

Eat Out

Tokyo Marina

5058 N Clark St, 773-878-2900

In the bowl Ramen is by nature a pretty blue-collar meal, and the Tokyo Marina version (\$8.50) (listed simply as “ramen” on the menu) is appropriately minimalistic. Slightly gummy noodles are served in an umami-rich miso broth, with a few slices of thickly sliced pork loin. Broccoli, mushrooms, onion, bean sprouts, scallions, spinach and a slightly cool hard-boiled egg round out the dish. It may not be the most refined ramen in town, but it’s certainly the least pretentious.

Know before you go Hot tea and a simple green salad with ginger dressing come free with every order.

Hiro's Cafe

2936 N Broadway, 773-477-8510

In the bowl With green noodles and a deep green broth, the tea flavor of Hiro’s green-tea ramen (\$9.95) is an interesting infusion. Think of green-tea ice cream, in which the tea flavor doesn’t dominate, but you’re definitely aware of it. With broccoli, onion and bits of red pepper, it’s certainly not what you’d expect from ramen, but it’s surprisingly decent when you want to switch things up.

Know before you go If you’ve OD’d on ramen, you can stuff yourself on its \$15.95 daily sushi buffet.

Cocoro East

668 N Wells St, 312-943-2220

In the bowl The three traditional styles of ramen (salt, miso, soy) all have a home at Cocoro, and the *shio* (salt) ramen (\$11.75), with a lightly salted but not overpowering broth, is passable but pricey. For your money you get a bowl of noodles with a few bamboo shoots, some scallions, a soft-boiled egg, a palmful of sesame seeds and one piece of dramatically oversalted pork.

Know before you go The bowl is served with a huge wooden spoon, far superior to the standard porcelain soup spoons everywhere else, and necessary for getting every penny’s worth of sustenance.

Santouka Ramen

100 E Algonquin Rd, Arlington Heights, 847-357-0286

In the bowl Located in Mitsuwa Marketplace’s food court, the cash-only Santouka makes ramen just about any way you can imagine, as long as it’s traditional and involves pork. The gargantuan menu has three different sizes of multiple ramen types—the

#33 Toroniku spicy miso ramen (\$10.49) with “special pork” (a terribly tasty and tender pork cheek) comes DIY-style with the rich, salty broth and perfectly cooked noodles in one bowl and the meat, bamboo shoots and scallions on a separate plate.

Know before you go: You might be tempted to grab a bottle of sake from Mitsuwa’s liquor store, but pour it on the DL—the food court is alcohol-free.

Tampopo

5665 N Lincoln Ave, 773-561-2277

In the bowl A nod to the area’s Korean roots means little plates of *banchan* (pickled and/or fermented vegetables), which are a nice extra to munch on while waiting for your noodles. The basic bowl of “tanmen” ramen (\$9.50) is heaped high with perfectly cooked noodles, tons of bean sprouts, carrots and scallions, plus fistfuls of cabbage (so much that it almost overwhelms the big picture). Don’t bother with the \$1 upcharge to the “gomoku” bowl—one shrimp and one little fish cake aren’t worth it.

Know before you go On Wednesday and Thursday, Tampopo is BYOB with no corkage fee. Time your ramen cravings appropriately.

Shinobu

1131 W Bryn Mawr Ave, 773-334-9062

In the bowl After bowl upon bowl of ramen with braised pork, roasted pork, pork belly and so on, a switch to fish can be tempting. Unfortunately, Shinobu’s salmon ramen (\$10) came with a filet that was so tough it was nearly impossible to pick apart with chopsticks. With only wilted spinach and a bit of scallion to garnish, the broth was bland, and the noodles were overcooked and oily.

Know before you go Unless you’ve got a pescatarian in your party who’s hell-bent on ramen, you’re better off skipping Shinobu.

Noodles by Takashi

111 N State St, seventh floor, 312-781-4483

In the bowl The namesake noodles are properly cooked, and the popular shoyu (soy) ramen (\$8.95) has a decently flavorful broth, but definitely benefits from a shot of chile oil. The “braised” pork, however, was boiled beyond recognition and proved too tough to handle with chopsticks alone. Bamboo shoots add a necessary bit of crunch to the bowl, but a huge sheet of nori (dried seaweed) is too big to do anything but get in the way.

Know before you go From the seats in the north-facing window, you can voyeuristically stare down on the Joffrey Ballet practice space next door.

Market share

A chef-guided tour of Chicago’s best farmers’ market stands, one vegetable at a time.



▲ **What to buy** Bushels of crisp French breakfast radishes at their stand at Green City Market (south end of Lincoln Park, Wednesdays and Saturdays 7am–1pm).

How to eat it Erling Wu-Bower (sous chef at the Publican) suggests quartering Green Acres’ radishes lengthwise, tossing them with chopped chives, thinly sliced tropea onions, crumbled feta, olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper, then piling the mixture onto slices of grilled sourdough bread for a fresh, springy bruschetta. A bottle of rosé would make a perfect pair.—Julia Kramer

Meet the farmers Beth and Brent Eccles (pictured, foreground) of Green Acres in North Judson, Indiana, maintain a third-generation farming legacy, started by Beth’s grandfather, who emigrated from Japan and specialized in growing Asian greens. Using biodiverse-farming techniques, the Eccleses grow more than 600 varieties of produce on 155 acres.

Bag it



HALVAH IF YOU HEAR ME Entering the season of baseball games and county fairs means temptation by nostalgic cravings that might just end in disappointment (c’mon, you know that funnel cake topped with canned cherries isn’t as good as it was when you were a spastic 12-year-old). So next time you find yourself ogling blue and pink pillars of cotton candy, mix it up with **floss halvah**. The traditional Turkish sweet known as *pishmaniye* is essentially wheat flour and sugar, with an ethereal texture as soft as freshly spun silk that melts instantly on your tongue, leaving behind traces of vanilla and pistachio. And pulling *this* stuff out of your bag at the next Sox game is more of a conversation starter than calling over the cotton-candy guy. \$4.99 at Sanabel Bakery (4253 N Kedzie Ave, 773-539-5409).—Heather Shouse

BEST BOWL