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The Evolution Of Pizza

By Kirsten Hawkins

Trying to trace the history of the first pizza is a surprisingly controversial subject. Some claim that this popular food is based on early unleavened breads served in the early centuries in Rome. Others trace a connection from modern pizza back to the pita breads of Greece.

It's fairly well established that the first pizza as we know it today was created by a man named Raffaele Esposito from Naples, Italy. Esposito's creation was designed to honor the visit of Queen Margherita to Naples in 1889, and he decorated it with the colors of the Italian flag, using white cheese, green basil, and red tomatoes (tomatoes, which had arrived from the west about 60 years earlier, were originally thought to be poisonous, but by Esposito's time they were already embraced by Italian cuisine).

As the years passed and the turn of the century came about, Italian immigrants brought this recipe with them to America. The first pizzeria was opened in America in 1905. It remained popular almost exclusively among immigrants until the end of World War II, when American soldiers returned to their home soil and brought back a love of the pizza they had discovered overseas. With that, the pizza boom in America began and this food became a mainstream meal instead of an underground Italian snack.

The concentration of Italian immigrants in New York in those olden days explains the fact that many people feel you must visit New York to get true pizzeria-style pizza. It's where the pizza got its American start, after all. And nobody who has experienced New York style pizza can disagree. New York is famous for its pizzerias, where a true slice of pizza consists of a thin, wide crust loaded with plenty of toppings and marinara and smothered in heady Italian seasonings. A side of garlic bread and some heady pastas and tortellinis usually round out the menu. Pizzerias in New York are not for the faint of heart.

In the early 1940s, the city of Chicago, IL took pizza in a different direction. It is believed that the first pizzeria in Chicago was Pizzeria Uno, opened in 1943 by Ike Sewell. Sewell's pizza creation was a new twist on the old New York standard. He created what is known today as deep-dish pizza, where the pizza is sunk low into a deeper pan, and the crust is allowed to rise in thick bubbles around the edges. People flocked to Sewell's pizzeria, and a whole new way of looking at this favorite food was

born.

To this day you can find yourself in some pretty heated debates if you argue with a New Yorker or a Chicagoan about what constitutes authentic pizzeria-style pizza. But whatever crust style you choose, pizza is a unique food with a foggy past and a definite appeal that has lasted through many incarnations.

So you're lucky enough to find yourself in New York or Chicago, or any city for that matter that has a true pizzeria, complete with checked tablecloths and plenty of garlic on the menu, indulge yourself in an old tradition and order a slice. After all, its tradition.

Kirsten Hawkins is a food and nutrition expert specializing the Mexican, Chinese, and Italian food. Visit

<http://www.food-and-nutrition.com/>

for more information on cooking delicious and healthy meals.

What Is So Special About Gourmet Pizza?

By Melinda Carnes

Pizza has been around for thousands of years. When did out of the ordinary and delicious gourmet pizza make its debut? What would the forefathers of pizza think of this culinary masterpiece?

Everyone knows that a standard pizza comes with pepperoni, cheese, ground beef, peppers, onions, anchovies and sausage. Today gourmet pizza is created with any kind of topping. They are topped with anything from broccoli to chocolate. There are gourmet pizzas for breakfast that can be topped with scrambled eggs, bacon and cheese. And, there are vegetarian gourmet pizzas that are topped with a medley of vegetables.

The gourmet pizza is relatively new and was created for the privileged. It has grown in popularity in nearly every household in the United States. Pizza parlors are popping up all across the country. A Sunday afternoon of football will be a definite hit with the gang if a gourmet pizza with all the toppings is served. A sure pleaser for chocolate lovers is a dessert pizza topped with marshmallows and chocolate.

Gourmet pizza was conceived with the belief that less is better. Only by using the finest quality ingredients and one or two toppings, can a pizza acquire the status of a gourmet pizza. Only the freshest and highest quality meats and freshest mozzarella can be used. The difference in a standard pizza and a gourmet pizza will be proven with each bite.

An ordinary consumer, with a little imagination, can create a gourmet pizza at home. A variety of pre-baked pizza shells are available in all types of food stores. With some imagination and experimentation, a home chef can make a mouth-watering work of art. Most food stores carry a line of

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pizza shells, cheeses and gourmet sauces. Cheeses other than Mozzarella can be used.

Gourmet pizza shops continue to grow, offering a variety of pizzas from different cultures. Every culture brings an innovative way to make the gourmet pizza. These tasty delights will bring dining pleasure for years to come.

Melinda Carnes is a staff writer at

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and is an occasional contributor

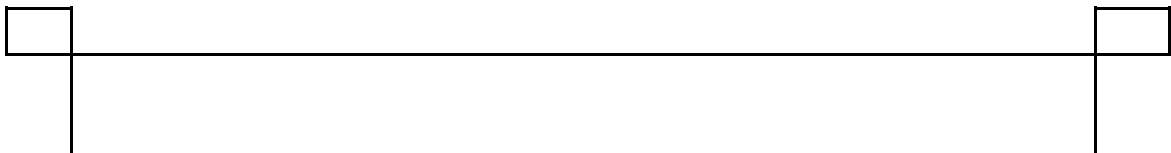
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