



# Japanese cheesecake a palm-sized thrill that lures us to Saint Germain bakeries

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VANCOUVER SUN



Mickey Zhao will tell you that his specialty, the treat that has customers taking numbers all day at his Saint Germain bakeries, is really more cheese souffle than cheesecake.

He's partly right. His Japanese cheesecake isn't anything like traditional New York-style cheesecake. For one thing, there's no crust, graham cracker or otherwise. For another, it doesn't taste like someone whipped up a few pounds of cream cheese and then baked it to death in a spring-form pan. For another, there are no toppings, no piles of strawberries or chocolate drizzle, no overly sweet glaze drizzled over the top and oozing down the sides.

Instead, Zhao's Japanese cheesecake is a two-layer unadorned sponge cake the size of a double deck of cards, a four-bite delight that has an odd, mushy texture, but is so light and cheesy you will be lucky if it lasts long enough for you to dream of ways to dress it up, which you can easily do with fresh fruit and yogurt or maybe a dollop of vanilla custard.

Like many ethnic delicacies being served up around Metro Vancouver, Japanese cheesecake began as an overseas sensation, in this case about 15 years ago in Asia, says Zhao. It was so popular in Japan, he says, that when it hit that country a few years back, customers were limited to six at a time.

"It's not too sweet, not too fatty, just something light and fluffy."



LES BAZZO/PNG

Mickey Zhao (left), Saint Germain's executive pastry chef, and production manager Weng So with cheesecakes, butter creme bun and apple tarts.

It gets that way when you fold whipped eggs whites into a mixture of Philadelphia cream cheese, evaporated milk, egg yolk, flour and lemon zest, and then cook it like you would a custard.

And that's pretty much it.

Zhao is not only the Saint Germain executive pastry chef, he's also a director of the 25-year-old company. His Japanese cheesecakes, sold in little cellophane packages for \$1.35 each, are baked at the company's factory in Richmond and sold at the bakery's three Metro Vancouver locations in the Metrotown, Aberdeen and Oakridge malls.

And while you might be tempted to pick up one of Saint Germain's full-sized tiramisu cakes while you're browsing the big glass case full of Saint Germain goodies – it's the bakery's most popular item – you can't

actually buy Japanese cheesecake as a whole cake because it only comes as a palm-sized pastry, which is just as well, because no one's buying Zhao's "not too fatty" contention.

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*Do you have a secret treat, a local delicacy that you'd be willing to share with Vancouver Sun readers? Let me know at the email above, and I might check it out and perhaps do a column about it. The rules? The culinary object of your desire, be it sweet or savoury, must not only be delicious, but unusual and not mass-produced, something tasty that can't be found at your average restaurant or chain grocery store. And it must be a single item – preferably something you can hold in one hand and eat on the run.*



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