



Domu ramen with housemade noodles, pork belly, and egg.

SNAPSHOT

# Orlando's Hand-Pulled Noodle Revolution

Fueling the city's noodle obsession, one steamy bowl at a time

BY KIRSTEN HARRINGTON

**O**rlando turns 150 this year. What used to be a small town dotted with orange groves has grown into a world-famous entertainment hub with a flourishing food scene. Recently, dim sum spots and noodle joints have burst onto the scene like a juicy soup dumpling. In the 1970s, Vietnamese refugees set up businesses in **Mills 50**, the heart of Orlando's Asian and Pacific Islander district. Subsequent revitalization efforts and Michelin stars landing on a pair of Japanese restaurants in 2022 propelled Orlando's Asian food culture forward. Today, a good portion of the city's Michelin Guide-recognized restau-

rants are Asian. What better way to celebrate Orlando's birthday than with a bowl of hand-pulled noodles, symbols of longevity? Since these noodle shops are stretched across the city like a springy strand of la mian, you'll need a car—and a friend since noodles taste best when slurped in tandem.

**FRIDAY**

First, check into the **Grand Bohemian Orlando**. This stunning, art-forward 248-room downtown hotel underwent a \$20 million renovation in 2024. A sleek, black Bösendorfer piano punctuates the

rotunda, the centerpiece for the popular Sunday jazz brunch.

After a drink at the rooftop lounge, head to Mills 50. Kick off the weekend with sake at Michelin-recognized **Tori Tori**, chef-owner Sonny Nguyen's modern twist on a Japanese pub. He's also behind the fame at handmade ramen shop **Domu**, once featured on *Somebody Feed Phil*.

Cross the street to **Mills Market**, a collection of Asian eateries named Restaurant of the Year by *Orlando Sentinel*. Share **Kai Kai**'s smoky beef chow fun, rice noodles rolled by hand each morning, or try a petite packet of onigiri filled with spicy crab from **UniGirl**.

Next stop: **Chinatown**. Behind the red gates lie some of Orlando's hottest Asian restaurants, including **Walala Hand-Pulled Noodles**. Sit near the glass kitchen, watching as the chef twists, folds, and stretches the dough into delicate strands.

Father-daughter duo Jian and Yafei Yan named the restaurant Walala as a play on "voilà," capturing the feeling of delight as the noodles arrive. Tender beef swimming in broth seasoned with housemade soy sauce and chili oil make this a must-try. End the night with palate-cleansing mango shaved ice from Taiwanese dessert café **Meet Fresh**.

**SATURDAY**

Head west to Winter Garden, where outdoor cafés and trendy shops line cobblestone streets. Stroll the farmers market looking for boiled peanuts and fresh oranges, then grab a slice at **Michael's Ali Coal Fired Pizza** in the **Plant Street Market**, or stop for coffee at **Axum**, where proceeds support poverty alleviation. Nearby Lake Apopka is a great place to spot gators and majestic grey herons.

**Red Panda Noodle**'s wide biang biang ribbons with chili oil explode in the mouth like New Year's celebrations in Beijing. The food truck's only regular location is on Tuesdays in the Milk District, and weekend locations are posted weekly on their Instagram @redpandanoodle. If the food truck isn't available, go instead to **Wonderful**

C/O RED PANDA FOOD TRUCK. OPPOSITE: C/O VISIT ORLANDO

**Hand-Pulled Noodle**. Owners Ken and Zoe Chen come from Fujian province, known for authentic seafood dishes. Get the stir-fried shrimp noodles—light and fresh with crisp vegetables. Ken shows off his noodle-pulling prowess with each order.

Back at the elegant Bösendorfer Lounge, sip a Bee's Knees cocktail as piano jazz fills the room.

**SUNDAY**

Wander Orlando's art district to **Lake Eola Park**, lingering over an orange-infused latte at **Craft & Common**. Rent a swan-shaped pedal boat and

enjoy the skyline. Lunch is at **Kung Fu Kitchen** where New York chef Peter Fong serves hand-pulled noodles and a full dim sum menu. Don't miss the crab and pork soup dumplings, popping with rich flavor.

On your final stop, sip bubbly at **Wine Bar George**, reflecting on the noodle pullers who might just make Orlando the happiest place on earth. Add in Asian bakeries, Chinese hot pot, sushi, and Japanese ramen shops, and this city is bubbling over with sublime eats. With the Michelin Guide showering new accolades on a collection of Asian restaurants this year, this is one show you don't want to miss.



Red Panda food truck serves creative hand-pulled noodles.