

The History of Pizza



There are many theories about the origin of Pizza. There is agreement, though, that Pizza was developed by peasants in Naples, Italy. This early pizza consisted of flattened bread dough topped with olive oil, tomatoes and mozzarella cheese (another product of the Naples area).

Tomatoes were discovered growing in the new world by the Spanish Conquistadors. They were, for many centuries, thought to be poisonous. A Italian peasant might have tried to add bulk to his pizza by using the “devils fruit”.

The first pizza restaurant was named Port Alba and it opened in Naples in 1830. This restaurant served pizza baked in ovens made from lava rock.

Pizza, as we know it today, is credited to a man named Raffaele Esposito who was a proprietor of a restaurant in Naples. In 1889, to honor a visit by King Umberto I and Queen Margherita, he created a special pizza which resembled the Italian, Tre Colouri, Flag. The pizza consisted of basil, the green in the flag, mozzarella, the white, and tomatoes, the red in the flag. This dish set the standard for our modern day pizza. This patriotic pizza was an instant success with the King and Queen, as well as Raffaele’s other patrons. He named this pizza in honor of the Queen (the Margherita. It is still very popular today in pizzerias through out America.

Gennaro Lombardi opened the first American pizzeria in New York City in 1905. This restaurant (Lombardi’s) is still in operation today. The pizza is baked in a coal-burning oven with the same recipe Gennaro Lombardi brought from Naples in 1897.

There is no doubt that Italian immigrants brought pizza to the United States as part of their culture from the Old World. Italians generally saw pizza as a snack, not as a meal. It was also considered peasant food. When there was nothing to eat, there was always flour, olive oil and tomatoes. If available, cheese and meat would be used.

Pizza was an undiscovered treasure in America. For many years, pizza was only available in Italian Neighborhoods here in the USA. It took a World War to make it a part of our American landscape.

Pizza became very popular in the United States after World War II. The returning soldiers had gotten a taste of it while serving in southern Italy. Because of this, the demand for pizza grew. Today, pizza is a mainstream food. It is just as popular as Hamburgers and Hot Dogs. Some would say it might be the most popular food in America.

Our children and grandchildren do not know the world without that wonderful food called Pizza.

Grazie di Dio!

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