



# The Best Ramen in Tokyo

**Where do you find the ultimate ramen? Tokyo, of course. From the seemingly infinite number of options, we've asked top chefs and ramen fanatics to pick their favorite bowls in Japan's capital.**

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Photographs by Takashi Yasumura/Bloomberg

**Around the world, people obsess about this seemingly simple dish. But** nowhere is it taken more seriously than in and around Tokyo, the ramen epicenter of the universe. Japan is almost certainly not the place where ramen was born; experts say it originated in China at the turn of the 19th century. By the 1920s it was being sold from carts in Tokyo. The massive city holds thousands of ramen shops, most of them small, family-run operations that are generally quite good.

Think of ramen as the pizza of Japan: a quick, fortifying meal, which may involve standing in line and is then quickly devoured. Yet for some, including food-obsessed tourists, it's a meal worth stalking and savoring while they compile a list of their trophy bowls.

The best-known varieties of the all-important broth are shoyu (soy sauce), shio (sea salt), miso, and tonkotsu, made with so many pork bones that the broth is opaque and packed with fatty goodness. That is just the beginning. It's worth getting to know other varieties as well: Tokyo Tonkotsu, which is lightened and flavored a bit by the addition of such items as chicken and vegetables; tantanmen, which evokes dan dan noodles in its pervasive spiciness; and tsukemen, which features chilled noodles, solo, with a bowl of saucy broth for dipping.

Now, are you ready to discover the best of the best ramen? Good. We tapped top chefs from around the U.S. who have spent enough time in Tokyo to pick their destination counters. Here's where they go—and the bowls they order.



## Afuri

**1F UF Bld. 4,4-9-4 Roppongi, Minato-ku  
plus other Tokyo locations**

**[afuri.com](http://afuri.com)**

**Order:** Yuzu Shoyu Ramen

According to David Chang, founder of the Momofuku empire, you haven't done ramen right until you've gone to Afuri, where bowls are selected from a vending machine-like system. "The order I get has a lot of yuzu in the chicken-based broth," says Chang. "It's light and crisp and clean, and not traditional. It's the direction I hope ramen is going. And I like that there are a lot of locations, so you can just head to the one closest to you." There's even one stateside, in Portland, Oregon.

Pastry king Dominique Ansel agrees: "It's not the newest, but the classic Afuri Ramen in Ebisu has always been one of my favorites. Their signature is a yuzu ramen, with tender cha shu (marinated pork belly), chewy noodles, that perfectly soft boiled egg. I have a real thing for a kick of citrus in my ramen."

*—Recommended by chef/owner David Chang of Momofuku in New York, Canada, and Australia; and chef/owner Dominique Ansel of Dominique Ansel Bakery in New York, London, and Tokyo.*





A vending machine, ready for your order at Afuri in Tokyo's Ebisu.



Chasu, or marinated pork belly, cooked to order at Afuri.

# Fuunji

2-14-3 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku

**Order:** Tsukemen

When hot weather puts a bowl of steaming noodles farthest from your mind, consider tsukemen: The deconstructed ramen is presented as a bowl of chilled noodles that you dip in a dense, flavorful broth served alongside. When in Tokyo, connoisseurs head straight to Fuunji, where amazingly rich tsukemen is served with a concise, almost creamy chicken-and-fish broth, plus sliced pork and nori (dried seaweed).

“Pre-ordering via machine guarantees fast service once you get through the long line,” advises chef Ken Oringer. “Make sure you get extra noodles and dried smoked-fish powder on top.” Find it on a small street conveniently close to Shinjuku, home to the world’s busiest train station.

—Recommended by chef/owner Ken Oringer of Toro in Boston, New York, and Bangkok.



A view from the counter of the kitchen at Fuunji.



# Kagari

4-4-1 Ginza, Chou-ku

**Order:** Tori Paitan

As part of his job overseeing the worldwide culinary programs at Shake Shack, Mark Rosati scouted prospective Tokyo locations, and, of course, ate everywhere he could. In the process, he fell for Kagari, the first Michelin-starred ramen shop, in the glitzy Ginza district.

“Their tori paitan ramen has a chicken broth on the level of richness and pleasure as most pork-based ramens,” Rosati raves. He’s not alone. There’s a perpetual line for the eight seats at the U-shaped counter around the tiny, open kitchen. Kagari is marked simply by a ‘Soba’ sign hanging out front. (Don’t let it fool you; the place doesn’t serve soba.) Instead, the specialty is a luxurious, creamy colored broth with slices of juicy chicken breast set on top. Diners have the option of enriching it by adding a knob of shallot- or garlic-infused butter, which comes on the side and is highly recommended.

—*Recommended by Mark Rosati, culinary director of Shake Shack.*



(From left) You know you’ve found Kagari when you see the “Soba” sign; the entrance to the tiny ramen spot.

# Suzuran

1-7-12 Ebisu, Shibuya-ku

**Order:** Kakuni Tanmen

If there's a New York-born Jewish guy who knows his Tokyo ramen, it's Ivan Orkin. He lived in the city for several years and turned his ramen obsession into a popular counter spot (now shuttered). If pressed to pick a favorite, Orkin shouts out "Suzuran," which dishes up a Chinese-style ramen, as opposed to an authentic Japanese version.

"This is not an undiscovered place," notes Orkin. "It's right in the middle of Tokyo. I usually go there within the first day or two of being back in Tokyo. A little more expensive than some places, but they have beautiful ramen served in beautiful bowls." Orkin adds: "When I first started making ramen, I was going to model my noodles after theirs, that's how good they are. They're my very favorite in Japan." Suzuran's Kakuni Tanmen is a dish of sumptuous, braised pork belly, served alongside a bowl of elegant thin noodles in warm broth. (Tanmen means "hot noodles".)

—Recommended by chef/owner Ivan Orkin of Ivan Ramen, New York.



The master at work at Suzuran.



# Kondouya

1-1-39 Kitayamada, Tsuzuki-ku, Yokohama

**Order:** Tonkotsu Ramen

Masahi Ito is best known for the exquisite fish he serves at Sushi Zo in the U.S., but he was born in Japan and adores ramen. His favorite spot in Tokyo is a little-known mom-and-pop place called Kondouya, about an hour's travel by train. Consider coming here a culinary adventure.

"One reason I like it is that there is only one broth," says Ito of the tonkotsu specialty, so porky it's cloudy. "I don't care about a place with too many broth choices. You will have the tonkotsu ramen. It's very rich and very heavy, with wavy noodles. Your only decision is whether to have the small or large bowl."

*—Recommended by chef/owner Masahi Ito of Sushi Zo in Los Angeles and New York.*



(From left) The entrance to Kondouya, outside Tokyo; noodles, destined for broth.

# Asuka

2-11 Skuragaokacho, Shibuya-ku

**Order:** Tantanmen Ramen

For those looking for an unconventional ramen experience, you can't go wrong with tantanmen, which evokes the chili-spiked Chinese dish, dan dan noodles. Here, close to the Shibuya train station, Asuka even offers tonkatsu (fried pork cutlets) as a topping.

"The place is special because they offer a very crispy pork topping with a slightly curry flavor," explains chef Michael Anthony. "Along with a really thick sesame soup and Chinese-style noodles—it's the best marriage." Anthony, whose own restaurant is completely dictated by seasonal ingredients, has an additional reason for liking Asuka. He notes: "In the winter, they serve hot Tantanmen, and in the summer, they serve it cold."

*—Recommended by chef/partner Mike Anthony of Gramercy Tavern and Untitled, New York.*



Ramen essentials include vinegar and chili oil.



# Tonchin

**2-26-2 Minami-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku  
plus other Tokyo locations**

**Order:** Tokyo Tonkotsu Shoyu Ramen

In business since 1992, Tonchin is a pioneer of Tokyo tonkotsu ramen—which includes such ingredients as chicken and vegetables in the broth, in addition to the usual pork overload. Unlike many ramen shops, this one allows customization: You have a choice of noodles cooked soft, normal, or firm, and you also select how much pork fat you want (none, normal, or, if you're reckless, more).

"I've been there more than 50 times!" brags **star sushi chef** Daisuke Nakazawa of Tonchin's Toshima location. "It's cheap and tasty." Tonchin now has seven outlets around Tokyo, as well as shops in Taiwan and Shanghai. Its first stateside location will come to New York in the fall.

*—Recommended by chef/owner Daisuke Nakazawa of Sushi Nakazawa in New York.*



(From left) A Tonchin ramen vending machine; a napkin holder doubling as a ramen ad.

# Nagi Golden Gai

2F, Shinjuku Golden Gai, G2 Street, 1-1-10 Kabukicho, Shinjuku-ku  
plus other Tokyo locations  
[n-nagi.com](http://n-nagi.com)

**Order:** Niboshi Ramen

There's a lot to like about the spot favored by *Top Chef Masters* star Douglas Keane, including the unconventional ramen served at one of five locations—niboshi style, with a fishy broth and thicker-than-usual noodles. Keane explains: "First of all, the location in Kabukicho is epic. It's almost always jam-packed, but it's in the bar district, so you can drink while you wait on the street. The broth has intense, yet perfect fish flavor—it's made from dried sardines. I always add chashu pork and an egg. And if possible, I like to sneak in some heat and add pepper oil, depending on my level of intoxication."

—Recommended by Douglas Keane of *Two Birds One Stone* in St. Helena, California.



The colorful interior of Nagi Golden Gai in Shinjuku.



# Rokurinsha

**B1F 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku  
plus other Tokyo locations**  
[rokurinsha.com](http://rokurinsha.com)

**Order:** Tsukemen

Of all the superb ramen places on Tokyo Station's subterranean "[Ramen Street](#)," two top chefs name Rokurinsha the winner. You'll know it by the line outside. Chef Daniel Holzman recommends Rokurinsha's tsukemen for its thick, chewy noodles and for broth that's both rich with pork flavor and fishy. "You get the cold noodles on the side, which is my favorite way to enjoy ramen when I want to take my time and not worry about overcooked noodles," he says.

Likewise, chef Micah Wexler's Rokurinsha order is tsukemen, and he describes the barely warm bowl of reduced broth almost as a sludge. (A delicious sludge.) "You slurp the noodles up with soft-boiled egg, pork, and green onions. The flavor, texture, and experience are transcendent. When you are finished with the noodles, they come around and pour hot dashi into what's left of your broth, so you can drink it down."

*—Recommended by co-owner and chef Daniel Holzman of the Meatball Shop in New York, and by co-owner and chef Micah Wexler of Wexler's Deli in Los Angeles.*



Rokurinsha is conveniently located on Tokyo Ramen Street in Tokyo Station.