

# eat & drink



**THE ESSENTIALS**  
**Lawrence**  
**Fish Market**  
3914 W. Lawrence Ave.  
773-267-6838

**LOOKS LIKE**  
A Korean dry cleaners  
from the outside

**SOUNDS LIKE**  
A phone ringing off  
the hook during dinner  
rush

**SMELLS LIKE**  
The nutty whiff of  
freshly steamed rice

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

## the essentials

UPPING YOUR CHICAGO RESTAURANT CRED ONE BITE AT A TIME

**By Michael Nagrant** | FOR REDEYE  
One. Dollar. Sushi.

Now, I know some of you read that and were certain you wouldn't touch one-buck sushi with a 10-foot pole. You're a really smart person. Your parents did a good job raising you.

But I also know that some of you were like, "WUT? Where?" I'm sure your parents tried really hard, too. I know this because I fall into this camp, and my mom and dad are great people. Still, I inherently know that words like "value," "B.O.G.O." and "free" should never come near raw fish. We're not talking about buying a cheap HDMI cable on Amazon to hook up your Google Chromecast to your TV. If it fails, the worst-case scenario is that you're left finishing "Stranger Things" on your tiny tablet.

No, we're talking about eating bargain basement raw flesh, which probably isn't the

jammy glory of Trader Joe's Two Buck Chuck. Instead, it might result in two tickets to the porcelain bowl with an additional upchuck ticketing fee. A deep dive into the more unfortunate outcomes on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website is dismal. (I don't recommend it.)

That being said, I've risked mad cow disease and eaten lamb brains and goat eyeball tacos. I've never let the threat of intestinal distress get between me and my craft. One time I ventured to a now-defunct sushi buffet in Schaumburg called *Today*. I don't speak Japanese well, but I'm pretty sure that's pronounced "to die." I didn't get sick, and because it was all you can eat, I'm sure I got my per sashimi cost below \$1. Still, the nori wrappers were rubbery, the rice glutinous and the fish rife with ammonia funk.

But, like Maya Angelou, still I rise. Sushi is the gun-to-my-head desert island meal.

I'll take the best marbled and jewel-pink toro over a bone-in ribeye or foie gras any day. But I'm also not Taylor Swift-rich. Rare is the occasion that even mediocre takeout sushi for two doesn't require a crisp \$50 bill. That is, until I found Lawrence Fish Market in Albany Park a few years ago, which offers nine \$1 sushi options. They also have a \$2.50 California roll and lots of \$5 maki options.

For those of you who like to elbow up to marble-topped sushi bars and go omakase, know that Lawrence is straight-up takeout. When I first started visiting a few years back, they had what looked like the third-row of seating from a vintage Dodge Caravan as the only lobby lounging option. But that was five years ago, and in some kind of sushi parlor gentrification, the beat plywood counter has been stained a nice espresso color and the chipped tiled floor, which was often lined with cardboard boxes to sop up salty snow boot dribble in winter, has been replaced with honey-colored wood. For dessert, there are free Dum Dums lollipops for the taking.

One thing that has been constant, however, is—and I still can't believe I'm typing this—fantastic fluke (\$1.25), custardy uni (\$1.50) and

tasty white tuna (\$1). If you pay really close attention, some of the fish is surely tattered at the ends or cut like slabs rather than the thin screams you'll find at upscale sushi temples. The maki is overloaded with rice, and the ebi tempura (\$3.45) can get soggy if you don't run out and eat your order on the hood of your car fast enough. But the fish is fresh, briny and sea-kissed. I've never had an off piece at Lawrence. I'm not blinded by value. No, Lawrence isn't on par with Naoki or Juno, but it is usually better than most costlier neighborhood sushi restaurants in Chicago.

And if, like me, you're always thinking about how to serve a party for no more than \$60, Lawrence has you covered with a tray of California and spicy tuna rolls plus 44 pieces of sushi (\$52.50). And if people are ill after your bash, it'll be because they mixed Malort with Miller High Life. On a regular day, \$20 will buy you a feast at Lawrence and, best of all, prove that despite what mom and dad taught you, you don't always get what you pay for.

**MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.**