or beer. It may taste good if you got used to it, but it is not usually done.

by Uji

Thank you!

2006/1/8

Uji, thank you for your response... I'll try not to offend.

by Surfbeat

The truth is that...

2006/1/8

The truth is that lots of locals like to pour soy sauce on white rice.

But we don't do that in public, because it just shows how unsophisticated you are :)

Instead, we pour soy sauce on other things like pickles, or dip things like sashimi in soy sauce, eat them, and then immediately eat white rice so that we can enjoy a slight mixture of the soy sauce flavor that has clinged on our tongues for a while.

As for pouring soy sauce directly on the rice, we do it secretly in our kitchen when no one's watching :)

Also, you may notice that rice in Japan can be quite different from rice in other countries. Enjoy it as is.

by Uco

Thanks

2006/1/8

Will try!

by Surfbeat

soy sauce

2006/1/10

that's not just a japanese thing, but a chinese thing too.

normally you just don't pour soy sauce on white rice. it's seen as something only the poor do. it's actually kind of a joke to suggest that someone has to eat soy sauce on rice, because they can't afford the "real food".

by nancy

I've been to China...

2006/1/10

Each time I went to China, one thing I noticed, at restaurants it was difficult to get them to bring me soy sauce, and when they did, it was very little.

"it's actually kind of a joke to suggest that someone has to eat soy sauce on rice, because they can't afford the real food".

Perhaps, but I was also told in China that only poor people build homes out of wood. Most homes in the U.S. are build out of wood. So it's a culture thing.

Well. I think it's amusing that you can be judged by what and how you eat, I like what I like and I do not like plain boring white rice.

I live in Kauai and I ride a bike for exercise, but on Kauai, when you ride a bike, the locals think you had a DUI and got your drivers license suspended, I don't care!

I talked with my J-girlfriend last night and told her I like soy sauce on my white rice, she said that is "ugly", I said, 'No, it is delicious!'

But hey, I also like jalapenos on my pizza.

by Surfbeat

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2006/1/10

I do not like plain boring white rice.

Thats why usually people are eating other items with the rice.

I think it's amusing that you can be judged by what and how you eat

I don't think its amusing, take it from this point of view, and I think Uji pointed it out, you eating in a resturant and someone comes in and pours tabasco sause into his Pepsi, it might taste good to him, looks strange to everyone else, but its something not usually done, if you like it in private thats fine, but in a public place I think its better to follow proper ettiquete You really sould not pour soy sauce onto white rice.

As mentioned usually if you're eating the rice with something else, you can dip the other item into the soy sauce eat it, then eat rice with it for the flavors.

by ..

Ok, how about this...

2006/1/10

Would it also offensive if I just don't eat the rice? I mean, if I'm paying for it, I should eat it or not eat it the way I like.

Again, if I just do not eat the rice...

by Surfbeat

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2006/1/10

Honestly I don't see any problems with you pouring soya sauce onto white rice to eat, if you like it! You're a foreigner and you're exempted. Unless you go to high class Japanese restaurants its a bit impolite.

Look you might be looked at as 'weird' or 'uneducated' in Japanese food and etiquette - but then again Iron Chef Japanese Masaharu Morimoto's neo-Japanese style of cooking doesn't get the endorsement of many Japanese traditionalists either.... :)

The fact is soya sauce goes well with Rice, but other Japanese food (that might also happen to be soy based cooked, like teriyaki beef/chick) goes even better on rice! And if you eat like this, you wouldn't be thought of as weird.

To give you the confidence booster - I have seen Japanese guys putting Kinako (yellow bean powder) on rice to eat... Kinako is usually only put over dessert!

And I have also seen people pour Soya sauce onto their Chinese Dim Sim Dessert to eat, to the amusement of everyone else...

To me, eating something is at least better than those who never ever try to eat anything new..
by Kensuke

Ok, what about...

2006/1/10

Thanks Kensuke..

When I was in China, I ate at some Chinese friends home and they would scoop some rice in a bowl the go to other dishes and put food on top of the rice. I did the same and the juices of the different meats and vegetables would get soaked up by the rice, I like it that way.

Is that acceptable in Japan, putting other food on top of the rice?

by Surfbeat

Skipping rice and topping

2006/1/10

Actually, when you're drinking alcohol, the restaurant will not bring you rice and soup until you finish your alcoholic beverage. You can use alcohol as an excuse to skip your rice, and say at the end that you're already full and wish to skip the rice.

But I think skipping rice when you're having a proper dinner, is like skipping potatoes when you're having a full course American dinner. The chef has designed the menu so that it would go well with a bowl of rice, so that's the way it should be properly eaten.

But requesting your rice to be served in small portions is very common.

About topping food on rice, I know that it's more commonly done in countries like China, but here, it's not good manners although a lot of people do it. It's also impolite to hold your rice bowl while eating something else, although a lot of people do it.

I think that the real reason that soy sauce on rice is not appreciated is because it tends to spoil the quality of the good rice cooked to perfection. And white rice to the Japanese is like potatoes to the Irish. They're precious and something worth saying, "What did you do to MY rice?"

by Uco

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2006/1/10

You're a foreigner and you're exempted.

Its my personal opinion, ok fine you don't know you don't know, but the poster is asking if its proper or not, and giving someone a blank check "oh you're foreign its ok" is just wrong information in my opinion.

Don't take off your shoes when entering a house, its OK you're from another country. Usually its kind to correct someone, "You're supposed to take off your shoes when you enter someone's house, and I would follow the custom", i've made mistakes myself but have been corrected. This case seems different because I'm more or less confused by the poster he's saying "oh i'm paying for it I should eat it whatever what I like"

I'm not sure if you're trying to "justify" or "reason"

something. I like to burp loud when drinking, or eat without a shirt, why shouldn't I?

And I'm not even Japanese.

by ..

When in Rome...

2006/1/10

If you're at a cheap restaurant or bar with some friends, probably no one will care, but if you're at someone's house, I wouldn't do it.

But there's an additional reason you may find once you get there. Japanese rice tastes a bit better, and you'll learn how to eat it correctly. Like someone mentioned before, when eating rice, you should alternate bites of rice with other things. If you're eating something that is bigger than a bite size, put the whole thing in your bowl, and break off a chunk scoop it up with some rice. You'll get some other flavors in with your rice, and you may even find it more enjoyable than simple shoyu.

by noexit

All this over Rice and Soy Sauce

2006/1/10

Well, thanks for all the input everyone. I'll only be in Japan a week, so I think I can deal with it a short time, besides, I may end up liking white rice all by itself!

by Surfbeat

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2006/1/10

I also keep some secrets about how to eat the Japonica rice.

When I was a student living alone, I used to pour soy source ramen soup into a bowl of fresh white rice and sometimes even added a lot of mayo mixed with mustard. Please forgive me. Do not punish me, the god of rice. I have never done that in public, even if I enjoyed those ugly but inevitably attractive tastes! No, honestly, I could not afford to buy the other foods at that time!

When I was a little boy, my mom did not allow me to leave a table until I finished the last grain of white rice. She said I should respect the precious efforts of farmers and thankfully clean my bowl without a single grain of rice.

In the past, some people in a generation of my mother starved to death in and out of Japan. So did many rice farmers before that.

In that process, the pure white rice might have been regarded as a top sacred item in some Asian cuisines.

Anyway, enjoy Japan!

by .

in Ramen

2006/1/11

I have friends who do the opposite at Ramen shops. They order a bowl of rice and dump it in the broth after they've finished the noodles.

by noexit

Japanese Mindset

2006/1/11

Pouring Soy sauce over white rice is not a good idea, you can in some instances end up insulting your host or causing an uncomfortable situation. I think the whole reason behind this is that the Japanese believe for no reason that has ever been explained to me, that Japanese white rice is superior to all other white rice and that pouring Soy sauce over a bowl of it, would be like ordering Tomato Catsup with your escargot in a French Restaurant.

by GeorgeT

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2006/1/11

Japanese believe for no reason that has ever been explained to me, that Japanese white rice is superior to all other white rice

Can you point me to where you received this information from?

by ..

Wasn't my original post, but...

2006/1/11

Japanese believe for no reason that has ever been explained to me, that Japanese white rice is superior to all other white rice

Can you point me to where you received this information from?

Wasn't my original post, but as a foreigner living in Japan, I hear this very often. Not trying to start anything, but yes, many Japanese with no basis for comparison do believe this. Sean

by Seanolan

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2006/1/11

"Japanese believe for no reason that has ever been explained to me, that Japanese white rice is superior to all other white rice"

Actually, I think this is true too. And humans tend to believe that what is superior within the person's taste is superior to all people in the world. This is just like the French think that French wine is the best, even though a lot of people may prefer Chile wine over French. Any way for sure, Japanese rice is quite "unique".

by Uco,Thai rice fan

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2006/1/11

I would say its like New York pizza is the best, but others argue Chicago Pizza is the best and I've seen some heated debates on this.

by john

Rice, Pizza, etc..

2006/1/11

After eating American rice for 34 years and now eating Japanese rice for 2, my opinion is that Japanese rice is much better tasting. Having a good rice cooker helps too. We brought a new one back from Japan last month & makes much better rice than the old one we had.

As far as pizza, NE Pennsylvania, specifically the Scranton area, has the best pizza by far. Of course my sister is a pizza chef, so that sways my opinion.

I think over all what you grew up with and/or have the fondest memories of will be what you consider "best" of any type of food.

by Carl

i wouldnt do it.

2008/10/18

I think it's a bit rude and disrespectful. As for best pizza! New York's brick oven pizza is the best I ever tasted. It cooks at around 800-1000 degrees rather than 500 or so. :)

by Greg

What about Nigiri Sushi?

2008/10/21

Does the soy sauce and rice etiquette apply to Nigiri as well?

At the sushi bars here in the US we are provided with bowls to dip nigirisushi in soy sauce.

side note: A traditional US cuisine rule I break regards Grits.

Grits is a cornmeal based porridge. It's a staple of breakfast in the US South. Traditionally you're supposed to add salt, pepper and butter. To the disdain of many a US southerner, I use sugar because I like the taste.

by BWinc

Nigiri sushi

2008/10/21

Does the soy sauce and rice etiquette apply to Nigiri as well?

You're really supposed to dip the sashimi on top of the nigiri sushi in the soy sauce and wasabi mixture and not the rice. It is bit difficult to do with chopsticks as it means that you need to turn the sushi, but remember, it is perfectly okay to eat sushi with your fingers.

by Kappa

Now I know

2008/10/23

Even though the "customer is god". I wish the local wait staff or the itamae would have educated me better :P

<http://www.wikihow.com/Practice-Sushi-Etiquette>

by BWinc

no only rice

2008/10/23

If the OP likes rice mixed up with other foodstuff why not eat Domburi and curry? both are very popular dishes in Japan, that are cheap and found everywhere. If he doesn't like to eat rice all the time why not eat Italian food, Udon dishes, Okonomiyake etc.??

by Sensei 2

About soy sauce on rice

2008/10/25

First, please understand that soy sauce on white rice is not considered rude or blasphemous or anything like that, it just looks too miserable. So miserable that decent restaurants could not afford it. As a matter of fact, we have alternatives. White rice and soy sauce *and* either of a raw chicken egg, dried bonito flakes (katsuobushi), fermented small beans (natto), or boiled small fish (shirasu). They are not considered first-class food but acceptable, and probably better than crude rice and soy sauce nutritionally.

by A Japanese