

History of PIZZA:

The actual origin of pizza-like products is unknown. There have been reports of many meals made by peoples and cultures whose description strongly resembles the modern day pizza. For example, the soldiers of the Persian king, Darius the Great, are said to have baked bread on their shields and then covered it with cheese and dates. The Ancient Greeks flavored a flat bread called "plakous" with toppings that included onions, garlic, and herbs, just to name a few. Some people argue that pizza evolved from the green onion pancake made by the Chinese and was brought back to Italy by Marco Polo. Then again, some people are still convinced that pizza as we know it was originated in the United States of America.

The most popular pizza origin story comes to us by way of Naples, Italy with the addition of the tomato topping. Prior to the late 18th century, Europeans thought that the tomato was actually a poisonous fruit. However, around the late 1700's, the poorer communities in Naples began adding tomato to their yeast-based flat bread. The original pizza during that time was topped with the things the poor of Naples could afford. The flat bread was topped with oil, lard, tallow, anchovies, and, of course, cheese, and tomatoes.

The taste was a hit and the "pizza" grew in popularity. It wasn't long before word spread and visitors to Naples went into the poorer areas for the sole purpose of sampling this tasty feast served on flat bread. Thanks to the popularization of the pizza, the wealthier segments of society saw that the tomato was not only safe to eat, but also delicious, and tomatoes became a main ingredient of many Italian delicacies! The original pizza vendor operated from open-air stands on the streets of Naples. The pizza would be baked in wood-fired pizza carts. Possibly the world's first pizzeria was Antica Pizzeria Port Alba' in Naples, Italy. They first made pizza for peddlers from the wood-fired pizza carts, but expanded to a full-fledged pizzeria with tables and chairs in 1830. If you go to Naples, you can still get authentic pizza from that original pizzeria site. During the late 1800's, Queen Margherita and her husband, Umberto, took an evaluation tour of her Italian Kingdom. While touring around Italy, she saw that many of Italy's citizens, especially peasants, were eating this large flat bread food. Curious about it, she told one of her guards to bring her a pizza bread. Upon tasting it, she immediately developed a love for pizza, and ate it every time she would venture out among the citizens. This caused some controversy among those in the Royal Court circles, as it was not becoming for royalty, especially the queen, to eat the food of mere peasants. The queen, not wanting to give up dining on this wonderful pizza bread, requested that Chef Raphael Esposito travel from his pizzeria to the palace. Queen Margherita then ordered him to bake a variety of pizzas for her to sample and enjoy. Queen Margherita was loved and respected by her subjects, and Chef Rafealle was no exception. Chef Rafealle decided to make a special pizza in honor of his queen that would represent the colors of the Italian flag: red, white, and green. The pizza was topped with red tomatoes, white Mozzarella cheese, and fresh basil. Of all the pizzas Chef Rafealle prepared for her, this became Queen Margherita's favorite. When word spread throughout Italy that this "Italian Flag" pizza was one of the queen's favorite foods, she became even more real and beloved by her subject citizens, as they felt more connected with her. Queen Margherita's addition of pizza to her royal menu began a culinary tradition that would spread into the elite homes of Naples, then Italy at large, and then into all of the world. As the popularity of pizza spread throughout the region, variations and adaptations began to be made which followed the pizza throughout time. In Bologna, meat was added to the choice of toppings. The Neapolitan pizza was topped with crumbly Neapolitan cheeses, garlic, herbs, fresh vegetables, and other spices. Eventually pizza began to be baked in special brick ovens that enveloped the pizza, cooking all the toppings along with the pizza dough all together. This is the same process used to bake pizza in most pizzerias across the world today.

After the rise in popularity of pizza had spread across Italy, the love of pizza spread to France, Spain, England, and the Americas. Pizza had spread, but it was still not wildly popular. The true spark of popularity came during World War II when American and European soldiers who were occupying Italian territories tasted this dish. They loved it straight away. Now immigrant Italian restaurateurs had been selling pizza in their American establishments for a while, but as the soldiers returned from the war with an appetite for this cheesy, saucy delight, the quiet Italian restaurants suddenly had a booming new clientele. And, with that, pizza became popular across the nations. Pizza has become an icon of civilization. The versatility of pizzas keep it a dish that anyone could consider. Pizza evolved from a meal peasants could afford to a gourmet dish loved the world over. As the recipes have changed, there are some pizza aficionados that insist on maintaining pizza in its truest purest form. Of course, these people are not talking about the peasant bread, but rather the slightly evolved Neapolitan-style pizza.

The Verace Pizza Napoletana Americas, VPN, is an association that offers training on how to create an authentic style pizza to individuals or businesses. They are strict in following the guidelines of the VPN Association that is based out of Naples, Italy. VPN has specific recipes that emphasize perfection in reproducing the original Pizza Margherita, as well as other original favorites. To be certified by the VPN means that clientele can always expect a perfect pizza experience. No food has ever affected society the way pizza has. No matter who you are, pizza has likely had some impact on your life. What other food can people the world over say that about?