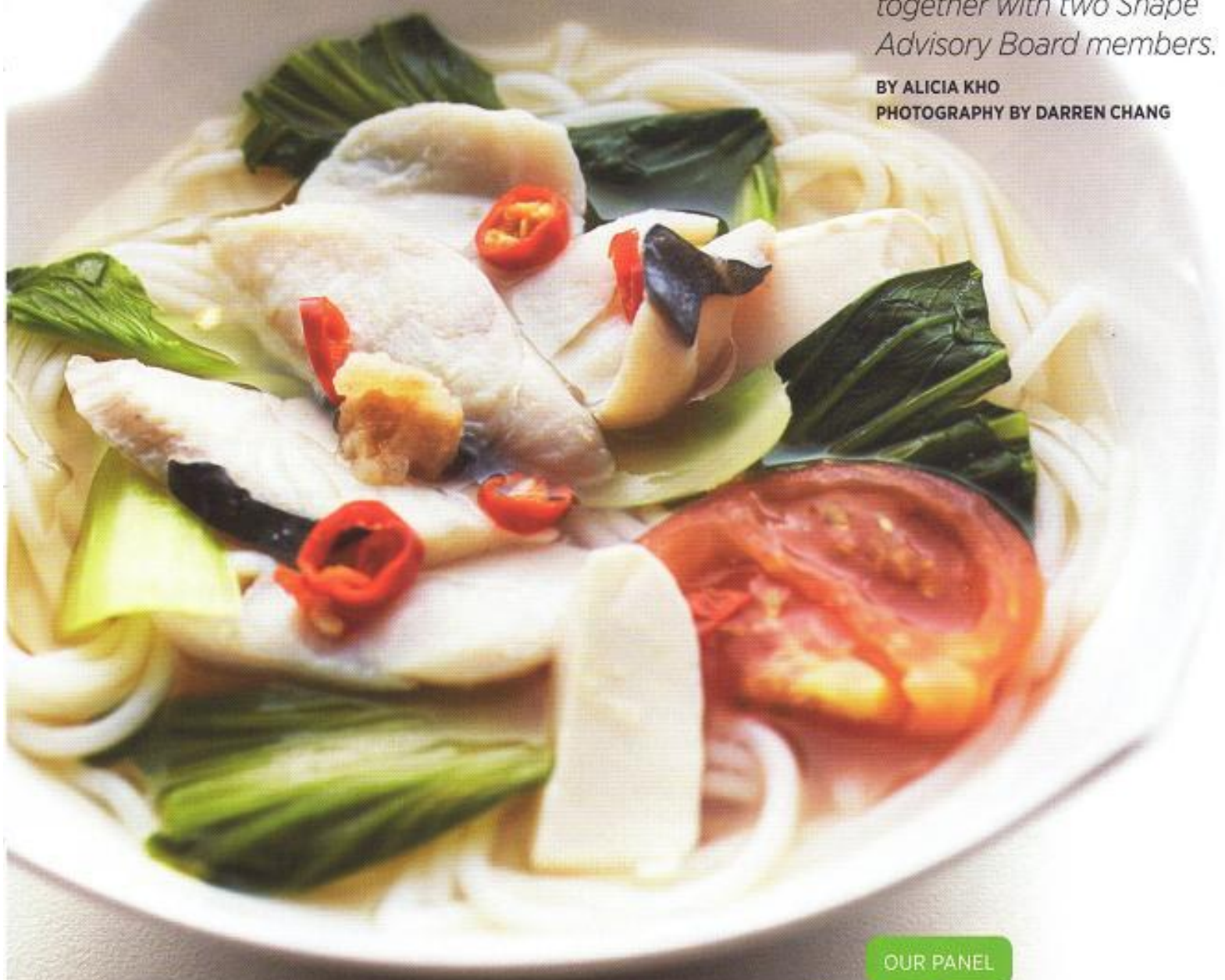


Fish Soup We Love

We hone in on six stalls worth a visit and dish out the yummy low-downs together with two Shape Advisory Board members.

BY ALICIA KHO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARREN CHANG



OUR PANEL

JACLYN REUTENS, clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants, and **DR LESLIE TAY** of Karri Family Clinic and popular food blogger (www.iesatshootipost.sg).

1/ Ichiban Seafood Sliced Fish Soup

Seah Im Food Centre, #01-18

Opening hours 7am-10pm, daily

Price \$4



Broth

Clear and light stock, but it takes a few spoonfuls to get used to the slightly fishy aftertaste.



Fish

Sliced thickly and cooked to perfect tenderness, the fish here is one of the freshest of the lot. Dr Tay points out that this stall uses wild barramundi (kim bak lor) that is higher in free-form amino acids, so it is naturally tastier than the farm-bred variety.



Greens

Each regular bowl comes with a generous serving of chopped cabbage. For 50 cents more, you get a heap more greens.



Wait time

Expect a wait time of 20 minutes. Lunchtime queues can be rather daunting because of the office crowd, but service is very efficient and orders are cleared quickly.

The verdict BEST VALUE

Three words: Value for money. We loved the generous, quality portions of fish, vegetables and tofu in each bowl. Also worth a mention is the sour-sweet chilli sauce with a pleasant calamansi aroma.

2/ Han Kee Fish Soup

Amoy Street Food Centre, #02-129

Opening hours 10.30am-3pm

(closed on Sundays)

Price \$5



Broth

Not too salty nor fishy, the stock is made from boiling the bones of Spanish mackerel (batang) for five hours, says Dr Tay, after his chat with the stall owners.

NOT ALL FISH SOUP IS HEALTHY

According to www.healthxchange.com.sg, a bowl of fried fish soup with evaporated milk and bee hoon has 730 calories, 28g fat and 13g saturated fat. The non-milky and non-fried version, contains 349 calories, 8g fat and 3.5g saturated fat. That's a difference of 381 calories – the equivalent to two bowls of the regular fish soup or three and a half bowls of rice, says Jaclyn!



Fish

Fresh and firm, but mackerel slices tend to overcook after a while (as ours did), so eat up while the soup's hot.



Greens

Han Kee puts three to four full iceberg lettuce leaves in every bowl.

Wait time



By far the longest queue, thanks to the CBD office crowd – there were 30 waiting in line by 12pm. Thankfully, orders are taken in advance, so your bowl of piping-hot soup is ready when you reach the front of the line.

The verdict DON'T COME STARVING

For \$5 a bowl, Han Kee is another stall that snags you a good deal for the lavish portion of fish slices. Just make sure you're not ravenous on arrival and be prepared to wait.

3/ Piao Ji Fish Porridge

Amoy Street Food Centre, #02-100

Opening hours 10.30am-3pm

(closed on Thursdays)

Price \$7



Broth

The slightly oily but flavourful broth comes with lots of spring onions and fried shallots for an extra oomph. And then there are some not-so-healthy but yummy pieces of lard.



Fish

Marinated in a fragrant oil, Jaclyn says that the mackerel slices almost melt in your mouth, but watch out for bones.



Greens

It uses garland chrysanthemum (tang oh), which is commonly used in Cantonese stews and Taiwanese oyster omelettes – and a refreshing change from lettuce or cabbage. But the stall is not exactly generous; each bowl has only two to three pieces.



Wait time

It's under the same roof as Han Kee at Amoy Food Centre, but with half the number of people queueing by lunch hour, we're guessing that this could be due to the \$2 extra per regular bowl.

The verdict SILKIEST FISH SLICES

To make up for its price tag, Piao Ji provides a hearty meal – the fish is smooth, the broth has a robust flavour, and the pickled ginger and chilli round off the dish perfectly. Ask for the lard to be left out of the soup if you're watching your health, says Jaclyn.

4/ Ng Soon Kee Fish & Duck Porridge

Blk 117 Aljunied Avenue 2, #01-11

Opening hours 12-9pm

(closed on Saturdays and Sundays)

Price \$3

Broth



According to Dr Tay, the soup is brewed solely from fish bones and old hens. Not too cloying, given the visible layer of oil and fried shallots, and with just the right amount of saltiness, this soup packs a deliciously potent punch.

Fish



Offering both mackerel and pomfret, the fish is so fresh that the stall's owner proudly displays glistening, crimson-pale mounds of raw slices at the front. A nibble of the non-skinned mackerel and we confirm that it is indeed fresh and not at all fishy.

Greens



Each bowl contains only two to three pieces of lettuce, so we were thankful for the addition of sliced tomatoes.

Wait time



Patronise this stall at lunchtime and receive a friendly warning from the auntie: you'll have to wait at least 30 minutes. This is how popular it is, despite being in a fairly inaccessible Aljunied food centre.

The verdict CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

Ng Soon Kee reflects the true essence of hawker food – cheap and good. With the painstaking effort in preparing and ensuring the quality of its fish, \$3 is a steal. Dr Tay mentions that it is one of the few stalls in Singapore to sell pomfret fish soup with zha cai or Szechuan vegetable as well.

5/ Mei Xiang Fish Soup

Berseh Food Centre, #02-44

Opening hours 11.12am-3pm

(closed on Saturdays and Sundays)

Price \$5

Broth



It's oily, opaque and a tad heavy on the battered fish slices and fried shallots. You'll need a tissue for that gleaming sheen on your lips afterwards.

Fish



Thickly sliced pieces of mackerel are delicate yet springy. The fried version is slightly saltier, but still fresh.

Greens



Mei Xiang provides a good amount of cabbage per bowl, says Jaclyn.

Wait time



Barely 15 minutes after ordering, we were tucking into our meal.

The verdict MOST INDULGENT

Definitely not the healthiest around – Jaclyn estimates a bowl to be around 500 to 600 calories and Mei Xiang does not allow customers to modify its signature "black and white" soup, consisting of deep fried and boiled fish slices. However, portions are huge, so you do get your money's worth. Try the home-made chilli sauce – a spicy kicker with a zesty twist that goes perfectly with the fish.

6/ Rui Ji Fish Porridge

Market Street Food Centre, #02-15

Opening hours 7.30am-2pm

(closed on Saturdays and Sundays)

Price \$3.50

Broth



Purists will delight in this very simple, clear stock. You can request for less salt in the

soup for health's sake, but that does make it rather bland.

Fish



Without a doubt, the thick slices of succulent and naturally sweet mackerel are the star of the show. The fish is so good, Jaclyn says that there is no need for marinade.

Greens



Rui Ji is not shy with its greens. Each bowl comes with a generous serving of lettuce that fully covers the base of your bowl. Plus, you can add more veggies for free.

Wait time



As it's in the CBD zone, expect to wait at least 15 to 20 minutes at lunchtime.

The verdict HEALTHIEST OPTION

The simple broth, all that vegetable and not too oily at all – Rui Ji truly believes in the importance of quality, freshness and eating healthily. Plus, it's reasonably priced for its location.

