

The History of Pizza

* piz' za, n. (It.) - *A baked pie of Italian origin consisting of a shallow bread-like crust covered with seasoned tomato sauce, cheese, and often other toppings, such as sausage or olives.*

Did you know?

- 670 MILLION pounds of cheese is sold every year!
- 75 ACRES of cheese is eaten every day!
- 350 MILLION tons of frozen pizza is sold every year!
- 30 TIMES a year is how often the average family eats pizza at home!
- 96% of people buy pizza out. Only 4% never go out for pizza!
- 23 POUNDS of cheese is eaten every year by the average person
- 1.1 BILLION frozen pizzas were sold last year!
- 4 BILLION fresh pizzas were sold last year!

The History behind the modern pizza...

Considered a peasant's meal in Italy for centuries, modern pizza is attributed to baker Raffaele Esposito of Napoli (Naples) in the Italian region of Campania, who in 1889 created a pizza especially for the visit of Italian King Umberto and Queen Margherita. The pizza, named Pizza Margherita after the queen, was very patriotic and resembled the Italian flag with its colors of red (tomatoes), white (mozzarella cheese), and green (basil), and got rave reviews. It set the standard by which today's pizza evolved. The idea of using bread as a plate came from the Greeks, who ate flat round bread (plankuntos) baked with an assortment of toppings. The tomato came to Italy from Mexico and Peru through Spain in the 16th century as an ornamental plant first thought to be poisonous. True mozzarella is made from the milk of the water buffalo imported from India to Campania in the 7th century. So the Neapolitan baker, as the saying goes, put it all together. Also, in 1830 the world's first true pizzeria, Antica Pizzeria Port' Alba in Naples, opened and is still in business today!

Pizza migrated to America with the Italians. Gennaro Lombardi opened the first U.S. pizzeria in 1905 in New York City at 53 1/3 Spring Street, but it wasn't until after World War II when returning GI's created a nationwide demand for the pizza they had eaten and loved in Italy that pizza went public. For many, their first recollection of pizza is homemade "box" pizza (Chef Boyardee) with canned pizza sauce and parmesan cheese. In the late 1950's, Shakey's and various other mass production pizza parlors appeared and further popularized pizza.

Pizza in this day and age is not limited to the flat round type. It's also deep-dish pizza, stuffed pizza, pizza pockets, pizza turnovers, rolled pizza, pizza-on-a-stick, pizza strudel, etc., all with combinations of sauce, cheese, and toppings limited only by one's inventiveness. However, the best pizza still comes from the individual pizzaiolo, a pizza baker, who prepares his yeast dough and ingredients daily and heats his oven for hours before baking the first pizza.

Some More Pizza Facts...

The first pizzeria opened in New York on 53 1/2 Spring Street in 1895. Between 1948 and 1956 oregano sales increased 5200%. This was due to the growing popularity of pizza and other Italian specialties discovered by US servicemen stationed in Europe. Pizza Hut opens its first store in Kansas City in 1958. Domino's Pizza opened its doors in Detroit in 1960. The store was bought by a 23 year old investor named Thomas Monaghan, who borrowed \$500 to buy the store.

- In 1994, total pizza sales in the United States exceeded \$20 billion.
- The 1995 Guinness Book of World Records lists the largest baked pizza on record was 37.4 meters in diameter (12,159 sq. ft.), in Norwood, South Africa December 8th 1990. Another notable pizza by size was a 10,000 sq. ft. pizza cooked by Lorenzo Amato, owner of Cafe di Lorenzo in Tallahassee Florida in 1991.
- The first known pizza shop, Port 'Alba in Naples, opened in 1830 and is still open today.
- The first pizzeria in North America was opened in 1905 by Gennaro Lombardi at 53 1/3 Spring Street in New York City.
- The first pizza delivery was in 1889, by Raffaele Esposito owner of the famous pizzeria Pietro il Pizzaiolo (Naples). The recipients were visiting King Umberto I and Queen Margherita. Refusing to go to the likes of a pizzeria, the queen ordered in, being anxious to try this food she heard so much about.
- The first commercial pizza-pie mix was "Roman Pizza Mix", produced in 1948 in Worcester, Massachusetts by Frank A. Fiorello.
- The mozzarella originally used in Italy for pizza, was made from the milk of the water buffalo.
- The tomato arrived in Naples, Italy around 1522 originating from seeds first arriving in Spain from Peru. Initially grown only as an ornamental plant, the 'golden apple', so called because they were small and yellow, were thought to be poisonous until around 1750, when it began to be used in cooking.
- The origins of focaccia, one of the oldest styles of pizza (without the tomato) can be traced back to about 1000 B.C.E., when the Etruscans arrived in northern and central parts of Italy from Asia Minor.
- Pizza is the number 2 entree in food service, outpacing the growth rate of all other food items. It represents more than 10% of all food sales and is expected to exceed the hamburger 1996.
- Tuna is one of the most popular toppings in Europe.
- North Americans eat more pizza than anyone else in the world, yet most are acquainted with little beyond the basic tomato and cheese style.
- There are three major regional styles of pizza in the US. In the East, pizza is the traditional Neapolitan type with a light, thin crust, tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese and a vegetable or meat topping. It is more commonly known as New York-style. On the West Coast, pizza takes on a sophisticated look. Individual pizzettes with light, chewy crusts and toppings ranging from sun dried tomatoes to asparagus to bocconcini cheese are the norm. The Midwestern states prefer the deep-dish Chicago style, a thick creation heaped with toppings requiring up to 45 minutes to bake.
- Cookbooks specializing in Italian recipes have no reference to pizza prior to the 1950's.

In non-Italian communities in the eastern states, pizza can be heard to be referred to as "tomato pie".

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