

SOUP SOLVES EVERYTHING

Just off Serangoon Road in Singapore, on the 4th floor City Square Mall's Food Republic is a small hawker stall that serves the best cure-all soup I've ever tasted. If you're feeling blue, homesick, or just under the weather, find your way to *Qiu Lian Ban Mian* and order the #5 Dumpling *Ban Mee* Soup. I realize this may be a tad out of the way for many of you, but should you find yourself nearby, it's well worth a visit.



Ban Mian is a handmade Chinese thick noodle served in an addictive Asian chicken broth that I've been trying to replicate for years. (If any of my old Singaporean pals have a

good recipe, please send it my way!).

First the noodles go in the bottom of the bowl, the broth is added, and then some *xiao bai cai* (little white cabbage). Next, two or three enormous pork wontons are gingerly placed on top of the noodles. The wontons alone would be enough for any meal. A common accompaniment in many Asian dishes is a raw egg. It is cracked on top, cooked by the heat of the broth and adds a richness and depth to the soup. And finally, the bowl is garnished with small anchovies, fried shallots, and a few drops of chili oil.

I first discovered this dish while in the midst of a horrible head cold. The steaming broth and kick from the chili oil opened my nasal passages enough to allow my tastebuds to luxuriate in this heavenly dish. I am convinced that it has healing properties and I would return for more whenever I had a bad day or wasn't feeling 100%.

Although I've bombed out on all of my attempts to make this dish, I have hope that one day it will all come together. If not, I'll just have to save up those frequent flyer miles and return. I don't think traveling half way around the globe for a bowl of soup is too excessive, do you?