

LIFESTYLE SURVEY

61 bowls, 26 restaurants—where to find the perfect ramen in Manila

The respondents were also asked which ramen places were overrated; it was interesting to see that some people's favorite places were on other people's 'overrated' lists

By Pam Pastor

WE'VE BEEN swimming in ramen. Restaurants that serve the Japanese noodle soup have mushroomed everywhere. But which place is the best? Where can you find the perfect ramen in Manila?

We asked 100 people (64-percent female, 36-percent male, ages 21-52) to tell us about the best bowl of ramen they've had, and we ended up with a list of 61 different ramen bowls from 26 restaurants.

Clearly, ramen is a divisive topic, a fact confirmed by our poll. Ramen places that were loved by some were hated by others. Bowls of ramen that were declared favorites were pronounced terrible by other respondents. And some people were passionate about ramen while others couldn't care less.

About 74 percent of the respondents said they love ramen; 4 percent said they are obsessed with it; 4 percent said they don't care; and 3 percent said they don't crave it.

Ralph, 22, said: "I only really care if it's ramen from Yushoken."

Some 39 percent of respondents said they eat ramen once a month; 21 percent said they rarely eat ramen; 16 percent eat ramen once a week; and 13 percent go for ramen twice a month.

Best bowls

Ten percent of our respondents picked Ramen Nagi's Black King (P410) as their best bowl, giving the calamari-ink-soaked ramen the No. 1 spot in our list of top five bowls.

"It's silky and rich but not to the point of being overpowering. The broth is really comforting and delectable," said Aimee, 35.

Kitkat, 35, agrees. "It has the most unique flavor of all ramen I have tried in Manila."

In second place is Ramen Yushoken's Shoyu Tonkotsu (P350), chosen by 8 percent of respondents.

"The pork was melt-in-your-mouth good," said Mason, 33.

Number three, with 7 percent, is Ukokkei Ramen Ron's legendary Tantanmen (P390), which is not on the menu, is only served after 6 p.m. and in very limited quantities (just 20 bowls a night, according to rumors) by a chef whom diners have christened "the Ramen Nazi."

"The creamy broth lingers and its flavor seeps into every ingredient, even the egg. You'd think that would be a recipe for umay, but strangely, it's so addicting. The taste is very authentic. It was only when I tried Ukokkei that I found the taste that replicated the ramen I had in Japan," said Francis, 39.

The top five list is completed by Ramen Yushoken's Tantan-Men (P380) and Ramen Nagi's Butao King (P390), tied in fourth place, with each one chosen as the best bowl by 5 percent of respondents.

"Ramen Yushoken's Tantan-Men is perfection in a bowl. Perfect flavor and texture!" said Anika, 25.

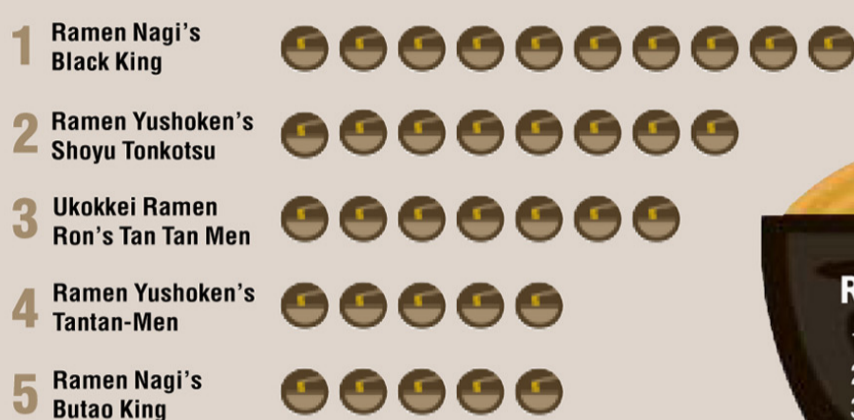
"Butao King's pork was tender and sweet, and the egg was good," said Kitty, 32.

Most number

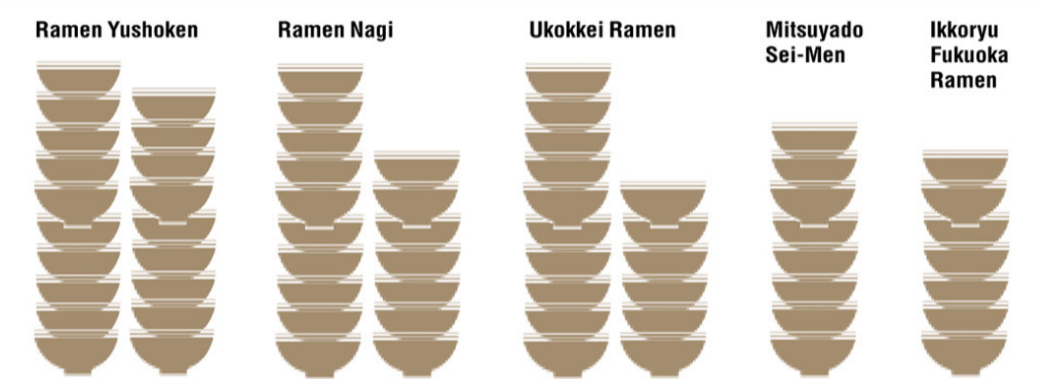
Five restaurants stood out for serving the most number of best ramen bowls. Ramen Yushoken took the top spot with 19 percent.

"I would have to say that the best

TOP FIVE RAMEN BOWLS:



RESTAURANTS THAT HAVE SERVED THE MOST NUMBER OF BEST BOWLS:



55% of respondents have enjoyed ramen abroad

11% of respondents want to see Ippudo open in the Philippines

TOP FIVE FAVORITE RAMEN PLACES:

- Ramen Yushoken = 16%
Ramen Nagi = 13%
Ukokkei Ramen Ron = 10%
Hokkaido Ramen Santouka = 9%
Mitsuyado Sei-Men = 7%

3% wish their favorite ramen place would move to a better location

2% wish the service at their favorite ramen place was better

16% of respondents said their favorite ramen place is different from the place that served them their best bowl of ramen

bowl of ramen I've eaten is Ramen Yushoken's Gyokal. Two factors make it the best for me: broth and noodles. Unlike the different broths out there, Yushoken has that distinct taste and texture that makes the broth stand out, while it's also the only one who gets noodles perfect, giving you just enough bite," said Ralph.

Martin, 25, is a fan of Ramen Yushoken, too. "Something about that bowl made me want to come back. I've tried the Shio Ramen, Tonkotsu Dipping Ramen, Tantanmen and also ramen from the resto's secret menu. It's probably how rich it makes its soup that all other places just pale in comparison."

Ramen Nagi got 17 percent. "Ramen Nagi's Green King is an unusual ramen. It's the bastard of the Italian and Japanese cuisines. It is ramen swimming in fresh basil, olive oil and parmesan cheese. It is always, always welcome in my mouth," said Tere, 30.

Ukokkei Ramen Ron is in third place with 16 percent. Joy, 41, said: "Ukokkei's Miso Chashu has flavorful

soup and the noodles are just right. You feel satisfied after finishing it and think of when your next visit will be."

Mitsuyado Sei-Men served 8 percent of the best bowls. Its Double Cheese Tsukemen was chosen by 2 percent of the respondents. Son, 23, said: "It's topped with grated parmesan and you could just slather it with cheese sauce then slurp away. Who doesn't love cheese?"

Kate, 36, agrees. "The cheese sauce was new to me and I liked it."

Although their picks didn't make it to the top lists, a lot of ramen fans were very passionate about their favorite bowls.

"I like Shoyu Ramen at Oishinbo because it's as authentic as the one I tried in the streets and mom-and-pop ramen houses in Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. Oishinbo is not specifically a ramen place but it serves authentic ramen. I like the simplicity of the ingredients, I'm not into heavy and complicated kinds of ramen," said Jolo, 29.

Ley, 27, said: "Wrong Ramen's EU puts brekky favorites in a ramen! And, oh my God, there is bacon. Bacon. What more can you ask for? I always order a runny egg—the soft-boiled egg yolk is simply irresistible."

"Paitan Ramen at Kichitora of Tokyo is the best one. The broth hit the spot, it was hot and flavorful, noodles cooked perfectly, and pork chashu slice was tender and tasty," said Doris, 51.

Others were not as enthusiastic. "To be honest, they all taste pretty much the same to me," said Paulo, 30.

"The truth is the ramen is just my excuse to eat kakuni buns. That's what I really like," said Phoebe, 33.

Favorite ramen place

Respondents were asked to name their favorite ramen place. The top five were Ramen Yushoken (16 percent), Ramen Nagi (13 percent), Ukokkei Ramen Ron (10 percent), Hokkaido Ramen Santouka (9 percent) and Mitsuyado Sei-Men (7 percent).



There are...

- 20% Not enough
26% Too many
54% Just enough

... ramen places in the Philippines

RAMEN FACTORS ACCORDING TO IMPORTANCE

- 1. Soup base/broth
2. Flavor
3. Noodles
4. Topping Options
5. Size
6. Accessibility
7. Price
8. Location
9. Service

36% Male



64% Female

4% of respondents say they are obsessed with ramen

4% of respondents say they don't care about ramen



74%

of respondents say they love ramen

HOW MUCH THEY'RE WILLING TO PAY FOR A GOOD BOWL OF RAMEN

- P1 to P200 = 10%
P201 to P300 = 35%
P301 to P400 = 30%
P401 to P500 = 18%
P501 and up = 7%

AGE OF RESPONDENTS:

- 21 to 25 = 13%
26 to 30 = 23%
31 to 35 = 38%
36 to 40 = 14%
41 to 45 = 9%
46 & above = 3%

HOW OFTEN THEY EAT RAMEN:

- Twice a week = 2%
Once a week = 16%
Three times a month = 2%
Twice a month = 13%
Once a month = 39%
Rarely = 21%
Occasionally = 1%
Other = 1%



"Yushoken's menu is simple. It only has four or five different types of ramen, and each one has a distinct taste and flavor; you just know it has perfected its recipes! The tamago is also the best," said Chezka, 29.

"I like that Ramen Nagi gives the option to customize the ramen," said Maan, 34.

"I like that I can go to Ukokkei Ramen Ron anytime and get a good bowl of ramen. Okay, after six, for the secret ramen," said Kristine, 29.

It was interesting that 16 percent of respondents chose places that were different from the restaurants that served their best bowls of ramen.

"If it weren't so far away, Ramen Nagi would be my favorite," said Kitkat, 35, who picked Ramen Bar because it's near her place of work.

"Ukokkei Ramen Ron is good but the service is bad, the parking space is inadequate, the seats are uncomfortable and the attendants are rude," said Glenn, 34.

Some diners wished they could change things about their favorite ramen places: 7 percent said prices should be more affordable; 5 percent wanted more space; 3 percent, a change in location; 2 percent, more branches; and 2 percent, better service.

"I wish they would offer different serving sizes. I've never finished a bowl of ramen, ever. I always feel like I would drown in the ramen," said Phoebe.

"Maybe Yushoken can add dessert to the menu?" said Chezka.

"I would change absolutely nothing about Yushoken. I just wish they would open somewhere more accessible," said Ruby, 52.

But some people actually like going the distance for their ramen. Miguel, 34, said: "Yushoken is far enough that I don't get to go very often. Makes a trip to have a bowl worth it."

We asked diners to rank ramen factors according to importance. To them, the soup base or broth was the most

important, followed by flavor, noodles, topping options, serving size, accessibility, price, location and service.

Prices

Ten percent of respondents said they would like to pay P200 or less for a good bowl of ramen. Thirty-five percent said they are willing to pay P201-P300. Thirty percent said P301-P400 would be a good price. Eighteen percent would gladly pay P401-P500 for ramen, while only 7 percent said they are willing to shell out over P500 for a bowl.

Twenty percent think there are not enough ramen places in the country; 54 percent think there are just enough ramen restaurants; while 26 percent said there are too many ramen places in the Philippines.

"There are not enough good ones," two respondents stressed.

Eleven percent want to see Ippudo open in the Philippines.

The respondents were asked which ramen places were overrated, and it was interesting to see that some people's favorite places were on other people's lists.

Ramen Bar, which served 6 percent of the best bowls and was chosen as the favorite by 6 percent of respondents, was called overrated by 12 percent of those who answered the survey.

Ikkoryu Fukuoka Ramen, which served 7 percent of the best bowls and was picked as a favorite by 4 percent, was declared overrated by 10 percent.

Ukokkei Ramen Ron, chosen as a favorite by 10 percent of the respondents, was called overrated by 8 percent of them.

Ramen Nagi, the favorite of 13 percent of respondents, was called overrated by 4 percent of them.

And 9 percent of respondents love Hokkaido Ramen Santouka, but 4 percent think it's overrated.

"I think ramen's overrated," said Ramon, 44. With reports from Jill Lajano, Tatin Yang and Giff Ricarte, Contributors



INFOGRAPHICS BY ELIZALDE V. PUSUNG AND AILEEN CASIS