

Ramen



Dream chaser



Ramen

When you visit Japan, try throwing ten stones at random.

Chances are, at least three of them will hit a ramen shop.

That's how common ramen joints are here.

Originally a noodle dish brought over from China, ramen has undergone a uniquely Japanese evolution—

and is now considered a national comfort food.

There are four classic flavors: soy sauce, miso, salt, and pork bone (tonkotsu).

Soy sauce ramen is the oldest and still one of the most popular.

Each shop tweaks its soup recipe and toppings to stand out, and almost every region boasts its own “local ramen.”

For something easier, try cup noodles or instant ramen.

Just pour in hot water, or boil in a pot. That's it.

During adolescence—when kids eat like Slimer from Ghostbusters— instant ramen becomes every parent's best friend.

But a few words of caution:

As tempting as it is to drink all the soup, Japanese doctors often say: “Leave the broth.”

With high blood pressure being a major health issue in Japan, salt intake is taken seriously.

Also—do not microwave your cup noodles.

Unless you want your kitchen to turn into a Michael Bay movie set.

Handled with the right knowledge and moderation, ramen is one of the best meals to warm both the belly and the soul of any busy modern human.

Onigiri



Makanai : Staff meal



Onigiri (Rice Balls)

I've never been outside of Japan, but based on all the foreign dramas I've watched, it seems that a homemade lunch for a businessman usually means one thing: a sandwich.

Even Walter White brought a ham sandwich to his underground lab—though to be fair, his business wasn't exactly legal.

In Japan, our go-to homemade lunch is the onigiri—rice balls.

From kindergarteners to businesspeople, and yes—even criminals—when it comes to homemade lunches, rice balls reign supreme.

Their history is ancient. Some of the earliest examples date back to the 1st century.

During the Sengoku period, samurai carried rice balls with pickled plums (umeboshi) as a convenient battlefield ration.

By the Edo period, the familiar seaweed-wrapped style emerged.

In modern times, the individually wrapped convenience store onigiri stands as a symbol of Japan's packaging innovation.

Like sandwiches, onigiri are beloved for their simplicity and flexibility.

Just stuff your favorite filling into some rice and shape it—that's it.

It's arguably the easiest and most enjoyable Japanese dish to make with children.

Surprisingly, onigiri are also a hit at Japanese BBQs.

Lightly grilling them on a mesh rack brings out a wonderful roasted aroma.

Brushing on soy sauce with sugar or some yakiniku sauce makes for a delicious treat —

just skip the filling and you've got yaki-onigiri (grilled rice balls).

The pairing with grilled meat?

It's as perfect as—well, Walter and Jesse.

...Okay, bad example. They didn't exactly end well.

Let's go with Riggs and Murtaugh. That's more like it—no arguments there.

And when it comes to food safety, especially in summer, onigiri come with their own “guardian angel”: the humble umeboshi (pickled plum).

Rich in citric and organic acids, umeboshi have powerful antibacterial properties.

Tuck one inside your rice ball and it helps prevent bacteria growth—both in your lunchbox and in your stomach.

It's basically a pro-level food safety agent.

We Japanese trust umeboshi more than we trust corrupt politicians or those “mysterious startup CEOs” flaunting suspiciously perfect lives on social media.

Takoyaki



Takopa



Takoyaki

Your teenage kid says they're going to sleep over at a friend's place.

A few others are coming too. Some kind of secret meeting, apparently.

As a parent, this raises alarms.

You start wondering—will there be something shady going on?

Some kind of... herbal substance that isn't sold over the counter?

Take a breath. You're safe.

These days in Japan, when young people gather at night, it's usually for one thing: a Takoyaki Party—known affectionately as “Tako-pa.”

Once upon a time, takoyaki (octopus balls) were something you could only get from street stalls during festivals or from small takoyaki shops.

But today, home takoyaki makers are so affordable and compact, it's said every household should have one.

During a tako-pa, friends sit around gossiping while they cook.

Families catch up on school stories while awkwardly flipping the balls in the pan.

It's dinner—and entertainment—rolled into one.

And here's the best part: you don't have to stick with octopus.

Anything goes—sausage, cheese, corn, kimchi, green onions, even chocolate.

The joy is in creating your own ultimate takoyaki.

Each ball is about the size of a golf ball.

Honestly, spending your weekend sucking up to your boss on the golf course?

You'd be better off around a takoyaki grill with your family, laughing and flipping batter.

Pro tip: go for a gas-powered model over an electric one.

Electric plates often don't heat evenly.

With gas, you'll get that perfect crispy outside and gooey inside.

Top it off with sauce, mayo, and lots of katsuobushi (bonito flakes).

The smell alone is enough to send your appetite into overdrive.

With a family of four, don't be surprised if you knock back 100 of these without even realizing.

But no worries—takoyaki is made from flour, eggs, and water.

Delicious and budget-friendly.

Bring the tako-pa culture into your home.

Because nothing brings people together like hot, sizzling takoyaki.

Udon



Moon-Viewing



Udon

Do you know the difference between udon and soba?

Udon is made by kneading wheat flour with salted water—so it's actually closer to pasta in terms of ingredients.

Some people even think of it as “fat Japanese pasta.”

Soba, on the other hand, is made from buckwheat flour ground from soba grains.

It has a rich aroma, is packed with nutrients, and offers a crisp, clean bite.

If someone asked me which one I like more, I'd probably say soba.

But if they asked which one I eat more often each year, it's definitely udon.

Why?

Because udon is just so versatile.

You can add it to vegetable soup.

You can stir-fry it with soy sauce and whatever toppings you like.

You can even mix it with vegetables and a bold dressing to make a chilled udon salad.

There are two classic udon dishes: kitsune udon and tanuki udon.

Kitsune udon is topped with sweet, simmered fried tofu (aburaage), and tanuki udon comes with crunchy tempura bits (tenkasu).

No, there's no actual fox or raccoon in them.

The name “kitsune” (fox) supposedly comes from the belief that foxes love fried tofu—

but honestly, if a fox were really hungry, it would probably eat just about anything.

As for tanuki (raccoon dog) udon, one theory says the tempura crumbs look like a tanuki's fur.

That one's a bit of a stretch.

These playful names likely came from merchants in the old days—

a clever marketing trick to add a little humor and familiarity to the menu.