

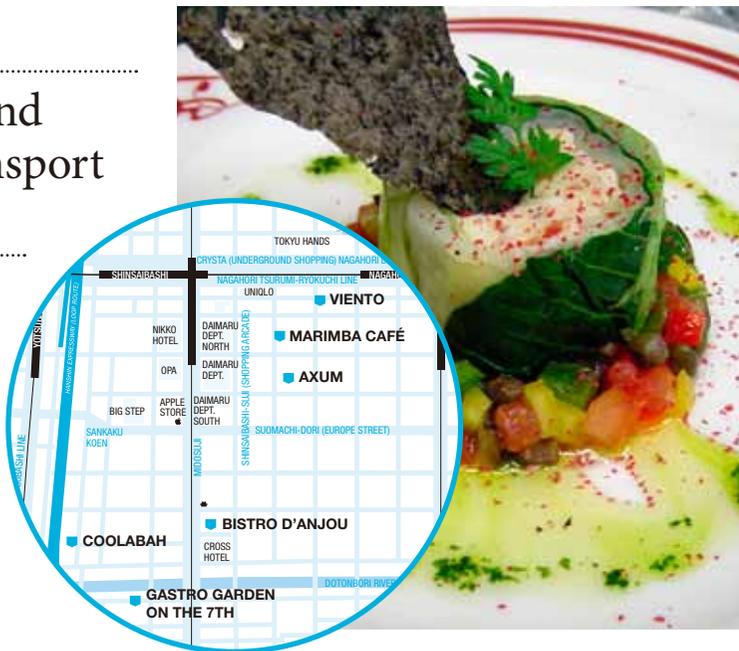
Shinsaibashi's go

Food and drink

Osaka's oldest bistro and other eateries that transport you to foreign lands

Text: Carla Avolio

For tourists, Shinsaibashi is a must-see kaleidoscope of lights and bustle, with all the takoyaki and izakayas you could ask for. But for locals, well, sometimes we just want to get away, and Shinsaibashi has that too. You can share foie gras to the strains of an accordion, eat Spanish food al fresco, or find comfort on a leather couch with a devilish torte. These are places designed to immerse you in another world, offering you a night away from the neon.



Bistro d'Anjou

As winter creeps in and the mercury drops, the body yearns for comfort food. And few places do comfort food like the French bistro, serving satisfying cooking with glamour and finesse.

Osaka has no shortage of French restaurants, but in bustling Shinsaibashi lies the gem Bistrot d'Anjou. Osaka's oldest bistro has been serving brasserie food to a loyal following for 40 years.

The subterranean restaurant, tucked away in an alley just off Ebisubashi arcade, is an affectionate homage to the Parisian bistro. Its decor does a fine job of evoking the grandeur of the Belle Epoque; a pastiche of bow-tied waiters, brass railway luggage racks, dark banquettes and chairs, a wall of gleaming copper pots and brass lamps.

The menu is similarly faithful, never straying too far from the built-in familiarity of bistro classics. A pleasant surprise, however, is the affordability of this menu; a three-course dinner with coffee and tea will only cost ¥3,500. Lunch is, of course, even better value at ¥2,625 for the lot.

Entrée could be escargot simmered with butter and parsley, or the dangerously wicked foie gras terrine, which is served at the table with customers asked to indicate the desired portion size (warning: although it's tempting to take a massive slice, there is such thing as too much foie gras).

For main you can't go past the coq au vin, cooked in its own little cast-iron pot and theatrically served at the table. First, a quenelle of buttery mash is placed on the plate, over which the wait staff spoon a rich sauce and then meat. Those wanting the forest taste of autumn should order the rabbit in cream sauce, which is cooked with a generous helping of seasonal chanterelle mushrooms.

To finish, dessert could be a light ice cream done affogato style with bubbly moscato, or, if digestion allows, the memorable chocolate mousse. Staff serve it at the table from a giant glass bowl, and here again let us dictate how many scoops (tip: four is too many).

With authenticity, attention to detail and plenty of good food, Bistrot d'Anjou sends diners on a one-night trip to Paris. And we can only hope they'll keep doing it for another forty years.

- **Where:** Hayakawa Bldg B1F, 2-6-18, Shinsaibashi
- **Tel:** 06-6211-6085
- **Hours:** Lunch 11:30am-3pm, Dinner 5:30-9:30pm (weekdays) 11:30am-9:30pm (Sat, Sun, holidays)
- **Url:** www.anjou.co.jp/shop/bistrot



urmet getaways



Viento

If on a mild evening one was looking for the fresh food and sultry atmosphere of the Mediterranean, chef Kosuke Shinobu's Viento would be the destination. Sitting in this breezy corner establishment, with its sliding doors pushed aside to let in the warm summer air, feels not unlike being in Barcelona. Hand-painted Spanish tiles, upholstered weathered chairs and colourful glass lamps evoke the relaxed ambiance of the Mediterranean coast.

The heart of the venue is the enormous bar, behind which cocktails are expertly shaken and chef Shinobu performs his culinary magic. Shinobu prepares all food from his broadly Mediterranean menu on a large grill in full view of guests. His tapas, range of pastas and mains are bursting with flavour, and are graced with the freshness that makes food from that region so good. Go for the ¥300 pizza, which is great for a light meal and may well be the best value item on the menu. Eat on stools watching Shinobu cook or on one of the tables a touch away from the action.

Even as winter draws closer, never fear, this little beauty has the cosy factor covered. Friday is roast night; a rotating menu of pork, beef, lamb and turkey with mashed potatoes, winter vegetables and gravy. With this hearty fare, Friday's live musical acts, and Shinobu's warm hospitality, you're guaranteed to stay roasty-toasty.

- **Where:** 1F, 1-12-11 Higashi-shinsaibashi
- **Tel:** 06-6121-7887
- **Hours:** 7pm – 5am

Marimba Café

Step off the street and into Old World Europe with a visit to this distinctly charming café. The establishment's antique romance comes from carefully selected bric-a-brac, heavy furniture and the dim glow of candles and lamps. The ground floor of this two-story café could be a salon in Paris, with dark tables and chairs, smoky mirrors, and a gleaming cake stand displaying the tortes du jour.

Down here, chef-owner Ikuta Daiki puts out dishes that could be described as loosely French. Chicken liver mousse, ratatouille, and the shrimp, scallop and avocado tartare form part of the "small plates" menu, which can be shared for a French tapas-style meal. The more substantial dishes, however, tend to venture out of France and into German (hamburg steak), Italian (risotto and pastas) and Asian (green curry) territory.

Marimba is also open to those wanting just a slice of cake or a drink.



Couples wanting a cheeky drink will find the perfect spot on the second floor. In this broodingly sensual living room – complete with comfortable leather couches and tall lamps with tasseled shades – you can find a nook in which to curl up with a companion (or book) over a tumbler of whisky. The staff are discreet, only coming upstairs if customers ring a bell, which leaves you free to dream of your next holiday to Vienna.

- **Where:** 1F & 2F, 1-18-18 Higashi-shinsaibashi
- **Tel:** 06-6281-1310
- **Hours:** Sun-Thurs 11:30am-11pm, Fri-Sat 11:30am-12:30am

Axum

This East African den serves drinks or an Ethiopian feast against a soundscape of rhythmic music. It claims to be Kansai's only Ethiopian restaurant. Ethiopia-born Nunu Hadis has been dishing up unique cuisine and, on weekends, a party atmosphere for 11 years.

For the uninitiated, Ethiopian cuisine consists of spicy meat or vegetable stews served with injera, a sour flatbread that resembles a spongy crepe. And the food doesn't disappoint. Go for doro wat – meltingly tender chicken stew served with an egg – the most popular dish both at Axum and back in the motherland. There's a good selection for vegetarians, but the must-try dish is atr kik – a rich red lentil dish. Nunu is strict about etiquette, so be warned that he may come to your table to demonstrate the proper way of handling the food.

(Using the right hand, injera should be unrolled and placed on the plate, stew spooned on top, then a piece of injera torn off and used to scoop up the sauce.)



Culturephiles wanting the real deal should opt for the "traditional dish". A variety of stews will be dolloped onto an enormous disk of injera, which serves as both plate and food. Another treat is to experience the real Ethiopian coffee ceremony, which Nunu does by reservation only. Alternatively, you can sit at Nunu's expansive bar where he will pour you a drink, play some music, and entertain you with stories about his homeland.

- **Where:** 5F, 1-17-15 Higashi-shinsaibashi
- **Tel:** 06-6241-5838
- **Hours:** Tue-Sun 5pm-late