



eat

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The most common style of ramen is tonkotsu. Tonkotsu refers to the creamy broth made by boiling pork bones, fat and collagen over high heat for many hours. The tonkotsu broth can be filled with different ingredients. Chashu pork belly is tender as the tough collagen turns soft by braising over low heat for a long time. Negi is shredded green onions. Raw or cooked bean sprouts called moyashi are common. Wakame or nori seaweed are typical. Most will have tamago — a boiled or marinated egg. While kamaboko, a pink and white steamed fish cake slice, is also common, none of the ramen in Central Oregon included it.

All of the ramens listed here were excellent. All were made with quality ramen noodles with elasticity and springiness, which feels full in your mouth, is chewy and flavorful. Contrast this to bad ramen noodles that will soak up too much liquid and fall apart or dissolve in the soup.



Miyagi Ramen, Kanpai and Chomp Chomp tonkatsu ramens, the most common style of the noodle soup.

KANPAI

While I usually think of Kanpai for sushi, they serve a variety of food, including the best (available) ramen. The pork bone broth is made with tare — soy, sake, brown sugar and sweet Japanese rice wine. The result is a rich, dark, clear broth with a meaty flavor. A generous helping of incredibly tender and sweet Chasu pork belly slices add to the meaty base. Big sheets of Wakame seaweed add the flavor of the sea. A sharp bit of spice tickled the tongue. The noodles are very light with a chewy, full mouthfeel. The whole egg looked as though it had been marinated for a long time or that it picked up the dark broth coloring from sitting in the soup. The egg was on the hard-boiled side.

In all, it was a satisfying, filling bowl of ramen with plenty of combined flavors in a good balance.

OISHI — REDMOND

After the first taste of the ramen from Oishi, I didn't want to stop eating it. The tonkotsu was the more typical light broth with the creamy consistency of a miso soup but with a smoky, meaty flavor. The tender pork slices were sweet and smoky, but there were only three small slices. The noodles were chewy and imbued with a smoky taste.

A few bean sprouts added a fresh crunch without overpowering the soup. Green on-



Plenty of tender chashu pork and mushrooms in Kanpai's ramen.

ion added dimension, and big sheets of seaweed added a hint of salty fish flavor. It was topped with a halved hard-boiled egg.

MIYAGI RAMEN

Miyagi Ramen opened two years ago to bring the trend to Bend. As the name implies, Miyagi is the place for ramen. Along with the tonkotsu ramen, Miyagi offers three other ramen styles including yuzu-tan with spicy minced pork, baby bop chow, pea shoots and black garlic oil; a Spicy Miso that adds red miso and spicy minced pork; and a vegan Smoked Shiitake-Cashew option.

Chef George Morris spent time in Japan and brought back the idea of making American food with Japanese flavors. He spent two weeks in Tokyo dedicated to getting the feel of what makes a great bowl of ramen, and he seems to have succeeded. The small restaurant seems to have gotten a boost with a massive demand for takeout. The popular-

ity is well earned.

Miyagi's Tonkotsu Ramen is also a creamy broth that was rich and meaty with the complexity of subtle yet distinct onion and herb flavors. This broth is masterfully crafted. Unlike the traditional tender pork belly, it is crispy-edged like the pork belly served in other cuisines in town. Nonetheless, it had a tasty, smoky, almost bacon-like flavor. Crispy sweet potatoes added earthy sweetness. It was topped with Negi cut scallions. The light, flavorful noodles had a great mouth feel—chewy and satisfying. It was topped with a perfectly cooked, soft egg that wasn't too runny and held its shape. It was the perfect complement to the soup.

CHOMP CHOMP

The ramen from Chomp Chomp had the most ingredients and personality. It was very umami forward that came from a generous addition of oyster mushrooms. Like Miyagi, the pork was tender but crispier than the traditional chashu pork. There were only two pieces, which wasn't enough for pork in every bite.

While the broth had a creamy consistency, there was not enough in the to-go order to go with the rest of the ingredients. (When I previously tried the ramen at the restaurant, this was not a problem.)

Plenty of other ingredients added a balance of flavors. Garlic fried cabbage, microgreens, and scallions added freshness to the earthy flavors. The soft-boiled egg was covered in a Togarashi Seven Spice that adds a

Where to find ramen in Central Oregon

Kanpai, 990 NW Newport Ave., kanpaibend.com, 541-388-4636

Oishi, 511 SW 6th St., Redmond, oishijapanese.com, 541-548-3035

Miyagi Ramen, 550 SW Industrial Way (The Box Factory), miyagiramen.com, 541-797-7000

Chomp Chomp, 945 NW Bond St., chompchomp-bend.com, 541-797-6909

Bend Izakaya Rōnin, 70 SW Century Drive, Bendizakaya.com, 541-797-4325

toasty sweetness from orange zest, nuttiness from sesame and poppy seeds, and a zing from ginger, red chili, and Japanese peppers.

BEND IZAKAYA RŌNIN (NOT AVAILABLE NOW)

Sadly, the exceptional ramen at Bend Izakaya Rōnin is not available right now. The soup's long process makes it difficult to serve as the restaurant reopens, and chef Scott Byers focuses on his chef's choice Omakase menu. But it will return in the fall as the temperatures drop. My description of the soup is from last year's review. I've enjoyed it several times for takeout during the shutdown.

Rōnin's ramen starts with noodles that arrive fresh and slightly cooked. They are added to the pork/chicken-based broth. A traditional Tonkotsu style ramen, it has tender chashu pork, a square of nori and fresh Negi, shallots and garlic. The Shoyu-marinated soft-boiled egg steals the show. Its smokiness flavors the broth and noodles and stays on your lips after taking a bite of the soup. The egg may be available on the menu aside from the ramen. It's worth a try.

BOP CULTURE (TEMPORARILY CLOSED)

The ghost kitchen Bop Culture also served an excellent ramen with thick, tender slices of chashu pork and a complex broth. As restaurants open again, there is a shortage of restaurant workers.

Like other restaurants, they have not been able to get the staff they need to keep Bop Culture going. Hopefully, it will return soon, and we'll get to taste the rich flavors of their ramen again.

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