

SOUL FOOD | REVIEW



MAX BRENNER'S CHOCOLATE CULTURE

By Megan Waters

On a warm evening in mid April, I indulged myself; I dropped in at the recently opened Max Brenner Chocolate Bar in Omotesando. It is a haven for chocolate mavens and those who simply have a sweet tooth. Yes, this purveyor of chocolate culture would certainly win the approval of Willy Wonka.

In November 2013, the New York-based chocolate bar opened in two Tokyo locations: Omotesando and Solamachi, near the Tokyo Skytree. While the Brenner brand already has 52 locations around the world, plans are underway for further expansion.

From small beginnings in 1996, the founder dreamed of creating a chocolate culture worldwide by encouraging people to experience chocolate with the five senses. As business thrived, Max Brenner operations expanded, with each providing a variety of decadent chocolate-based desserts, crepes, milkshakes, waffles, and hot drinks. Many of the offerings are served in signature utensils. They are designed to enhance the Max Brenner experience and tell their own story.

There is the Hugmug, made to be held in both hands, so the warmth and fragrance of the beverage can create a sense of coziness; and the Alice Cup,

inspired by Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which plays on the fantasy aspect of drinking chocolate. Both the beverage containers and the Max Brenner selection of chocolate-based goodies are available for purchase and make perfect gifts.

Having warmly welcomed me, Manager Rieko Kida carefully explained the Max Brenner concept and talked me through the tantalizing and all-too-tempting menu.

Kida had her first taste of Max Brenner on a visit to Australia some years ago. Impressed by the smooth chocolate taste and fun concept of the chocolate café, she hoped the brand she loved would open in Japan. So, when her wish came true late last year, Kida moved from her hometown of Kobe to take up the position of manager in the Omotesando store.

The knowledgeable Kida further related that most ingredients are made on-site, and the menu is almost exactly the same as that in the New York restaurant. And, on occasion, chefs from the United States even visit the Tokyo franchises to ensure the quality of the ingredients.

That said, the dishes have been tweaked slightly to better suit the Japanese palette; they are slightly less sweet than those served in the United States. Surprisingly, however,

The lively music, modern décor, and unusual menu attracts a wide variety of chocolate lovers.

portion sizes are almost the same as their stateside counterparts so, Kida believes, they are best for sharing.

This rang true as I noticed that most of the clientele around me on the night were couples, although Kida assured me that the lively music, modern décor, and unusual menu attracts a wide variety of chocolate lovers. Families with young kids are sure to love the chocolate factory feel.

With the delicious smell of chocolate overwhelming my senses, I set about placing my order, with ample guidance from Kida.

White Chocolate Green Tea, served in a Hugmug.





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Chocolate Chunks Pizza



White Chocolate Lemon Crepe Pasta

First, I selected the White Chocolate Green Tea, an item initially made exclusively for the Japan market. Although not a big fan of green tea, I found this unusual combination drink absolutely delicious.

The taste buds noted the subtle green-tea flavor after the first tang of chocolate. Served in a Hugmug, the thick and warming drink was a very sweet and delectable treat.

Next, Kida recommended a slice of the Chocolate Chunks Pizza, one of the most popular items on the menu.

Unlike the US café, the pizza comes with only one choice of topping: marshmallows with milk- and white-chocolate chunks, melted to create a chocolate sauce that covered the soft, doughy base of this rich and generously sized treat. For those tempted to order a whole pizza (six slices), I recommend they bring along a small army of helpers.

Last but by no means least, I tried the White Chocolate Lemon Crepe Pasta on the special seasonal menu. A Raspberry Chocolate Smoothie and Mandarin Dip complete the spring offerings, which are served until the end of August. Each season features a limited-edition menu, which uses appropriate flavors and ingredients.

The light and fluffy crepe, cleverly presented to look like pasta, was topped

with a dollop of caramel ice cream, white-chocolate shavings, and a sharp blueberry jus, with a base of lemon cream.

This not-too-sweet spring dish was, by far, the best among the items I tried. Although an unusual combination of flavors, the smooth, tangy lemon dressing perfectly complemented the lighter tastes, sending my taste buds into overdrive.

For those seeking something other than chocolate, the Max Brenner Bar is not the place. Besides chocolate items, the menu has only sparkling water and a selection of tea infusions.

The Omotesando café has 40 seats, including table and counter seating. But chocolate lovers remember: delicious treats only come to those who wait.

According to Kida, lengthy queues of up to three hours can be expected at the Omotesando branch on weekends. The best time to visit is on weekday evenings, when there is not so much of a rush. The Solamachi branch is much quieter. Unfortunately, reservations cannot be made at either branch.

There is a take out menu for those wishing to get their chocolate fix at home, in the office, or at a party.

My first Max Brenner experience will not soon be forgotten. The dishes are a delight and have been prepared with care and a great amount of attention to detail. •

Each season features a limited-edition menu, which uses appropriate flavors and ingredients.

White Chocolate Green Tea.....	¥600
Chocolate Chunks Pizza.....	¥420 (slice)
White Chocolate Lemon Crepe Pasta.....	¥1,300 (available until August 31)

Opening Hours (Omotesando):

11:00–22:30 (Monday–Saturday)
L.O. 22:00

11:00–21:30 (Sunday)
L.O. 21:00

maxbrenner.co.jp



The Omotesando branch opened in November 2013.