

## INVENTION OF PIZZA

Pizza, like so many other foods, did not originate in the country for which it is now famous. Unless you have researched the subject, you probably always thought Pizza was strictly an Italian creation.

The foundations for Pizza were originally laid by the early Greeks who first baked large, round and flat breads which they "anointed with oil, herbs, spices and dates."

Eventually the idea of flat bread found its way to Italy where, in the 18th century, the flat breads called "Pizzas" were sold on the streets and in the markets. They were not topped with anything.

In about 1889, Queen Margherita, accompanied by her husband, Umberto I, took an inspection tour of her Italian Kingdom. During her travels around Italy she saw many people, especially the peasants, eating this large, flat bread. Curious, the queen ordered her guards to bring her one of these Pizza breads. The Queen loved the bread and would eat it every time she was out among the people, which caused some consternation in court circles. It was not seemly for a Queen to dine on peasants' food.

Nevertheless, the queen loved the bread and decided to take matters into her own hands. She ordered Chef Raffaella to bake a selection of pizzas for her pleasure.

To honor the queen, he decided to make a very special pizza just for her. He baked a Pizza topped with tomatoes, Mozzarella Cheese and fresh Basil (to represent the colors of the Italian flag: red, white, and green). This became Queen Margherita's favorite pizza.

It's known that the Pizza was thereafter enjoyed by all the Italian people. Variations began to be made in different parts of the country. In Bologna, meat began to be added into the topping mix. Neapolitan Pizza became quite popular and it brought garlic and crumbly Neapolitan cheeses into the mixture as well as herbs, fresh vegetables, and other spices.

Pizza spread to America, France, England and Spain, where it was little known until after World War II. While occupying Italian territories, many American and European soldiers tasted Pizza for the first time. Italian immigrants had been selling Pizzas in their American stores for some time, but it was the returning soldiers with a lust for the saucy delight that drew the Pizzas out of the quiet Italian neighborhoods into the main stream of city life all over the continent. Today we celebrate Pizza. February 9 is International Pizza Day and the Guinness Book of Records states that the largest Pizza ever made and eaten was created in Florida and was 100 feet and 1 inch across!

According to statistics American and Canadian citizens eat an average 23 pounds of Pizza, per person, per year. Pepperoni pizza is second only to the hamburger as this continent's favorite food.

So, next time you eat a Pizza, stop and think of Queen Margherita and Chef Raffaella and be grateful that a Queen would dare to taste peasants' bread that she liked so much.