

1: $p^1 = \text{Pizza}$

Although people debate the origins of pizza, I'm taking the widely accepted view that pizza spread from Naples to the USA upon the arrival of immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century, my own maternal grandparents included. Its popularity exploded after GIs returned from Italy after World War II. Its evolution continued with the development of Chicago and New York styles that were then adulterated and corrupted by Pizza Hut, Dominoes, California Kitchen, Papa John's and hundreds of others. You are not going to find barbecue shredded pork pizza or roasted garlic with goat cheese in Italy. Though there are variations in Italy, you will find the same fundamental styles and toppings everywhere. Italian pizza has a thin crust, almost cracker thin. Toppings are light; you don't order extra cheese or extra sausage. Nor do you order 1/2 cheese and 1/2 "meat lovers." Fortunately, the concept of "take out" pizza has taken off in Italy. You can call your pizzeria and drive over and pick it up. No delivery yet.

Una Virgine della Pizza — A Pizza Virgin

It's odd now that I think about it that I did not eat pizza on my first few visits to Italy, I was more into pasta, meats, and *contorni*. My "first time" was after returning to Arezzo from a long day of sight seeing with my cousins in 2000. It was getting too late to prepare *la cena* at home (7:30) so my cousin Marisa decided to order some take-out pizza. She called a pizzeria near her home from the car and started ordering for the seven of us. She asked me, "*Cosa vorresti sulla tua pizza?*" I replied, "*funghi*," mushrooms. I expected to get home and find a couple of large pizzas that we would share and that at least one would have mushrooms on part of it.

After arriving home Nando went back out to get the pizzas and Marisa set the table with large plates, knives, and forks. Luca found a bottle of Nando's homemade red wine while Raffaella went to the cellar for a couple of bottles of water: *naturale* and *frizzante*. The rest of us were sitting around the table talking, well, they were talking and I was lost, knowing little Italian at the time, when Nando walked in hidden behind a stack of seven pizza boxes. Marisa opened the boxes and put a pizza on each plate and commanded, "*A tavola!*" "To table!" or "Let's eat!"

I couldn't fathom it. There in front of me was a 12-inch pizza with mushrooms. I stared at it. What the hell was I going to do with an entire pizza? Moreover, each of us had an entire pizza. Were we going to share slices with one another? What would we do with the left overs?

While I was wasting time wondering what to do everyone else had cut out a piece of pizza and were chewing. I looked at Lucio and he had simply cut his pizza in half, took one of the halves, folded it, and began eating. How could these thin men and women be eating a whole pizza? If I

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hadn't been famished I'd probably end up staring at them all night. I took up my knife and fork and cut out a fourth of my pizza. I imitated the others, folded it in half and started eating. You don't have to fold your pizza in half and you could just use your knife and fork. However, folding keeps your hands clean because you only touch the bottom of the crust. It doesn't get messy because the pizza is not covered with a mountain of cheese or other ingredients. Mine was simply dressed with tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, and mushrooms and folded easily. It was excellent, the sauce was used sparingly and subtly flavored with oregano, salt, and garlic. The cheese was just enough to add a creamy flavor.

Yes, I ate the whole thing. And so did everyone else. The thin crust and light layer of ingredients make it possible. That and none of us had eaten since 1:00 and it was now 8:30.

I learned more about pizza on subsequent visits, particularly since I was trying to keep costs down — I'm cheap. I learned that I could go to a restaurant and order a pizza, water, and a *quarto* (250 ml) of house wine for less than cooking meals in my apartment.

Pizza è Ovunque — Pizza is Everywhere

You can find pizza all over. If you decide you want a piece of pizza, look around and there will be a bar, restaurant, *trattoria*, *tavola calda*, bakery, or pizzeria a few feet away. Quality varies enormously, perhaps more than any other food in Italy because of the number of purveyors.

Easiest to find are bars. There are bars on almost every block of a town or city; they are more ubiquitous than Starbucks in the USA. In addition to serving both coffee and alcoholic drinks, a bar has food. Most serve pastries for *la colazione* (breakfast), focaccia, simple *panini*, and pizza by the slice while some serve *primi piatti* (pastas) for *pranzo*, (lunch). Their pizzas are usually six-inch diameter pieces of dough with plain tomato sauce painted on and a few shreds of mozzarella added. Sometimes there is a classy touch with a few leaves of wilted basil on top. When requested they put the pizza into a small counter-top oven and heat it up. These slices will give you carb calories in a hurry, but don't expect a dining experience. Often they offer whole pizzas that are frozen and heated when you order. Let me ask, "Do you eat frozen pizza frequently at home?" Well, it's not any better just because you are in Italy.

Bakeries do much the same. They may make some pizzas in the morning, cut them up, and serve them by the slice. If you get there in the morning they will be OK, but as the day goes on they shrivel up and dry out. Unless you are starving in the afternoon and are close to fainting from hunger you should pass. If you are on a tight budget, pizza-by-the-slice from bars and bakeries is the next best thing to living on ramen noodles. You can get a filling piece of dough for less than two euros.

A *tavola calda* means "hot table" and is like a cafeteria with precooked food sitting on warming platters in display cases. These items are usually fresher than bars and bakeries because they are made and replaced several times a day. The *tavola calda* makes its living selling fresh hot food so you can find tasty pizza or focaccia slices for a reasonable sum (€4 or €5). A focaccia pizza has a crust that's about 1/2-inch thick with fresh toppings.

Places that advertise themselves as a *pizzeria* serve fresh, hand tossed pizza cooked in a very hot oven (700° F or more), the best use wood-fired ovens, although I don't really understand why wood

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heat is better than gas. I've never tasted wood smoke on a pizza. In the USA coal-fired pizza ovens are the current rage. Who would ever want the taste of coal smoke on a pizza? Heat is heat.

A fresh cooked pizza comes out on a 12-inch plate steaming. Often there is a pool of moisture and cheese in the center, that's the sign of a good Italian, especially Naples, pizza.

Most *ristoranti* and *trattorie* also serve fresh made pizza.

Pizza is a wholesome, fast food that you can eat for only a few euros. A margherita pizza, basic cheese and tomato sauce pizza, can cost between four and six euros. Add a bottle of water and the cover charge and you can have dinner for six to ten euros. For me, it's cheaper than buying all the groceries that I would need to cook dinner in my apartment. Even cheaper, I can buy half of a sixteen-inch pizza at the local Coopfi grocery store for three euros — and it's first rate pizza cooked fresh in a wood-fired oven.

If you want to take your pizza home say, "*Porta via,*" take-out.

Tipi di Pizza — Kinds of Pizza

One of my quarrels with Italian food is that the items on the menus from one restaurant to another are basically the same and this carries over for pizza choices. Each restaurant has the same basic 10 to 15 pizzas (see Table 1) and, perhaps, one or more *pizza della casa*.

Table 1: Traditional Kinds of Pizzas	
Pizza	Ingredients
Marinara	Baked dough with tomato sauce. No cheese or other ingredients.
Ciaccia	Fried dough with oil and salt.
Margherita	The basic cheese pizza. Sometimes it has tomato slices and basil leaves added.
Napoletana	Capers and anchovies. My cousin Giovanni's favorite.
Pizza con Carciofi	Artichoke hearts.
Pizza con Funghi	White mushrooms.
Pizza con Porcini	The porcini may be fresh or frozen depending on the time of year. While porcini are the king of mushrooms, in general mushrooms are a bad choice because they release too much moisture on the pizza and it gets soggy.
Pizza al Prosciutto Cotto	A cooked ham pizza.
Pizza al Prosciutto Crudo	Made with cured ham, what we commonly know as prosciutto.
Pizza con Quattro Formaggi	Four of the following: mozzarella, buffalo mozzarella, parmigiano, pecorino, a smoked cheese, fontina, asiago, or gorgonzola.
Pizza alla Salsiccia	Sausage pizza.

Pizza alla Salume	A spicy salami pizza.
Pizza Capricciosa	“Capricious” or “whimsical” pizza. This will vary from place to place but usually involves olives, artichokes, ham, mushrooms, tomatoes, basil, or even a hard boiled egg.
Pizza Quattro Stagioni	“Four seasons” with choices from: artichokes, ham, olives, capers, anchovies, or mushrooms each in its own quadrant.
Pizza Vegetariana	Eggplant, zucchini, or grilled peppers.
Pizza del Saraceno	A <i>pizza della casa</i> at the Trattoria Saraceno in Arezzo: canned tuna with onions.

Table 2: Modern Abominations	
Pizza	Ingredients
Nordica	Mozzarella, smoked cheese, mushroom, cream, smoked salmon, and rucola.
La Taranta	Fried crust, prosciutto, and burrata cheese.
Bomba	Tomato sauce, mozzarella, spicy pepperoni, broccoli rabe, cherry tomatoes, chili peppers.
Affumicato	Mozzarella, smoked bacon, broccoli rabe, smoked provola cheese.
Prosciutto Crudo e Fichi	Prosciutto, figs, walnuts, mascarpone, balsamic vinegar cream, and mint.
Diavola	Tomatoes, bacon, leeks, garlic and basil pesto, and chili peppers.
Spiritosa	Tomatoes, buffalo mozzarella, onions, sausage, and olives.

However, America’s creativity in pizza ingredients is influencing newer pizzerias and restaurants in Italy. Check out Table 2 for *haute couture* pizzas from a few restaurants I’ve visited. I am a minimalist and traditionalist. I prefer ham pizza and sometimes with mushrooms. I think that anything beyond tomato sauce, mozzarella, and traditional toppings is an abomination. If you want to eat pizza, eat pizza. If you want barbecued chicken then go to a barbecue place, but never ever eat barbecue chicken with garlic cloves, jalapeños, and goat cheese.

È la pizza da Napoli così grande come Dicono? — Is Naples pizza as great as they say?

Then there is the pizza from its birthplace — Naples. It is supposedly the paragon, the apotheosis, the epitome, and the archetype to which all others aspire. As far as the birthplace is concerned, it is questionable. The earliest Italian inhabitants, the Etruscans who lived in central and northern Italy, served flat bread with toppings that the ancient Romans then adopted over 2500 years ago. Today you can find flat bread, focaccia, or *ciaccia* with toppings everywhere, though Naples has made production of pizza an art form.

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Naples is one of the places that took me a long time to visit. My principle goal was my work in Tuscany and my relatives always discouraged me whenever I mentioned visiting Naples. They always shook their heads and for emphasis raised and crossed and recrossed their index fingers several times. “*No, non è un luogo sicuro, è pericoloso,*” “No, it’s not a safe place, it’s dangerous.” Additionally they made sure to mention that there was garbage all over the city. This was during one of Naples garbage crises when they had nowhere to remove the garbage to because all the money for garbage disposal went to the Mafia. All of that is true, but you have to keep in mind that northern Italians (anything north of Rome) have deep seated prejudices against the southerners saying that they are dishonest, lazy, and dirty.

Finally, one year after finishing my work in Tuscany I decided to pay a visit to Naples. There was too much history and art to see. I wanted to see the National Archaeological Museum and it was time I tried the historic pizza (maybe the pizza was the real reason). I was skeptical and fully expected it to be one of those “busts” that come no where near the promise. Nothing ever measures up to a reputation that is so exalted.

I had decided to stay in touristy Sorrento and took the 45-minute ferry ride to Naples in the morning. After visiting the museum, which made every minute I spent in Naples worth while, I walked down the street looking for a pizzeria lunch. It was 1:00 and I was starving, an Italian breakfast of cappuccino and pastries doesn’t last long. I walked down busy Via Toledo in the center of the historic city toward the harbor. I passed several *pizzerie* but they were so close to the tourist route I avoided them. I started turning into the “dangerous” narrow alleys and side streets, which were full of Neapolitans selling shoes, flowers, music, fresh seafood still squirming on ice, kitchen gadgets, and clothing. I looked into a *pizzeria*, well back from the street and noticed a large dome-shaped ceramic tile covered wood oven with logs piled along the wall. It looked to be full of locals, just what I was looking for. I walked in and the waitress gave me a menu and table.

I immediately ordered a liter of *acqua naturale* and an antipasto of mixed bruschetta a ham and mushroom pizza (I wasn’t thinking). The *bruschette* were four slices of toast with different combinations of sautéed vegetables, which I ate while reading about Naples pizza on the back of the menu.

A few minutes later the pizza arrived, steaming, direct from the oven. First, I looked it over carefully and nothing looked out of the ordinary; it had a thin crust charred black around the puffy edges, a light coating of tomato sauce, a sprinkling of cheese topped with sliced ham and mushrooms. The mushrooms released water which pooled a bit in the center but I learned that that pooling was a trademark of Naples pizza.

I couldn’t wait until it cooled so cut a piece, blew on it, and took a bite. I chewed slowly, swallowed, and paused. I was dumbfounded. My skepticism evaporated. Immediately I promised myself I would never eat another pizza again unless I was in Naples. It *was* the paragon, the ideal, the masterpiece to which all other pizza should be compared. I’d never tasted a pizza like it and by this time I’d eaten a lot of Italian pizzas — did I say that I was cheap?

Why is Naples pizza so much better than others? It’s not complicated though the Neapolitanos try to make it so. It is the ingredients that matter: tomatoes, cheese, and dough and Naples makes sure that the quality is regulated under penalty of serious fines. The laws govern the kind of tomatoes, flour, yeast, cheese, oven, and baking time (see Table 3). It starts with the tomatoes. An official

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pizzeria in Napoli can only use San Marzano (or two other derivatives) from the Mount Vesuvius region. It is a tomato that is sweet and full of concentrated flavor. It's as much the soil as the variety and can't be imitated anywhere else, particularly in the USA where tomatoes seem to be more acidic than Italian tomatoes. I've been to restaurants that use canned San Marzano tomatoes on their pizza, but it isn't the same, plus these restaurants don't follow the rest of the rules required of official Naples pizza. Naples and Italy send the "Pizza Police," auditors, around to make sure that a pizzeria is in compliance.

I do still eat pizza, but I'll never forget that first bite of official Naples pizza.

Table 3: Official Rules for a Pizza from Naples	
Pizza	Ingredients
Yeast	Compressed yeast, biologically produced, soft and beige in color with a bland taste and low acidity. Packages must range from 25-500 grams. Natural yeast is also allowed.
Dough	Flour (type 0 or 00) must be added slowly, 1.7 to 1.8 kilograms depending on protein content in the yeast, water, and salt mixture over the course of ten minutes and mixed at a low speed for precisely 20 minutes.
pH	It must have a final pH of $5.87 \pm 10\%$ and a density of 79 grams per cubic centimeter.
Thickness	When stretched the dough must be no more than .16-inch thick.
Tomatoes	The following variations of fresh tomatoes grown in the area may be used: San Marzano dell'Agro Sarnese-nocerino DOP, Pomodorini di Corbara (Corbarino), and Pomodorino del Piennolo del Vesuvio.
Mozzarella	Certified buffalo mozzarella DOP or mozzarella STG.
Oven	It must be baked for 60 to 90 seconds in an oak wood fired oven at 750° F.