

The Boston Globe



Yume Ga Arukara head chef Tomohiro Shinoda served udon noodles in Cambridge.

*Aram Boghosian for  
The Boston Globe*

# Critics love these Cambridge noodle shops. But their real

# purpose is much deeper than ramen

By [Devra First](#), Globe Staff

**November 27, 2018**

CAMBRIDGE — It's a Thursday night and the line outside Yume Ga Arukara snakes all the way down one side of the Porter Exchange food court. Sara Brande, who is both marketing manager and chief lemon slicer for the udon shop, gently nudges the unruly hungry back toward the wall.

Brande comes by to take our order. "What if you get the hot and I get the cold, and then we can share?" I ask my friend. No, says Brande. "Each person can have one taste from their friend's bowl, but that's it. Because each bowl is made just for you."

The noodles are special. That's why the line is so long. It doesn't hurt that food magazine Bon Appetit included Yume Ga Arukara on its [Hot Ten](#) list of best new restaurants this past summer, calling its beef udon a "profound bowl."

We work our way to the front of the line and settle

into two stools at a wooden counter overlooking the basic kitchen: bubbling vats of broth, a machine into which lead cook Tomohiro Shinoda feeds slabs of dough, rolling them thinner and thinner, then slicing them into hanks of udon, Japanese wheat noodles. There is a message painted in blue on one white wall: “If my kids ask me ‘Why do you work everyday?’ I want to tell them ‘Because I have dreams.’ ”

That, in fact, is what Yume Ga Arukara means in Japanese: “Because I Have Dreams.”

There are choices here, but not too many: niku (beef) udon, served cold or hot. Tuesday through Thursday, there’s a spicy version available. You can get your bowl with extra noodles, extra beef, or no beef. To drink: tea or water; help yourself. Pay in cash. Take a photo of your food, but then put away your phone. This is the process. These are the rules.





Tomohiro Shinoda prepared udon noodles at Yume Ga Arukara.

*Aram Boghosian for The  
Boston Globe*

Our bowls arrive. I enjoy my one bite of the hot udon, savory and comforting, the broth flavored with seaweed, fish flakes, shiitake mushrooms, soy sauce, and mirin, a little sweet from brown sugar. And then I turn to my own bowl. It absorbs my full attention. The udon are thick, chewy, slippery, served in a splash of broth alongside a pile of shaved beef, topped with shreds of seaweed, sliced scallion, a little pile of grated daikon, and a lemon wedge. It's cooling, balanced, just right, the radish and citrus tracing lines of brightness against the rich beef. The food sits easy in the stomach. "I like to finish by sucking the lemon," Brande says. I bite the yellow wedge, saturated with broth. It's the perfect note to end on.

When we are finished, there's still a bit of broth at the bottom of my bowl: "Good job," the staff calls out in unison. But my friend has finished every last drop of his. They yell together in approval:

“Perfect!”

• • •

Lines are nothing new to Yume Ga Arukara founder Tsuyoshi Nishioka and his team. In 2012, Nishioka opened Yume Wo Katare, the Porter Square ramen shop where even now there’s often a wait for the big bowls of noodles — porky, garlicky, hefty, intense. The food at Yume Ga Arukara is a little more cerebral; the Yume Wo Katare experience is rooted firmly in the gut.



Tomohiro Shinoda prepared a plate of Niku Udon.

*Aram Boghosian for The  
Boston Globe*

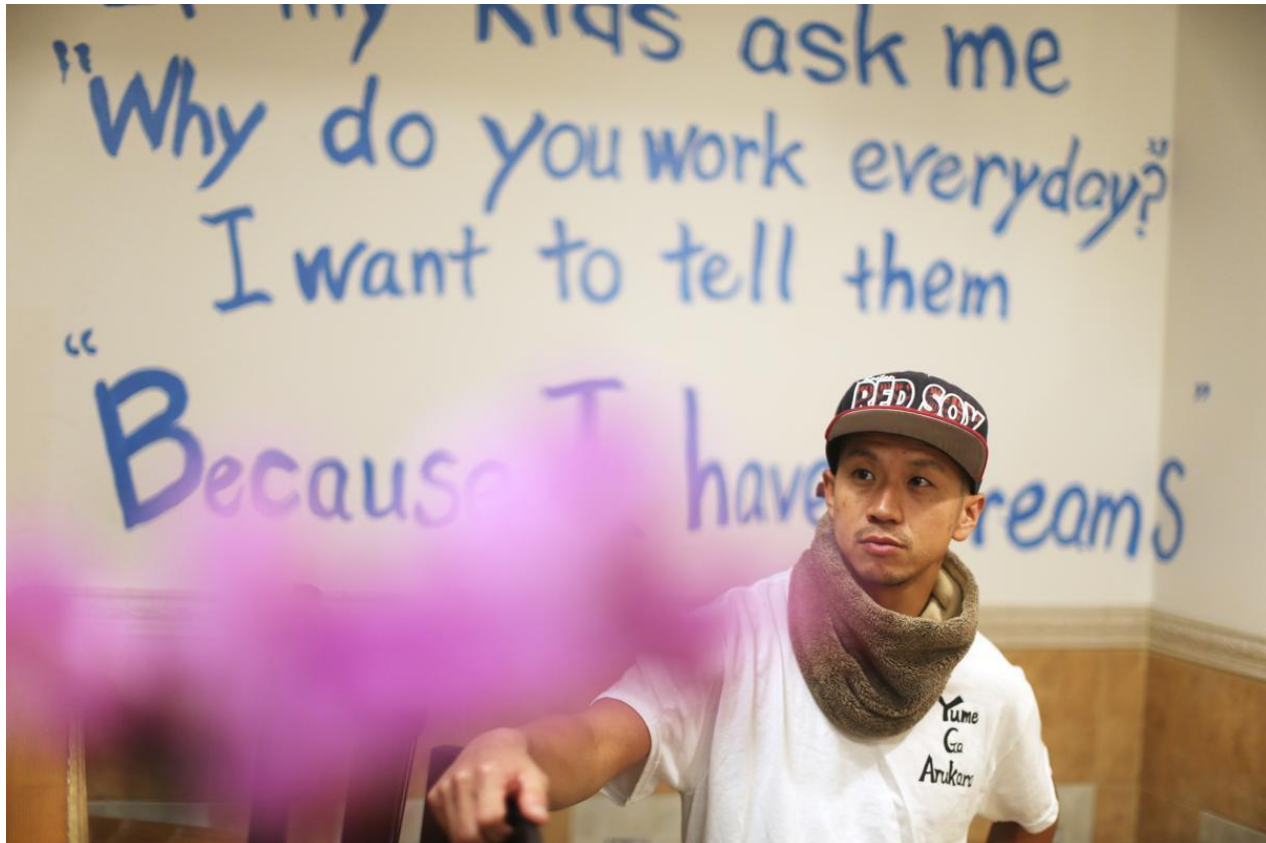
The “perfect!” routine is inherited from the ramen shop. Its name means “Talk About Your Dreams,” and that is what many diners do: stand up at the end of the meal and speak their dreams out loud to everyone present. (For a \$100 donation, one can write down a dream and hang it on the restaurant wall for a month; this also includes free ramen for the month.)

The dreams are what’s important, the reason for the restaurants. The noodles are just a vehicle to help steer customers in the right direction.

To order a bowl and finish it is setting and achieving a goal, however small. The praise at the end — *perfect! good job!* — is acknowledgment of that achievement. Maybe it’s practice for something larger. Maybe it’s just dinner.

• • •

Nishioka, 39, is sitting by the counter at Yume Ga Arukara, wearing a Red Sox hat, furry scarf, and joggers. He has been on the other end of things, he says. After attending a prestigious high school, “I lost my goal. For three years, I just slept.” His friends didn’t question their path: take an exam, get into the best university, get a job at a good company. It wasn’t for him.



Yume Ga Arukara founder Tsuyoshi Nishioka on a recent visit to the Cambridge restaurant.

*Michael Swensen for The Boston Globe*

He decided he wanted to become a comedian. So he did, performing around Tokyo. Every week he would go to the same ramen shop: a branch of the Ramen Jiro chain, which pioneered the rich, filling style of ramen now served at Yume Wo Katate. One day he saw a sign in the shop, looking for help. "I asked the master to work here, and he said yes," Nishioka says. After a week, his mentor asked if he would open another branch for him in Kyoto. Nishioka agreed, and when he went home, he called his comedy partner to quit.

He opened the new ramen shop, and his partner

came in to eat. It was the last time Nishioka would see him. That night his friend committed suicide.

Suicide wasn't something Nishioka had thought about much before. Now he began to research the topic. Japan has one of the highest suicide rates, although it has declined over the last decade. "I was so sad. I didn't know that," he says. So, he decided, "I will make young people have a dream. I will give them a reason to live."



Tsuyoshi Nishioka at Yume Ga Arukara.

*Michael Swensen for The Boston Globe*

Nishioka opened several ramen shops in Japan. He wanted to spread the word. He felt America was his



next destination. He visited Hawaii, New York. Nothing felt quite right until he got to Boston: Kyoto's sister city. That's how Yume Wo Katare came to be. The restaurant just celebrated its sixth anniversary. Yume Ga Arukara followed in the fall of 2017.

Nishioka now lives in Beppu, a Japanese city famous for its hot springs, with his wife and two children, a boy, 10, and a girl, 7. He comes to Boston regularly to check in, but he trusts the people he recruits to run the show. "It's a pretty common narrative for a lot of us," says Brande, whose dream is to learn every language in the world: "You finish your bowl and you get scouted."



Tomohiro Shinoda prepared udon noodles.

*Aram Boghosian for The Boston Globe*

Shinoda got tapped by Nishioka while he was still in school. “He said when you’re done, there’s a job for you,” Shinoda says. Now he is in charge of Yume Ga Arukara’s day-to-day operations. His dream: to one day open his own noodle shop in Seattle.

As for Nishioka, he says his dream is “to make a good world where all people have dreams and enjoy this life.” That’s why he wants to spread Yume Wo Katate: “To 197 countries. Every country,” he says.



Tomohiro Shinoda prepared udon noodles.

*Aram Boghosian for The Boston Globe*

To that end, he has started a school in Japan, Yume Wo Katare Beppu, to train people to open their own branches of the ramen restaurant. He has five members at the moment; next year there will be 20 and the year after 30.

“I teach them how to find their dream, how to achieve their dream, how to learn, how to solve a problem,” he says. “I teach that, not just how to make ramen. Making ramen is not difficult. How to live is difficult.”

**Yume Ga Arukara**, 1815 Massachusetts Ave.,  
Cambridge, [www.yumegaarukara.com](http://www.yumegaarukara.com)

**Yume Wo Katare**, 1923 Massachusetts Ave.,  
Cambridge, [www.yumewokatare.com](http://www.yumewokatare.com)

Devra First can be reached at [devra.first@globe.com](mailto:devra.first@globe.com)

Follow her on Twitter [@devrafirst](https://twitter.com/devrafirst)

## 11 Comments

Oldest

Newest

Best



[MazacoteYorquest](#)

11/27/18 12:53 PM

I've always mourned the departure of Ittyo nearly 20 years ago-- their kitsune udon was a level above anything else in Porter Exchange and Boston at large. I may be ready

to return, though I don't have my hopes up yet.



[C.Kingsfield](#)

11/27/18 01:59 PM

Cool story.



[bigcj65](#)

11/27/18 02:09 PM

The best!



[FransBevy](#)

11/27/18 03:03 PM

Great story and wonderful quote, 'Because I have dreams'!



[Lahbsterpo](#)

11/27/18 05:15 PM

I like the Seinfeld reference.



[John-----](#)

11/27/18 07:29 PM

The Soup Nazi would have been great to see reacting to morons taking pictures of their food! I ate there and the line

was orderly, didn't get yelled at and got bread.

---



[NKotis](#)

11/28/18 05:03 AM

"To drink: tea or water; help yourself. Pay in cash. Take a photo of your food, but then put away your phone. This is the process. These are the rules."

No ramen for you!

---



[renisme](#)

11/27/18 09:45 PM

Great article!!

---



[Donleavy](#)

11/28/18 09:07 AM

Best article today!

---



[GoNEPats](#)

11/28/18 10:38 AM

Brande wishes to learn every language in the world?? There are 7,000 languages spoken currently, give or take. A single country like India or Papua New Guinea could keep you

busy for a lifetime.

On another hand -- the people who make my noodles have rules about sharing, about photographing, and they yell about how well I've cleaned my plate. Maybe it's not as weird as it sounds. It sounds weird.



[John-O44](#)

12/02/18 01:13 PM

will be on MA. department of revenue hit list with cash only policy....Dumpling House in Chinatown just got hot with \$150,000 fine for not paying taxes.....

To comment please create a [BostonGlobe.com screen name](#)

---

© 2018 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC