

The Pizza : From Ancient Naples To Modern Day USA

The ingredients that are the basis of the pizza as a culinary dish have their roots firmly founded in the sunny climate of Southern Italy around the city of Naples. This was historically a Greek colony rather than Italian. Naples was originally a Greek colony founded by sailors coming from Rhodos. It was a merchant colony which they called Parthenope and was situated on the island of Megaride.

Pizza is first mentioned in Roman literature around the 3rd century by Cato the Elder who records a flat and round piece of dough that was dressed with a combination of olive oil, herbs and flour with cheese and honey. This was cooked upon stones, according to translation. Pizza stones are used in many modern day kitchens to this day as they enable the heat to be distributed evenly throughout the cooking time and absorb excess moisture. This gives the benefit of a crispy crust.

Pompeii, the infamous doomed city that was devoured by the ash and smoke of Mount Vesuvius, also had the remains of several buildings resembling modern pizzerias.

Roman Pizzas

Pizzas back in Roman times were barely recognisable when compared to our modern day pizza. The bread would have been more likened to the modern focaccia bread still popular in Italy and around the world, and tomatoes were not known to them as they were not imported from the Americas until centuries later. Instead it is recorded that pigs blood and honey were popular pizza toppings, a pretty horrible thought in todays times!

Pizza Following The Introduction Of Tomatoes

Tomatoes originated in the Americas and were brought to Europe in the 16th century. For a long time the European public was nervous of the tomato thinking it to be in some way poisonous. However, by the 18th century the poor areas of Naples in Italy had no option but to begin using them as they faced starvation due to food shortages. They began not only to eat them like fruit, but also used tomatoes to bulk up their bread and to add flavour. This was the humble beginning of the modern day pizza. It became increasingly popular for visitors to Naples to venture into the poorer districts in order to try out the local's new dish. The tide was turning for the pizza, it began moving away from the stigma of a poor mans' meal to a much more acceptable and tasty meal for all.

The Pizzeria Emerges

The popular way to sell pizzas before the 1830's had been by means of street stands outside of or near to the pizza bakeries. Naples, not surprisingly, saw the very first pizzeria. It was called Antica Pizzeria Port Alba. It was described in those days as the food of the humble people in Naples and consisted of bread, oil, tallow, lard, cheese, tomato or anchovies. The pizza of today is very removed from those days and the choice of toppings is huge. Glad to say the use of tallow and lard have ceased down at your local pizzeria!

The Pizza Emigrates To America

Not surprisingly the pizza was brought to America by Italian immigrants from Naples. The first recorded pizzeria was founded in New York by Gennaro Lombardi in 1905, although there is a dispute over this. Lombardi had opened a grocery store in 1897 and from there he began to sell pizza to the local Italian residents. As money was somewhat scarce amongst them, they could not afford a whole pizza. The answer was to see what money the customer had, and to cut a slice that was proportionate. In this way, through the poverty of the local customers, the pizza slice was born.

Whilst pizza became more widespread amongst the cities of America it was largely confined to the Italian districts. However, following the Second World War, American soldiers who were fighting in Italy had discovered that local pizzerias supplied a meal unlike the boring rations that they had to endure. The love of the pizza amongst the troops was brought back to America and went from strength to strength. It is testimony to this popularity that Americans now devour 100 acres of pizza each and every day!

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About the Author

Steve Jones is the author of many e-books and articles in the Food sector, specialising in the origins of many food types and dishes. Visit his website at <http://www.pizza-recipe-expert.com> today.