

KUMI COMPLETES MANDALAY BAY'S DINING MAKEOVER WITH STYLE



The culinary makeover of Mandalay Bay is now complete, and fresh eats abound. Though the Light Group can take credit for much of the change, revitalization efforts actually began two years ago when Hubert Keller's fine French Fleur de Lys evolved (on trend) into the more casual and expense-account-friendly tapas concept Fleur. Fellow famous chef Rick Moonen duplicated the deed, recently converting his RM upstairs into the cocktails-and-comfort-food haven Rx Boiler Room.

Last year, Mandalay brought in Light to update three other restaurants. Red Square kept its Russian theme while upgrading the grub; Red White and Blue became the approachable, quite delicious diner Citizens; and China Grill—the flagship of the Jeffrey Chodorow-created company that once managed all three of these eateries—has transformed into Kumi. If you consider that Mandalay Bay also has Charlie Palmer, Michael Mina, Wolfgang Puck and Alain Ducasse restaurants, and add in the resurrected Light Nightclub and Cirque du Soleil's *Michael Jackson One* production, this place is packed with excitement. And while most of these dining adjustments skew casual, the latest arrival is a true destination restaurant, the sexy crowd-pleaser every Strip resort needs.

As soon as you turn the corner of Mandalay's restaurant walk and see Kumi's lounge stretching to greet you, it's clear this is the place you should be. Executive chef Akira Back, who made his name collaborating with Light at Bellagio's stellar Yellowtail, gets star billing in this 10,000-square-foot jewel. A blue-tiled sushi bar divides a dark, sunken dining room from the rear, the circular space bedazzled with images of cherry blossom trees. Like many Las Vegas Strip chefs serving modern Japanese, Back comes from the school of Nobu, and you can see those genre-defining influences in the decor and taste plenty more on the menu.

That means there are versions of miso black cod (\$29)—this one has *yuja*, a mildly sour citrus—and rock shrimp tempura (\$16), and, of course, yellowtail with serrano pepper (\$19). These standards are great, but better dishes are hot oil salmon carpaccio (\$19), doused in sesame and citrus oil; the beautiful whitefish carpaccio (\$20), halibut or turbot with crispy shallot; and the surprisingly awesome crispy rice (\$17) topped with squares of blackened ahi tuna and a spicy, creamy sauce.

This is a restaurant designed for sharing, from cold and hot small plates to your favorite sashimi bites and some truly wacky sushi rolls. Almost everyone will order the pork belly roll (\$17), an odd but tasty creation topped with a slaw of Brussels sprouts. The Pop Rockin' Roll (\$19) has Pop Rocks on it, plus spicy tuna, crab, salmon and avocado. Just a warning.

There are some rather meaty entrées worth experiencing, too, led by the tobyaki-style filet (\$36), steak and mushrooms served sizzling. Otherwise, opt for lamb chops, a pork chop in apple-miso glaze, a peppercorn ribeye, chicken or salmon, maybe with kimchee green beans on the side. Kumi is fit for your festive feast, pre-club, pre-show, whatever you need.



Photo: [Beverly Poppe](#)

Kumi's rich, earthy filet tobyaki is served sizzling.

Kumi Mandalay Bay, 632-9100. Sunday-Thursday, 5-10 p.m.; Friday & Saturday, 5-11 p.m.