

# Noodles That Don't Hang on Your Ears

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April 03, 2013



"Being a noodle" in Moscow today no longer carries the negative connotations that kids have been so used to.

Noodles have always played an important role in Russian culture. "Grow up strong, don't be like a noodle" — every Russian child hears this often enough on birthdays and other occasions. When a Russian is told a preposterous tale, he will likely respond by asking not to "hang noodles on his ears."

Although these are rather negative connotations, being "like noodles" and eating them are evidently not the same, as noodles are all the rage in today's Moscow.

We are not talking about chicken noodle soup, painful memories of which haunt some of us who have experienced a Soviet kindergarten. We are talking about noodles of a more Eastern variety: Chinese, Japanese or Vietnamese. New places keep popping up, from fast-growing chains to holes in the wall.

For many Muscovites, noodles have become associated with **Wokker** (multiple locations, see

[wokker.ru](http://wokker.ru)) in the last couple of years. I am not sure why this chain with five branches and citywide delivery service is so popular. I gave it a try several times, but it failed to impress. You can choose the type of noodles, what it goes with (chicken, beef, seafood) and the sauce, but the noodles are usually overdone and there's not nearly enough spices.

Admittedly, however, it might do as a snack when you are about to consume a few liters of beer at a festival in Gorky Park where Wokker's most well-known outpost is conveniently located between the central fountain and the embankment.

The hole in the wall variety of a noodle shop is best experienced at **Lucky Noodles** (20/1 Ulitsa Petrovka). For some it is just a front for the chic Mendeleev Bar, which is hidden in the basement of the shop, but for others Lucky is the best Chinese noodle venture in town. You can get noodles both in soup and fried form. There are also puffs with chicken and probably the cheapest Tsingtao beer in town.

Lucky Noodles just opened a branch in the Moscow suburb of Odintsovo and is planning to get at least one more location in central Moscow.

**Lapsha Panda** (15 Nikolskaya Ulitsa) is another "hole in the wall," located on the ground and second floors of the strikingly beautiful Russian State Social Sciences University building. The restaurant's facade manages to combine images of a unicorn, a lion and the Soviet coat of arms. The place itself is tiny. If it's crowded you may have to eat your noodles standing on the staircase. The menu is very similar to that of Lucky Noodles: fried noodles and noodles in soup, puffs and Tsingtao beer.

The first outpost of the popular international Japanese chain **Marukame** (29 Pyatnitskaya Ulitsa, +7 495-660-5589) opened near the Novokuznetskaya metro station. Only one type of noodles is served here: the thick, wheat-flour udon. You can have it with curry soup, stewed beef or as a classical udon in fish soup known as kamaage.

The place also serves some rice dishes, sushi and tempura. The only problem is that they don't have an alcohol license, but there's plenty of free tea to be had. Marukame is planning to open two more cafes in Moscow by the end of spring.

Probably one of the most authentic places serving traditional Vietnamese pho noodle soup is **Cafe Saigon** (5/22 Sushchyovsky Val, +7 903-174-0888), which is located not far from Savyolovsky Station. Waiters there hardly speak any Russian and the decor is minimalist in the extreme, reminiscent of a Soviet-era cafeteria. In addition to the wonderful pho soup, you can get Vietnamese fresh summer rolls and the regular fried spring rolls.

Some of the visitors are exactly who you would expect to see at a joint in close proximity to one of Moscow's major train stations. But there are also hipster-looking noodle connoisseurs who fancy Vietnamese marmalade, offered in little plastic boxes, for dessert.

The above are only some of the more noteworthy noodle places in the city, which is definitely experiencing a noodle boom right now. And who knows, in no time at all, fishing out slippery noodles with chopsticks might just become a new national pastime.

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