

Who Invented Pizza?

In the lively port city of Naples, Italy, during the 18th and 19th centuries, life moved with a restless energy. Street vendors called out their wares, fishermen hauled their catch from the harbour, and families gathered in small, bustling kitchens filled with savoury aromas. At that time, poor workers needed food that was affordable, filling, and quick to eat. They often bought simple flatbreads, warm from the oven, topped with tomatoes, garlic, and oil. These early creations were delicious, but they were not yet known as *pizza* in the way we understand it today.

The turning point came in 1889, when Queen Margherita of Italy visited Naples. She was known to be curious about the food of ordinary people, rather than only the grand dishes served in royal palaces. A respected baker named Raffaele Esposito was chosen to prepare something special in her honour. Wanting to celebrate Italy itself, he assembled a dish that displayed the colours of the Italian flag: red tomatoes, white mozzarella cheese, and green basil. The flatbread was baked in a wood-fired oven until the cheese melted into a soft, creamy layer.

When Queen Margherita tasted the dish, she is said to have been delighted. She praised it for its simple, balanced flavours and its beauty. From that moment, the dish was named Pizza Margherita, in tribute to the queen, and Esposito's bakery became famous across Naples. Word spread swiftly—first through the crowded marketplaces, then across Italy, and eventually across continents.

As Italian immigrants travelled to new countries seeking work and opportunity, they carried the tradition of pizza with them. In America, pizza changed again. New ingredients—such as pepperoni, mushrooms, onions, and olives—were added to suit local tastes. Some versions were thin and crisp; others were deep, thick, and almost cake-like. Yet, no matter how much pizza evolved, many still remembered the tale of the humble baker and the queen who helped bring the dish to fame.

Even today, when friends gather around a warm, bubbling pizza, something of Naples remains—not just in the taste, but in the sense of comfort, togetherness, and shared delight. In every slice, there lingers a story of ordinary people, royal surprise, and a dish that became beloved around the world.

Comprehension Questions

1. **Before pizza became widely known, why were simple flatbreads popular in Naples?**

- A. They were cheap, convenient, and satisfying for working people.
- B. They were a luxury reserved for wealthy travellers.
- C. They were believed to have special health benefits.
- D. They took a long time to prepare and were eaten only on holidays.

2. **What motivated Queen Margherita's interest in the new dish?**

- A. She hoped to replace traditional palace meals entirely.
- B. She was curious about everyday food enjoyed by ordinary citizens.
- C. She wanted to impress Raffaele Esposito.
- D. She disliked all other Italian cuisine.

3. How did Raffaele Esposito's creation symbolise Italian identity?

- A. The pizza included expensive ingredients from all across Europe.
- B. It was shaped to resemble the Italian royal crest.
- C. The colours of the toppings matched those of the Italian national flag.
- D. It was only served during national holidays.

4. What does the phrase "*word spread swiftly*" suggest about the dish's impact?

- A. People ignored the dish and quickly forgot it.
- B. It caused arguments throughout the city.
- C. News of the pizza's success travelled quickly and excited many.
- D. Only royal chefs were allowed to prepare it afterwards.

5. Why does the author describe how pizza changed in America?

- A. To show that pizza remained exactly the same everywhere.
- B. To highlight how food can adapt to new places and cultures.
- C. To argue that American versions are more authentic.
- D. To prove that the original recipe was disliked.

6. Which statement best captures the author's viewpoint in the final paragraph?

- A. Pizza is important mainly because it reminds people of royalty.
- B. Pizza is only meaningful in Napoli and nowhere else.
- C. Pizza carries emotional meaning, not just taste, bringing people together.
- D. Pizza is becoming less popular as time goes on.

Answers

1. **A** — They were cheap, convenient, and satisfying for working people.

The text explains that workers needed food that was affordable and quick to eat, so these simple flatbreads were popular.

2. **B** — She was curious about everyday food enjoyed by ordinary citizens.

The passage states Queen Margherita “*was known to be curious about the food of ordinary people.*”

3. **C** — The colours of the toppings matched those of the Italian national flag.

Esposito chose red tomatoes, white mozzarella, and green basil specifically to reflect the colours of Italy’s flag.

4. **C** — News of the pizza’s success travelled quickly and excited many.

“*Word spread swiftly*” means the news reached people fast and with enthusiasm, leading to its growing popularity.

5. **B** — To highlight how food can adapt to new places and cultures.

The text explains how pizza changed in America with new toppings and styles, showing how traditions evolve when shared.

6. **C** — Pizza carries emotional meaning, not just taste, bringing people together.

The final paragraph emphasises comfort, togetherness, and shared joy —

pizza is more than food; it creates a sense of community.