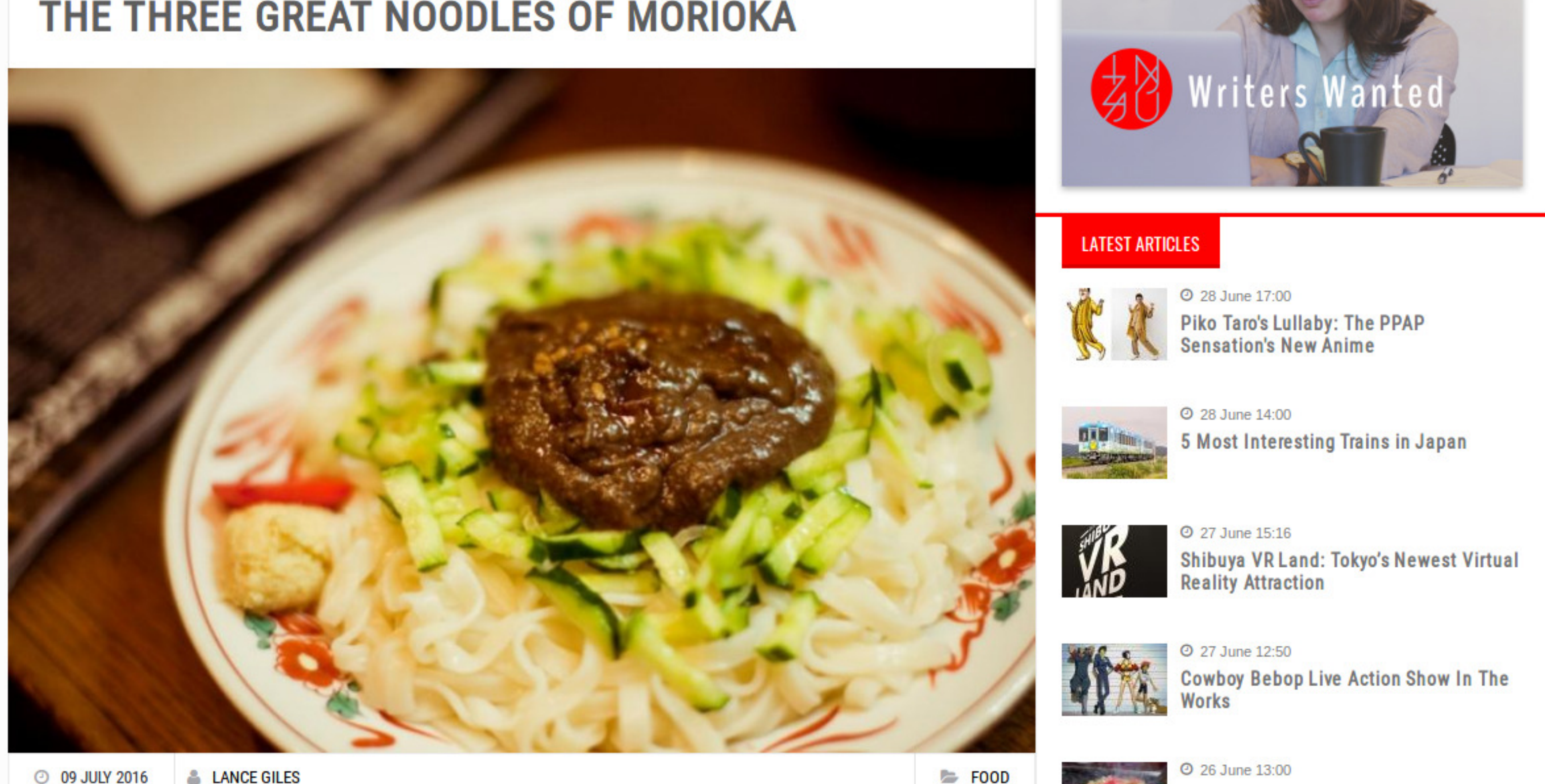


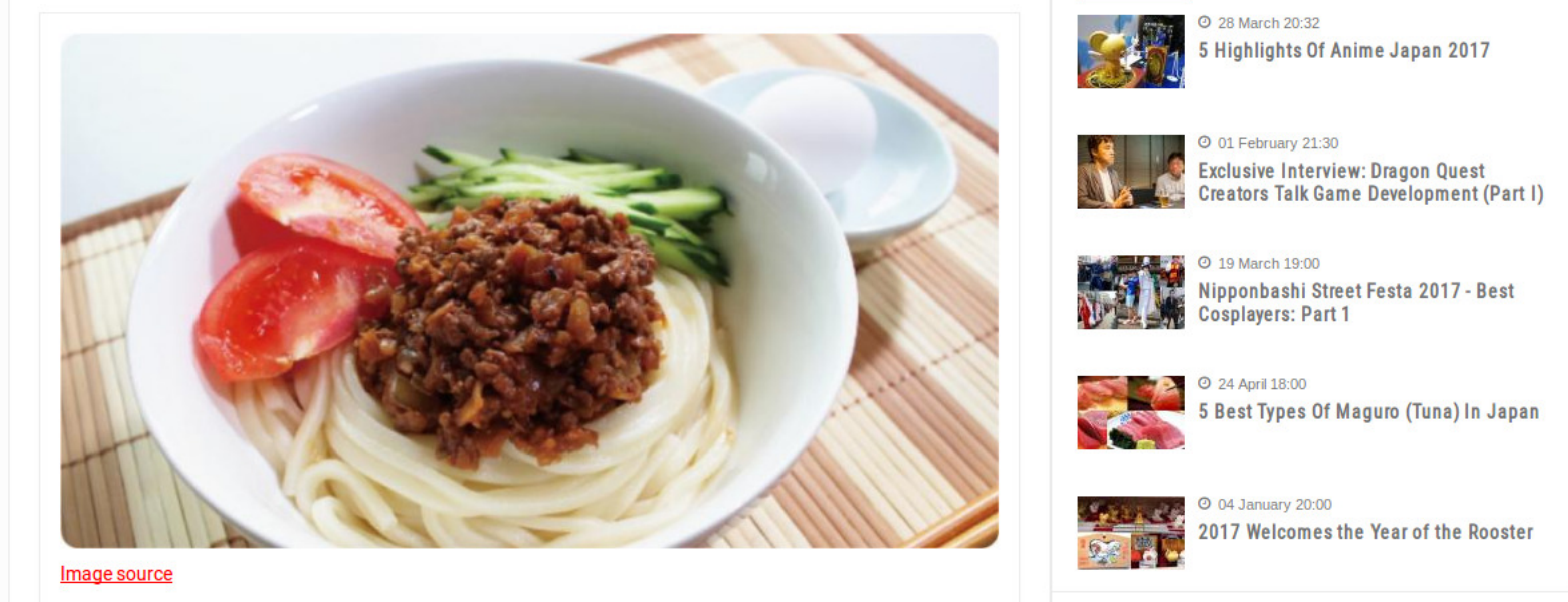
# THE THREE GREAT NOODLES OF MORIOKA



09 JULY 2016 LANCE GILES FOOD

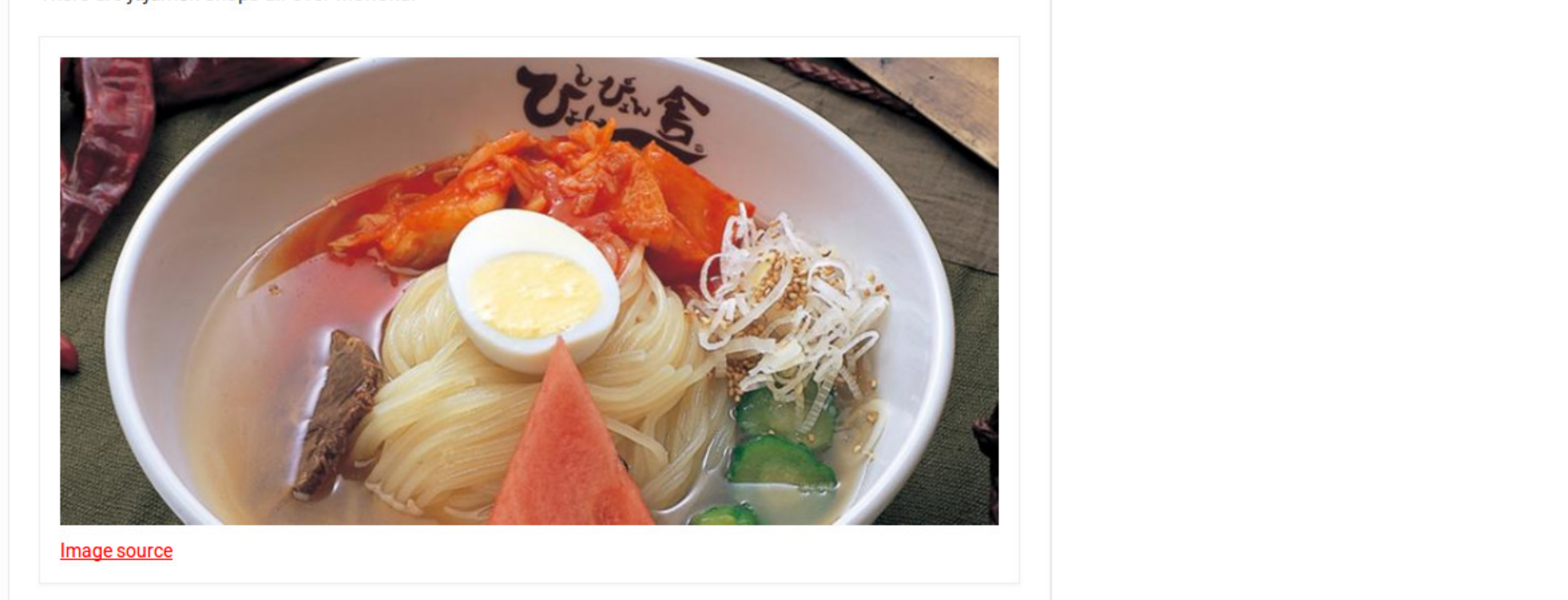
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One of the great things about Japan is the fact that there are very distinct regional culinary specialties in each area. Morioka (盛岡市), the capital of Iwate Prefecture (岩手県), is best known for its "Three Great Noodles" (盛岡三大麺; *Morioka sandaimen*): *jajamen*, *reimen*, and *wanko soba*.



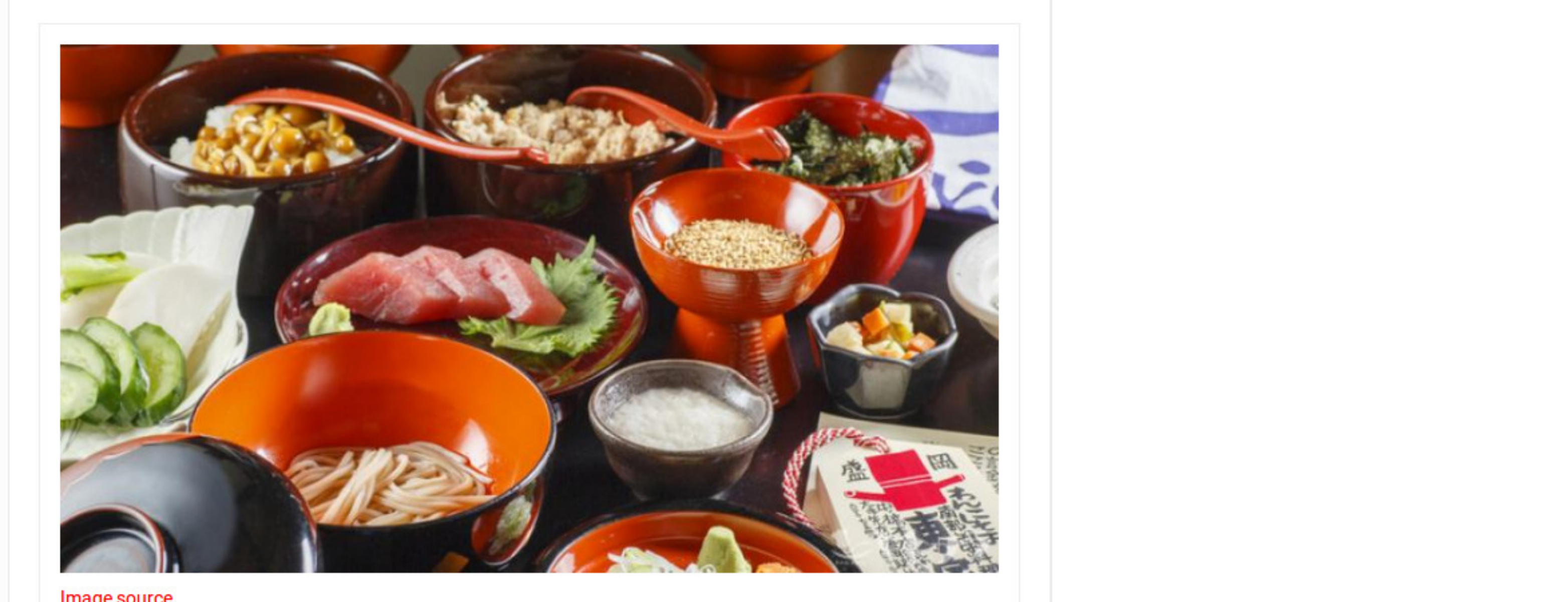
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**Jajamen** (ジャージャー麺) is my favorite of the group. It is based on a Chinese dish called [zhajiangmian](#). The noodles are thick and udon-like, topped with a miso-meat sauce, cucumbers, and green onions. Grated ginger, garlic, vinegar, and hot pepper oil are usually made available as condiments as well. There are different kinds of miso-meat sauces available in some restaurants, usually a selection of white, red, and/or black miso. To simplify the difference between the different types, think of white miso as mild, black miso as strong, and red miso as somewhere in the middle. But don't eat it all quite yet! You will likely have noticed that next to the sauces on the table there is a basket of raw eggs. These are for *chi-tantan* (鶏蛋湯), a kind of egg soup using the last little bits of the noodle dish. While a small portion of the dish still remains, call for a staff member. Crack an egg, plop it onto the remains of your dish, and mix it around a bit with chopsticks. Then, the staff will take it away and work some nature of magic using the water in which the noodles were cooked, and return with *chi-tantan*. It's delightful. *Chi-tantan* is often only available in shops that specialize in *jajamen*. *Jajamen* is generally the least expensive of the Three Great Noodles. A side of *gyoza* complements the dish quite well. There are *jajamen* shops all over Morioka.



[Image source](#)

**Morioka reimen** (盛岡冷麺) was born in a Korean-owned *yakiniku* shop and can be found in *yakiniku* places throughout Morioka. *Reimen* is a cold, spicy noodle soup. The typical ingredients are chewy noodles, kimchi, beef, a boiled egg, cucumber, and fruit. That's right, fruit. The fruit is there to ease the spiciness. The choice of fruit is linked to the seasons, but watermelon, apple, and pear are common. There are different spice levels from which to choose, and the spiciness is directly related to the kimchi content. While *jajamen* is good pretty much anywhere, personally I don't think this is necessarily true of *reimen*. *Reimen* is offered in a lot of places, but I suggest going to a shop known particularly for their *reimen*, such as [Pyon-Pyon-Sya](#), located right across the street from Morioka Station [There are also several branches around Eastern Japan, including several in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefectures.—ed]. The rubbery noodles, cold yet spicy soup, and chunks of fruit make for a strange dish, but that strangeness really grows on you; I like it more and more every time I have it. There's just nothing else quite like a bowl of *reimen* on a hot day.



[Image source](#)

Last, there's **wanko soba** (わんこそば). *Wanko soba* is more of an experience than an actual dish. The *wanko soba* experience is also the oldest of Three Great Noodles. Legend has it that *wanko soba* was conceived during a visit from Nanbu Toshinao (南部利直) nearly 400 years ago. *Soba* was the true regional specialty, but people were concerned that the *daimyo* lord wouldn't be impressed with it. So they served him small portions of noodles in little bowls (or "wanko", as the locals [used to] say), and he liked it enough that he kept asking for more. The competitive spirit that surrounds [the event](#) today came about later, but the custom of serving guests many small bowls of *soba* was established. Today, it is usually a served in a sort of contest, with new portions being brought out continuously. Side dishes are also served, but they are mostly for the eaters who are not looking for a competition. It is fun, but it isn't a typical eating experience. *Wanko soba* usually requires a reservation if you wish to eat it contest-style, and is typically the most expensive of the Three Great Noodles.

Each shop serving these noodles will have their own spin on the dish, so I suggest trying out a few places. They all offer an interesting look into Japanese cuisine and are available throughout the city, as well as many other places outside of Morioka. There's no excuse (apart from maybe severe food allergies) not to give at least one of them a try!

[Top image source](#)

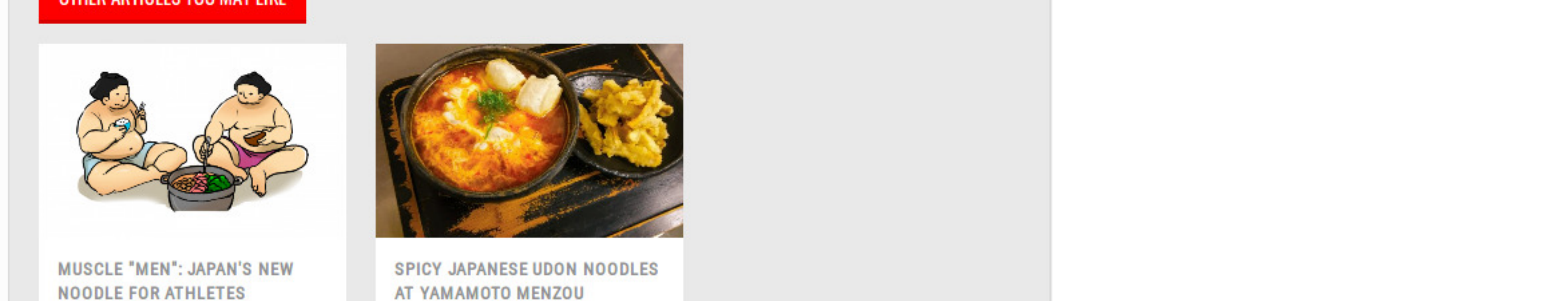
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