

## Monkey Magic

**Address** Shop 3&4,  
410 Crown Street, Surry Hills,  
9358 4444  
**Open** Mon-Sat, from 6pm

I'm confused. A Japanese-y bar-restaurant called Monkey Magic? I watched the weird *Monkey* television series in my childhood but was baffled by the gluttonous Piggy and alarmed by Monkey's frequent headband trouble. I thought it was a Chinese show. Turns out this confusion is understandable: filmed in the late 1970s, *Monkey* was a Japanese production based on a Chinese novel, filmed in China and Mongolia with Japanese actors and then dubbed, poorly, into English. Got it? Good.

**MONKEY MAGIC**, the Surry Hills version, occupies an awkwardly shaped but smartly refurbished warehouse in a stretch full of good drinking and eating options. It's hidden in plain view by virtue of its overly subtle signage and empty streetfront seating area. Presumably designed for a pre-dinner drink, the downstairs is full



Photo: Quentin Jones

of boxy pouffes and low tables and dominated by three soaring logs that reach to the upstairs ceiling. It makes Monkey Magic look empty from the street even though there are several full tables upstairs.

**A FRIEND** compares it with nearby Toko, citing similar concept, prices and stylish fit-out; but lacking the latter's advantage of a street-level aspect. Upstairs, the old brick walls and wooden beams lend the large

space an inviting warmth, while the bar is embellished with a motif evoking Monkey's gold headband. Staff are prompt and friendly, although a little vague on the origins of the name. Too young, perhaps, to remember the show?

**THE COCKTAIL LIST** is full of originals, offering a journey "from east to west". I try an ageha Tokyo punch (\$16) a passionfruit and rum blend served tall. It's sweet, tart and

chunky with fresh fruit. A companion pronounces her Kirishima sour (\$16) – a sophisticated fizzy concoction, expertly mixed – "really good".

**THE SUSHI** (\$34) is superb: meltingly fresh slices of kingfish, tuna, salmon and eel dressed delicately with subtle touches of wasabi mayonnaise and slender strips of seaweed. It's something familiar made special. The crab on

**YOU'LL LIKE IT IF** you love top-shelf sushi with great cocktails in a quiet setting.

**YOU'LL HATE IT IF** you're on a tight budget and looking for buzz.

**IT WILL COST YOU** \$16 for cocktails; wine by the glass, \$9-\$10; beers, \$8-\$12..

**GO FOR** sushi and the Ageha Tokyo Punch.

betel leaves (\$13) is good but not a showstopper; the moreish edamame (\$6) has crunchy yellow salt on top.

**OUR FIRST ROUND** seduces us to stay for another. We order the same cocktails again, soft-shell crab sushi rolls (not bad), salmon rolls (ornate and spectacular) and a big bowl of steaming, stir-fried mushrooms (nutty, aromatic and delicious). We've blown the budget, ordered more than we can eat but it was worth it. Piggy would be proud.

**By Kelsey Munro**