



Karai



Lotus Noodle Bar



Taverna

Ooodles of Noodles

THEY ARE THE UNIVERSAL FOOD, A GLOBAL FAVORITE THAT IS SAVORED FROM ITALY TO VIETNAM AND EVERYWHERE IN BETWEEN.

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

While pasta and noodles aren't a homegrown culinary creation, the combination of flour, water and maybe an egg or two to make a delicious dish is as American as apple pie. Who doesn't love the scene in the Disney animated classic *Lady and the Tramp* where the movie's lead characters, precious pups Tramp and Lady, share a bowl of spaghetti and meatballs? The accidental kiss at the end is cute but, truth be told, most viewers are thinking the same thing, namely that a bowl of pasta and sauce would be wonderful right now. You know it's true.

After all, what's not to like about noodles? Whether you grew up with cans of Chef Boyardee, boxes of Kraft Mac & Cheese, cups of Nissin Cup O' Noodles, or plastic pouches of Maruchan Ramen, you learned from a very early age just how good they can be.

Noodles have universal appeal, recognized as the ultimate comfort food. They're inexpensive, incredibly versatile and available in a seemingly endless variety of shapes, sizes, thicknesses, widths and textures—rolled, cut, stretched, or extruded into short tubes, curves, corkscrews and curls as well as long strings and ribbons. In addition, while most commonly made with wheat flour, some use rice flour, buckwheat flour, sweet potatoes and gluten-free alternatives such as konjac root, kelp, lentils, chickpeas and edamame.

It's been estimated that there are anywhere from 400 to 600 different varieties of noodles from around the world. While the most popular in America are spaghetti and ramen, a few others worth mentioning include udon, soba, ramen, rice vermicelli, ho fun, and pad Thai.

In the kitchen, no matter the variety, noodles can be boiled, baked, or stir-fried, customized with your favorite toppings and sauces, and used in both quick and easy meals for novice cooks as well as more elaborate dishes for more accomplished home chefs.

The bottom line is that, when it comes to noodles, whether they're served at breakfast, lunch or dinner, enjoyed hot or cold, slurped, twirled or shoveled using a fork, spoon or chopsticks, they are remarkably satisfying and undeniably fun.

Noodles in Italian cuisine rank among America's favorite foods. From spaghetti, fettuccine and linguine to tagliatelle, pappardelle and angel hair, there are endless options from which to choose.

"Few foods are as timeless or as beloved as pasta," says **Josephine's** Executive Chef Zach Preece. When asked about dishes that are frequently overlooked, he offers, "I find one of the most flavorful, and frequently overlooked noodle dishes is Spaghetti Puttanesca, fea-

turing a somewhat piquant sauce made with tomatoes, olives, capers, anchovies, garlic, and olive oil." While Puttanesca is only available at Josephine as an occasional special, the Rigatoni made with Calabrian vodka sauce (\$22), is Josephine's most popular dish.

Sam Efron, Executive Chef and owner at **Taverna**, says, "There's no substitute for fresh, handmade pasta when made well. Nothing compares, and simplicity is usually the best way to enjoy it. A cacio e pepe, pomodoro or simple butter sauce with freshly shaved truffles and Parmesan are divine when executed well." He may be biased, but Efron adds that diners can't go wrong with Taverna's Bolognese (\$34), made with pork, veal and beef, served over fresh fettucine.

Although Italian noodles have tremendous appeal, they are rivaled by dishes with origins throughout southeast Asia. When asked about the popularity of noodles in Asian cuisine, Chef Dennis Chan, owner of **Blue Bamboo Canton Bistro**, explains "Everyone grows up with noodles. Whether they're instant, fresh, cut or hand-pulled, they're the ultimate comfort food."

There are near-countless noodle dishes from China that have become quite popular in this country. In Cantonese cuisine, arguably the best-known style of Chinese cooking in America, the most popular are Beef Chow Fun—flat, wide rice noodles (hor fun), stir-fried with strips of beef and bean sprouts. Equally well known are Chow Mein—noodles that have been pan-fried in a wok until crispy, then topped with stir-fried meats and veggies—and lo mein, noodles tossed with vegetables, meat or seafood in a soy-based sauce. One local go-to spot for Beef Chow Fun is Blue Bamboo (\$22), Bistro Style Lo Mein at **YH Dim Sum** (\$13) and Pan-Fried Noodles at **Hong Kong Bistro** (\$17).

Another Chinese classic, this time part of Sichuan cuisine, is Dan Dan noodles. Known for its spicy flavor, including the numbing qualities of Sichuan peppercorns, this dish is made with noodles, spicy sauce, minced pork and pickled vegetables. Try it at **Sichuan Kitchen** (\$13).

Stretching out into other countries in Southeast Asia, you'll find an endless number of equally enjoyable noodle dishes. In Japan, there's udon and soba made from wheat flour and soba from buckwheat flour. Of course, one of the best-known dishes is ramen, due in part to the incredibly convenient "instant" varieties available in both mainstream and Asian grocery stores. Prepared in numerous regional variations incorporating broths such as shio (salty), shoyu



Chef Sam Efron, Taverna

Let's Eat!

In Jacksonville, there are a number of notable establishments serving noodles of all shapes, sizes and flavors. Here are a few we believe you'll enjoy, sorted alphabetically and by cuisine.

CHINESE

Blue Bamboo
10110 San Jose Blvd.
Mandarin
904-646-1478

Hong Kong Bistro & Dim Sum
13500 Beach Blvd.
Beach Haven
904-619-1717

Sichuan Kitchen
10584-10 Old St. Augustine Rd.
Southside
904-379-7457

YH Dim Sum
10460 Avenues Walk Blvd.
Southside
904-260-8860

INDONESIAN

Hawkers Asian Street Fare
1001 Park St.
Riverside
904-508-0342

241 Atlantic Blvd.
Neptune Beach
904-425-1025

Pandan Leaves Asian Bistro
725 Skymarks Dr.
River City Marketplace
904-551-6627

ITALIAN

Bella Vista
540 State Rd. 13
Fruit Cove
904-287-8317

Catullo's Italian Restaurant
1650-2 San Pablo Rd.
Intracoastal West
904-240-1252

Josephine
3563 St. Johns Ave.
Avondale
904-647-7556

Mezza Luna Ristorante
110 First St.
Neptune Beach
904-249-5573

Prati Italia
4972 Big Island Dr.
St. Johns Town Center
904-998-9744

Taverna
1986 San Marco Blvd.
San Marco
904-398-3005

JAPANESE

Domu
4852 Town Center Pkwy.
St. Johns Town Center
904-683-1367

Hanger Bay Cafe
2294 Mayport Rd.
Atlantic Beach
904-247-3301

Isakaya Ko
1198 Beach Blvd.
Jacksonville Beach
904-656-8128

Karai Ramen Bistro
14286 Beach Blvd.
Intracoastal West
904-977-8382

Lotus Noodle Bar
56 Grove Ave.
St. Augustine
904-342-7621

Umami Curry & Ramen
11701 San Jose Blvd.
San Jose
904-677-4780

THAI

Blue Orchid Thai Cuisine
1551 Riverside Ave.
Riverside
904-619-7349
13475 Atlantic Blvd.
Intracoastal West
904-723-1300

Lemongrass Thai Bistro
14866 Old St. Augustine Rd.
Southside
904-647-5043

Simply Tasty Thai
2292 Mayport Rd.
Atlantic Beach
904-865-7271

VIETNAMESE

Banana Leaf Asian Bistro
622 Cassat Ave.
Westside
904-516-4175

Bowl of Pho
9902 Old Baymeadows Rd.
Baymeadows
904-646-4455

Little Miss Ha
36 Grand St.
St. Augustine

PK Noodles
11925 Beach Blvd.
Southside
904-646-0707



*Chef Barry Honan,
Lotus Noodle Bar*

(soy sauce), tonkatsu (bone broth) and miso (soybean paste), along with a wide range of toppings including sliced pork, eggs, bamboo shoots, nori and green onions, the choices are limitless.

Barry Honan, Executive Chef and owner at **Lotus Noodle Bar**, says that ramen, a long-standing culinary staple in Japan, has evolved into a prominent trend globally. He specifically recommends exploring Hi-yashi Chuka, a cold ramen variety, as a particularly appealing and noteworthy option for summer. Diners find an impressive selection of ramens at Lotus Noodle Bar in St. Augustine, including Hiyashi Soba (\$27).

Thai cuisine has plenty of noodle dishes, as well, all richly flavored

and undeniably enjoyable. Pad Thai, arguably the most popular for American palates, features rice noodles, eggs, tofu, bean sprouts. Locally, this dish is a favorite at **Simply Tasty Thai** (\$16). Equally popular is Pad See Ew, made with flat rice noodles stir-fried with soy sauce, egg, Chinese broccoli and a protein, available at **Blue Orchid** (\$20) in Riverside. Another favorite is Pad Kee Mao, also known as Drunken Noodles, a somewhat spicy dish featuring wide rice noodles, vegetables and either chicken, beef, or seafood.

It's a little bit more difficult to find Indonesian or Malaysian foods here in the River City. But this dish is worth the hunt. If you get a chance, Curry Laksa, a creamy noodle soup made with several types of noodles in a rich coconut-based broth, topped with shrimp, chicken, fried tofu, and assorted veggies, is delish Asian comfort food.

Equally enjoyable from this part of southeast Asia is Char Kway Teow, a spicy stir fry made with wide rice noodles, shrimp, Chinese sausage, eggs, bean sprouts, and chives. Both delightful dishes are on the menu at **Hawkers** (\$15) in 5 Points.

When you have a hankerin' for Vietnamese noodles, the most popular by far is Pho (pronounced "fuh"), an aromatic noodle soup made with bone broth, thinly sliced meat and a few vegetables. Although Vietnamese restaurants offer numerous variations, the most popular features flank, brisket, tendon or tripe. Try them all at **Bowl of Pho** (\$13). Vietnamese cuisine also includes Summer Rolls, a dish you would not expect to include noodles. Prepared cold and served as an appetizer, these tasty handheld delights are made with shrimp, rice vermicelli and vegetables, all wrapped in translucent rice paper. Typically served with either peanut sauce or nuoc cham (fish sauce, lime juice, sugar, and chilies). Enjoy them at **Little Miss Ha** (\$9). *

Char Kway Teow

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

INGREDIENTS

3 Tbsp. peanut oil	2 Tbsp. mushroom
3 tsp. garlic, minced	soy sauce
4 oz. fish cake,*	2 Tbsp. light
thinly sliced	soy sauce
12 shrimp, cleaned	2 tsp. sambal oelek*
4 oz. crab meat	1/4 tsp. white pepper
6 oz. wide rice stick	4 oz. bean shoots
noodles, dry*	1 Tbsp. garlic chives,*
1 egg	thinly sliced

DIRECTIONS

1. This is a fast-moving dish. Accordingly, you'll want to be sure to have all of your ingredients fully prepared, measured and standing by prior to cooking. In professional kitchens, this is referred to as "mise en place," the French term meaning "everything is ready and in place."

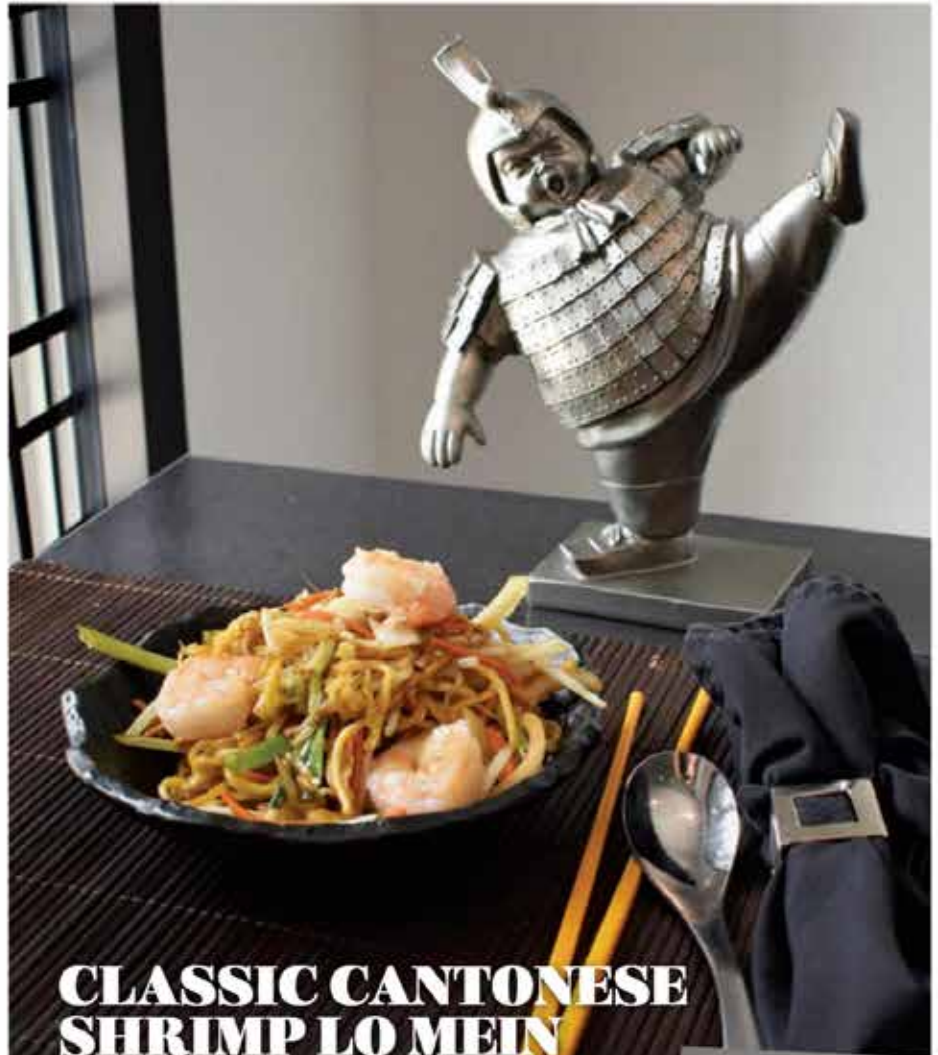
2. Pour oil into a wok over medium high heat. When shimmering, working quickly, toss in the garlic for 30 seconds, followed by the fish cake for 30 seconds, then the shrimp and crab. When the shrimp is just cooked, add the noodles, mushroom soy, regular soy and sambal and toss. If the noodles get dry, toss in a little water to keep things from sticking.

3. Move the noodles off to the sides, opening up the center of the wok. Add the egg and pepper and scramble together. As soon as the egg begins to set, break apart, then toss all of the ingredients together.

4. Divide the Kway Teow into four bowls, then garnish with the bean shoots and chives. Serves 4.

NOTE: You may want to place extra soy sauce and sambal on the table so that the Kway Teow can be adjusted to personal taste preferences.

* Available in Asian supermarkets. *



CLASSIC CANTONESE SHRIMP LO MEIN

BY CHEF DENNIS CHAN, BLUE BAMBOO CANTON BISTRO

INGREDIENTS

8 oz. fresh Chinese egg noodles, blanched for 5 minutes
 2 Tbsp. neutral oil
 6 oz. fresh shrimp, shelled and deveined
 3 cloves garlic, smashed and minced
 1 cup carrots, thinly sliced
 2 stalks celery, thinly sliced
 1/3 cup green peppers, thinly sliced
 1/3 cup bamboo shoots, julienned
 3 green onions, thinly sliced
 2 Tbsp. oyster-flavored sauce
 1 Tbsp. soy sauce
 1 1/2 tsp. sesame oil

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large pot of boiling water, cook noodles according to package instructions; drain, rinse with cold water and drain.

2. Place a stir-fry pan over high heat until hot. Add oil, swirling to coat sides. Add shrimp and cook until half done. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 5 seconds. Add the carrots, celery, green peppers, bamboo shoots, and green onions. Stir-fry until vegetables wilt slightly, 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Add the noodles, oyster-flavored sauce, soy sauce, and sesame oil. Toss to mix noodles with vegetables and cook until all vegetables are tender, about 2 minutes. Serve immediately. Serves 2. *

