

Great places to eat pizza in Naples

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So many pizza places in Naples--never enough time

When asked for directions to Da Michele, one of Naples' most famous pizzerias, the hotel concierge told us, "I would not go there," implying that it was not in a good neighborhood. Of course, we went anyway. True, the neighborhood was run down, but outside the restaurant there were late model Mercedes and BMW's parked all over and a line of well-to-do Italians dressed in designer clothes stretched far out the door. We could not get in and decided to return the next day for an early lunch.



Simplicity is what makes Da Michele special. The walls are white, decorated with a few poems and quotations about pizza. The restaurant serves only two kinds of pizza: marinara and margherita. There is no other food. Beer, Coke, or mineral water are the only drinks. When you are that focused you have to be good, and Da Michele's pizzas are some of the best I have ever eaten. Light and tender, they seem to melt in your mouth and all of this for only five euros.

Diagonally across the street from Da Michele is Pizzeria Trianon. It has dining rooms on three or four stories, but only one has air conditioning. My favorite here is the Margherita DOC. This is a type of margherita made with halved, tiny, sweet Neapolitan tomatoes known as pendolini. In each bite, you get the sweet, juicy flavor of the tomatoes combined with the tanginess of the mozzarella di bufala -- a great combination.

My wife, Michele, favors Da Ettore. Here they make great pizza and fried zucchini flowers as well as a stuffed pizza called the pagnoitiello. It looks more like a stuffed pita sandwich but it is made with pizza dough. Her favorite is made with fresh mozzarella, prosciutto, and arugula.

Ciro a Santa Brigida was the first place I ate pizza when I fell in love with Naples a few years ago. This is a great place to eat pizza and to sample the classic cooking of Naples as well a fine restaurant with a good wine list. They tend to seat all the non-Neapolitans downstairs, so ask to sit upstairs for a more interesting experience.

Europa is another excellent place to go for both pizza and other food. It is a bit more rustic than Ciro and we have always eaten well here. In Spaccanapoli, the old quarter in the heart of Naples, is Lombardi. Here we had a great margherita topped with prosciutto and rughetta, leaves of small wild arugula.

Not far from Naples in the town of Vico Equense is Da Gigino Università' della Pizza, better known as Pizza a Metro. Here they serve pizza by the meter and the waiters will help you to decide how many meters you need.

On our first visit we ordered a Margherita. It was delicious but I said to Michele "It tastes like it has prosciutto, but I don't see any prosciutto on it." She agreed and on the way out we stopped to watch the pizzaiolo. Michele noticed that just before sliding the pies into the oven, he drizzled a thick milky-looking liquid on them. The pizzaiolo told her it was strutto, liquified lard, which Michele remembered her mother making once a week by rendering pork fat. The pizza mystery was solved! Strutto is, or was, the quintessential Neapolitan cooking fat, though sadly, most cooks today have switched to olive oil. For a very large place that caters to enormous groups, the



food at Pizza a Metro is very good. Last time we were there you could order your pizza with or without lard.

On Capri, Villa Verde, not only makes delicious pizza but also great antipasto. One of the highlights was the fresh bufala mozzarella and red ripe tomatoes.

The Neapolitans like to drink sparking beverages with their pizza including beer, soda, aqua minerale gassata and sparkling wine such as the locally produced red Gragnano made from piedirosso and sciascinoso grapes.

Other wine choices I like include the white Falanghina (now very popular in Rome), Asprinio di'Aversa, and Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio made from the coda di volpe grape. For red, Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio made with the piedirosso grape is my choice.

When Michele and I began writing our pizza book we were surprised by the number of people, including food professionals, who told us that pizza is an American creation, brought to Naples and popularized there by the GI's during WWII. This misconception is worse than the one about Marco Polo and the pasta! Pizza in one form or another is a very ancient food.

The ancient Egyptians, Etruscans, and Greeks, who founded Partenope (Naples) made a primitive form of pizza. The word pizza may have come from Picentia, the name of a town near Naples. Flat bread came to be known as pieca, and it was in Naples where it evolved into what we know today as pizza. Tomatoes, which we think of as being a southern Italian staple, only came into general use in the 19th century. Before this pizza was seasoned only with lard, garlic, and herbs. Later little fish and cheese was used.

There are many other great pizzerias. If you have a favorite pizza place in Naples let me know about it and I will try to get there. If you like to cook and cannot get to these places, try making pizza at home. Our book (Pizza – Easy Recipes for Great Homemade Pizza, Focaccia, and Calzones by Michele and Charles Scicolone) is a good place to start.



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