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Pizza, Pizza...As Competition Heats Up, Who And What's On Top?

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Dive into the future of pizza and the trends towards health, convenience, and technology shaping its ... [+] GETTY

If you're like me, you'll have noticed that the pizza you've had lately is nothing like when you were a kid, and slices cost 15 cents.

Today's myriad types, styles, tastes, and ingredients are as mind-

boggling as the cost. How did pizza become so diversified and expensive, and where is it going from here?

Where did Pizza come from?

The origin of pizza can be traced back to ancient civilizations when Romans, Egyptians, and Greeks had variations of flatbread. The Greeks called their variation "plakous." The Italians later had their own form of "focaccia." Modern pizza has its roots in late 18th century Naples, where it was a dish for poor people. It was simple, seasoned only with tomato, garlic, oregano, and olive oil. Then came pizza Margherita, which carried the colors of the Italian flag with red tomato, white mozzarella cheese, and green basil.

Italian immigrants brought pizza to the United States in the late 19th century, but it was unique to their culture and tastes. After World War II, American soldiers started the pizza revolution by requesting at home the pizza they had eaten while serving on the Italian front.

Today, pizza is a global phenomenon with numerous regional variations, from the deep-dish pizzas of Chicago to the thin-crust pizzas of New York, with variations the world over reflecting local tastes and ingredients. It has become one of the world's most beloved, popular, and versatile foods.

Pizza for everyone's tastes





The quest for the supreme pizza style sparks debate among enthusiasts; preferences vary widely from ... [+] GETTY

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But, in the competitive food industry, it's essential to ask: which pizza reigns, what are the most popular variations, who is selling the most pizza, and where will pizza evolve from today? Well, like the question of the best toppings, it depends on who you ask. [Hakki Akdenziz](#), the founder of Champion Pizza, believes New York's thin-crust pizza is the healthiest choice. Others believe Chicago's deep-dish pizza leads the pack. While in Detroit, the rectangular, crispy, chewy version with a caramelized cheese perimeter is a fan favorite. A nationwide poll might be in order!

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We would be remiss not to mention Neapolitan, Sicilian, Roman, and Margherita (from the Italians), California, Hawaiian, and St. Louis (from other States), Greek (for the history books), and white pizza for those who don't like tomato sauce.

And how about the most expensive pizza in the United States, known as the "24K Gold Pizza," once offered by Industry Kitchen in New York City? This luxurious pizza was priced at \$2,000 and featured extravagant ingredients such as 24K gold leaves, white stilton cheese imported from England, French foie gras and truffles, Ossetra caviar from the Caspian Sea, and more.

Pizza is already well-traveled, but can it reach terminal velocity? It may surprise you to know that it already has. In 2001, Pizza Hut became the first company to deliver pizza to space. The pizza was sent to the International Space Station, and the delivery reportedly cost more than \$1 million. At a modest 5%, the tip on that order comes out to \$50,000.

Who is selling Pizza?





Domino's has overtaken Pizza Hut as the world's largest pizza chain in global retail sales, with ... [+] GETTY IMAGES

You've likely seen many of the commercials, "Pizza, Pizza," or heard the various jingles, but Domino's reigns as the largest chain (based upon global retail sales) with thousands of locations in over 90 countries. Pizza Hut was the prior holder of the top spot until being surpassed by Domino's, and, as far as delivery and takeout are concerned, Papa John's is king.

The competition is fierce between these brands and Little Caesars, California Pizza Kitchen, Papa Murphy's, Marco's Pizza, Telepizza, Sbarro, and many others, including the Villa Restaurant Group, a chain of over 200 restaurants. Michele Roberto Scotto, Vice President of Corporate Development for Villa, says, "There's never a bad time for pizza; consumers want it in good times and bad." Villa has pivoted its business model from traditional Villa Italian Kitchens to more locations in malls and airports. They have partnered with major brands such as Starbucks SBUX +1%, Shake Shack SHAK +1.1%, Jersey Mike's, and others to operate those units, some of which are the busiest in the country. While his restaurants



are pleased to serve customers whatever they prefer, Michele said good old pepperoni and cheese still rules when it comes to his favorite order.

The future of pizza

As consumer preferences evolve, so will pizza variations, especially since robots are now making and delivering the pies. The notable trends currently shaping the future of pizza are common to many other foods. There's healthy and nutritious, grab and go, delivery and takeout, automation and technology, sustainability, innovation, an



As consumers' tastes evolve, pizza is adapting to trends like healthier options, convenience through ...

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d customization. Healthy and nutritious trends include gluten-free, low-carb, whole-grain, or cauliflower dough (with the latter made by our friends at Caulipower). Plant-based and organic toppings may become increasingly popular as well.

Convenience is key to consumers today, so grab-and-go, delivery and takeout, ghost kitchens, and app-based services that expedite ordering and delivery will be

essential. In addition to robots, technology, and automation will help control costs while adding efficiency. Sustainable and safe practices are becoming more important to consumers as well. Packaging is critical, especially after bad news about PFAS in pizza boxes.

Customization and Innovation



The biggest changes will be inspired by customization and innovation. And, thanks to technology and automation, the costs may not increase as quickly as they have in the past. Pizza variations will include diverse new ingredients and incorporate favorites from other cultures. Perhaps apps will enable consumers to order any combination of toppings or types. A gluten-free California Sicilian?

Pizza has evolved from humble origins to feature flavors that the Italians, Greeks, and Egyptians never contemplated. I'm sure that by the next century, we will not be able to recognize today's pizzas, even if we still love the taste.

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