



Sometimes you want to joke around with a bunch of buddies and stuff your face while a game blares in the background; sometimes you and your significant other want to down a shot or two of shochu without a lot of wasted words. But if you're still in the getting-to-know-you phase, and you're looking for a clean, well-lit spot that's not too romantic, not too dank, but just right, Odori-ko is a place that hits the spot. It's a refreshing option in pau hana enjoyment, well-suited for girlfriend get-togethers, date nights or a family meals.

### **The experience**

Find Odori-ko on Kapiolani Boulevard, next to 24 Hour Fitness and in front of Hawaiian Brian's. There's valet parking, a convenient option at \$5, or you can park in the attached garage with validation.

The restaurant is a new-generation venture from the Takei family, which long operated Odoriko in Waikiki. It's been carefully designed to appeal to Honolulu's young, urban residents, with an open, clean design, updated Japanese dishes and decent pricing. Modestly hip music plays at a conversation-friendly level in the background, but there aren't many distractions; the emphasis here is on good food and a stress-free experience. The service is low-key and cheerful.

It's convenient that happy hour is offered in the afternoon and again late at night, every day and night that Odori-ko is open. The restaurant is closed on Sundays.

### **The food**

Pau hana offerings here are winners. Spicy tuna, hamachi and California rolls are \$5 to \$7, for a savings of \$2 or \$3 from the regular menu prices, served up fresh and tasty.

Salmon sashimi with onion and an inventive Ponzu "jelly" (gelatin-like in consistency, and served in tiny cubes) is \$7 (\$9 off the dinner menu).

I especially enjoyed the Tuna Tartare, \$7 (reg. \$11.50), served as a tower made with a delicately spicy ahi mix, topped with avocado and served with pita chips. The dish seemed to sum up all that Odori-ko does well by serving familiar dishes with fresh, light flavors at a tempting price.

While it wasn't a happy hour special, I also had to try one of the restaurant's signature dishes, the Odori-ko style Wafu Steak (\$18.95). The dish appeals even before you try it, because a portion of proceeds from each plate goes to Touch a Heart, an organization that trains local residents for jobs in the food service industry. But it wasn't merely feel-good — it tasted good, too.

The steak is a grilled New York sirloin cut, served over sprouts and other shredded veggies with Odori-ko's Wafu-style sauce and browned potato wedges. It was cooked perfectly, and the sauce and sprouts provided a nice contrast between Western and Eastern tastes. The steak was also topped with grated daikon, and for me, that combination didn't quite work — but it was easy enough to push the topping aside.

I didn't try them, but other do-good options are the Dragon Tempura Roll (\$14.95), a tempura roll topped with unagi & avocado, which benefits Junior Achievement, and the Macadamia Nut Tofu (\$6.95), which benefits the YWCA. I'll be back to give those a try.

### **The drinks**

Odori-ko's drink options during happy hour are pretty attractive. The cocktails change every couple of weeks, and provide good value at \$5 (normally \$7.50).

You'll save two bucks on a Budweiser or Kirin drafts, or may choose the beer "pitcher" (actually a cold tower) at \$10, saving \$8 as you quench your thirst.

On my visit, Odori-ko offered a sake sampler special, \$8, with sweeter sake varieties that went down easy and also paired well with the sushi, sashimi and steak we gobbled.

### **The verdict**

I wouldn't be surprised to find out that the restaurant draws a growing date-night crowd during pau hana and beyond. On my visit, there were two young couples there with smiles on their faces. As a date destination, the bright, stylish feel of the place appeals. When the restaurant is full, there is a buzz of energy and sound, but it's still possible to have an intimate conversation. And the reasonable prices — not to mention the beer tower — make it possible to indulge without emptying your wallet.

All in all, I'd say Odori-ko is a winner. With its central location, delicious food, pleasant staff and pleasing setting, the restaurant is positioned to make pau hana rovers happy indeed.

### **odori-ko**

1680 Kapiolani Blvd. 955-6555, [odori-ko.com](http://odori-ko.com)

### **Happy hour:**

4:30-6 p.m. and 10 p.m.-midnight daily (closed Sunday)

>> Kirin, Budweiser draft, \$4

>> Draft pitcher, \$10

>> House sake, \$4

>> Specialty cocktails, \$5

>> House wine, \$5