

A Slice of History

What do you like on your pizza? Cheese? Tomatoes? Pepperoni? People may disagree on their favorite ingredients, but many people agree that pizza is a favorite food. Where and when did people start making pizza? To find out, we have to travel back in time. People were baking bread dough on hot rocks in the Stone Age.

Stone Age people gathered ancient types of wheat and other grains. They mixed the grains into a batter. Then they poured the batter onto rocks in their campfires. What they got was a flat bread—the first pizza crust. In time, prehistoric bakers started using the flat bread as a plate. They put other food, herbs, and spices on the bread. Then they ate it.

Over the centuries, tastes changed. In the 1500s, European explorers tried to find a better way to sail to Asia to buy spices. Instead, they found a way to the Americas. Native American people in Peru, Central America, and Mexico enjoyed eating tomatoes, but in Europe, people thought tomatoes were poisonous! With time, Europeans and other people discovered

that tomatoes were delicious and safe to eat. Cooks in Naples, an Italian city, began putting tomatoes onto baking dough.

People in Naples didn't stop there, however. They took another big step in pizza history. The world's first true pizza shop opened in Naples in 1830. Cooking pizza in Naples wasn't as easy as it is today. It was even a little dangerous. You see, pizza makers didn't use wood, gas, or electric ovens. Instead they used lava from a nearby volcano to heat rocks for baking pizza dough. Despite the danger, pizza was soon a big hit. People ate it for lunch and dinner. They even ate it for breakfast. News of the pizza shop spread quickly, and people traveled to Naples to try the tasty dish.

In the late 1800s, many Italians moved to the United States. They brought pizza with them. The first American pizzeria was Lombardi's in New York City. It opened its doors in 1905. Now pizza is one of the top three most popular U.S. foods. Of course, Americans are hardly the only pizza lovers. Humans eat 5 billion pizzas a year. Our choices for toppings vary widely. Brazilians love green peas on their pizza. Russians like fish and onions. People in India use lamb and tofu. The Japanese think eel and squid are yummy. Some pizzas truly sound strange. Yet all share two things. Each begins with bread. And each is a slice of history.

