

# INSIDEHOOK

## New York Versus Naples: Which City Has Better Pizza?

We break down the Neapolitan tradition versus NYC's constant innovation — and which one comes out on top

BY BRIAN CICONI | August 12, 2025 12:36 pm EDT



Which city slings a better Margherita?

Rey Lopez for The Washington Post via Getty Images

Pizza as we know it was invented in Naples, Italy, in the late 19th century. While flatbreads with various toppings predate the Margherita pizza by centuries, it wasn't until 1889 when Neapolitan pizzaiolo Raffaele Esposito added mozzarella to bread topped with tomato sauce and basil. At that point, Italy as a nation was only 28 years old, but the food quickly became symbolic of the flag (white cheese represents the white of the Italian flag, basil represents green and tomato is a nod to the red). The Margherita pizza is named after Queen Margherita of Savoy (a region that is now the south of France), for whom the pizza was first made at **Pizzeria Brandi**, which still exists today.

By 1889, Italians were already migrating en masse to the United States via Ellis Island. The Southern Italians brought their pizza-making tradition with them, with **Lombardi's** becoming the first American pizzeria established in 1906 (it's still on Spring Street in Soho, just one block east of the original location). New York City has been America's undisputed **best pizza city** ever since. But can it compare to Naples, where it all started? We break down, once and for all, whether New York or Naples has better pizza.

## Naples Has Four Times the Pizzerias

With only one-ninth the population of NYC, Naples has at least 8,200 pizzerias. New York has, at most, one-quarter of that number. It's not the dominant cuisine in the city that never sleeps because, really, no cuisine is dominant here. A typical NYC block may contain a taco spot, **Chinese restaurant** and deli in addition to the pizza joint. In Naples, pizza is everywhere.



The Margherita pizza from Juliana's in Dumbo

Brian Cicioni

# The Difference Between New York and Naples Pizza

In Naples, tradition is far more important than innovation. The Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, which sets international standards for ingredients and techniques and offers [classes](#), is based there. “New York is a city of innovation and diversity when it comes to pizza,” says Giorgia Caporuscio, an NYC pizzaiola and Southern Italy native. “You can find world-class Neapolitan pizza here but also great slices, Roman-style, Detroit-style, everything.”

The type of round, thin-crust pies that Giorgia grew up eating and focuses on at her Midtown spot, [Don Antonio](#), are not the most prevalent pizza style in Manhattan or any other borough. Unfortunately, the uninspiring, uniform-looking pies that are often sold by the slice slices (likely featuring what looks like a machine-made layer of cheese on top, completely covering the sauce) are the only ones you can find in every NYC neighborhood.

## The Best of New York Is on Par With the Best of Napoli

Since the post-2000 openings of NYC pizzerias like Don Antonio, Keste, L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele, Ribalta and [Song'E Napule](#), you can get the same pizza in New York that you get in Naples. There's even a saying for this: “Everything from Italy except the water and the basil.” Napoli natives [Francesco Zimone](#) (responsible for bringing [L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele](#) to the United States) and [Ciro Iovinne](#) of Song'E Napule are both adherents of this philosophy. But technique also comes into play.

“The secret is not just where the tomato or cheese comes from — it's how fresh it is, how it's handled and how well it pairs with the dough and the oven,” Caporuscio says. “You can make an incredible Neapolitan pizza in the U.S., but you have to be mindful about every ingredient.” Eighty-three-year-old, third-generation Neapolitan pizzaiolo Giuseppe Starita says the same, often praising how well the Japanese pick up on traditional Neapolitan pizza techniques.

Plenty of pizza enthusiasts who have spent time on both sides of the Atlantic still swear by Brooklyn institutions like Juliana's and [L&B Spumoni Gardens](#). While the latter does have the boring American-style cheese pizza on their menu, many decades-long patrons have never tried it. That's because of the popularity of their famous Sicilian pie, where the cheese is baked into the thick crust and topped with a slightly sweet sauce that rivals any you'll get at the famous pizzerias in Naples.

# The Biggest Difference Is in the Street Food

You won't find serious Neapolitan pizzaiolos using cheap pre-shredded mozzarella (often with additives) that leaves an unattractive layer of grease atop the entire pie. And you'll be hard-pressed to find anyone walking down the street in Naples eating a greasy slice atop a thin paper plate. The closest thing you'll find to that is called *portofino*, or wallet pizza. These are mini pies that are folded so you can eat them without having to cut into slices. Doing this without making a mess is an acquired skill, yet it's a necessary experience if you're looking to compare pizza in Naples with that of NYC.

In Naples, there's also *pizze frite*, a popular street food where fried dough comes stuffed with different ingredients. Smoked provola and tomato sauce is only one of many options.



The pizza ovens at Pizzeria Brandi

Brian Cicioni

## What Do Pizza Experts Think?

In Naples, there are four pizzerias that have been around for a combined total of more than 600 years: Pizzeria Brandi, L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele, Starita and Gino e Toto Sorbillo, in order of seniority. Each has its own claim to fame beyond simple longevity. And while everyone will likely tell you they enjoy them all, people have their favorites.

Steve Perillo, third-generation owner of Perillo Tours, which designs custom Italy itineraries and has been sending American tourists to Naples since 1945, claims Sorbillo as his favorite pizzeria. The multi-location favorite, which had a brief run in NYC's Little Italy before closing in 2017, is the only pizzeria in Naples with the audacity to serve a pineapple pizza (*pizza ananas*). But he also enjoys Sorbillo's Napoli, which is essentially a Margherita topped with capers and anchovies. Perillo also prefers how pizza is never cut into slices in Naples. As pizza is seen in Italy as more of a personal thing, you're expected to cut it yourself with a fork and knife.

When in NYC, L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele has been Perillo's go-to since it opened in 2023. The original location in Naples has had the same four-pie menu since opening in 1870, while the NYC location uses the same ingredients but has more than twice the options to serve the less-rigid American diner.

## All That Said, Which City Has Better Pizza?

The short answer is Naples — that is, if you're comparing consistency. The standards there are higher to match the greater expectations of the more discerning Italian people. New York is the clear winner when it comes to variety, but that doesn't always equal quality. In Naples, you can speak very little Italian, walk into a pizzeria you've never heard of, order a Margherita and odds are it will be delicious and meticulously made. The same cannot yet be said about New York.

<https://www.insidehook.com/food/new-york-versus-naples-which-city-better-pizza>