

Cheese Kamaboko

Posted on **July 29, 2007** by **Rachel**

Here's an **East meets West snack** I've been putting off reviewing for a *loonngg* time. I usually don't mind chowing down on the new and unusual, but something about the packaging gave the product a sinister quality. Maybe it's the command, "Just Pack" or maybe it's the way the product's wrapped like cheesy, overly processed sausage, OR maybe it's because the product actually **IS** cheesy, overly processed fish sausage.

Fish cake, aka fish sausage, is called *kamaboko* in Japan. I like kamaboko. I think it's great in soup, tempura, noodles, or by itself. I'm a big fan of cheese too—the stinkier and older the better. However, cheese kamaboko doesn't sound too appealing. I've experienced an interesting range of fish products in my life (fish ham was...interesting) and my cheese intake has been varied, but never have I seen **cheese fish cakes**.

At a quick glance, there's nothing too outré about the packaging. Kanji aside, the packaging could belong to any other processed meat/cheese stix at a local Quickie Mart. In fact when I first spied it in the store, my eyes did an automatic pass over of it. I don't buy that kinda crap so it doesn't even register. But at second glance, yes, the romanji says "cheese kamaboko" and I do make exceptions to the no-crap-purchase rule.

The sticks are heavy. I paid about \$3.50 for the bag and it seems like I got my money's worth in the form of four sticks. At the gas station one "normal" cheese stick is about \$1.00. These chi-kama, as they're known across the Pacific, are also sold in convenience stores just as their nitrate-heavy counterparts are.

Unwrapping a chi-kama involves squeezing it out—an act that doesn't endear it to me. Thus far, it doesn't smell like fish, which is a plus. I have to tell myself that taking the first bite of this stuff is like tearing off a band-aid: do it quick and get it over with. Ok. Weird. It tastes like any other kamaboko I've ever eaten, which is to say: it's firm, has a sweetish flavor and isn't overwhelmingly fishy.

But, there are flavor bursts of whipped cheese interspersed throughout the stick. They're like cheesy landmines that detonate in my mouth with little or no warning. This snack reminds me of the cheese hot dogs of my youth but instead of mystery meat processed ten ways to hell, it's cod and "cheese" that's been processed ten ways to hell.

Although the fish flavor doesn't smack you down, it's still there and I'm not a fan of these two together. If this had been your average kamaboko, I think I would've really enjoyed this snack, but then again, it wouldn't even *be* **this** snack.

The cheese and kamaboko don't do it for me. There's a dichotomy of flavors that are so at odds that while I'm not vomiting out my ears, my taste buds are confused and huddling in a corner, not sure what to make of it all. Some East-West snack co-productions are great: custard-filled daifuku are excellent as are the mochi ice cream. This was not one of those successes. To be fair, I would actually recommend trying this snack just for the sake of trying something far outside the realm of "**That's a good idea.**" For those who like the unusual, I recommend chi-kama to you, too. Western cheese lovers, I advise you **not** to sample this snack. Unless you're a fan of Cheez Whiz™ and fish.

1 ½ outta 4 Kasugai



