

# The History of Food

## 1. The croissant

The croissant is a buttery, flaky pastry synonymous with France, and has a history that spans centuries and crosses many cultural boundaries.

The croissant's earliest ancestor is the **kipferl**, a crescent-shaped pastry from Austria. Kipferls date back to at least the 13th century, and they came in many forms, ranging from plain to sweet. These pastries were not layered with butter, but they had a crescent shape.

The croissant arrived in France in the late 18th century, brought by Austrian bakers. One key figure in this transition was **Marie Antoinette**, the Austrian queen of France, who is said to have introduced her homeland's pastries to the French court. The **kipferl** became popular in France, but it wasn't yet the croissant that we know today.

In the 19th century, French bakers adapted the Austrian **kipferl** into a buttery dough that was used to make puff pastries. This process, involving repeated folding of dough with butter to create flaky layers, gave the croissant its fluffy texture.

The first reference to the croissant in French literature appeared in 1853, and by 1869, it was a common sight in Parisian bakeries.

Croissants became a symbol of French culture and cuisine, celebrated worldwide for their delicate texture and rich flavor. Variations emerged, including almond, chocolate and ham and cheese.

Today, croissants are available in bakeries around the world. Innovations include vegan croissants, hybrid pastries like the "cronut" (croissant-doughnut), and creative fillings ranging from matcha to hazelnut cream. But in France, croissants remain a breakfast staple, often served with coffee or hot chocolate.



**Kipferl**



**Croissant**



**Cronut**

## 2. Ice-cream

The earliest known form of ice cream was in ancient China (2000 BC), where a mixture of milk, rice, and snow was used to create a chilled dessert.

In Persia (500 BC), people enjoyed a dessert called "sharbat" or "sherbet" which was made from grape juice and snow brought from the mountains. This precursor to modern sorbet was a favorite in royal courts.

In the 4th century BC, Alexander the Great enjoyed snow mixed with honey and nectar, an early version of flavored ice.

During the reign of the Roman Empire, Emperor Nero, in the 1st century AD sent slaves to collect snow from the mountains, which was then mixed with fruit juices and honey. This luxury was a precursor to modern frozen desserts.

In the 9th century, Arabs introduced new techniques for making ice desserts, adding sugar to improve sweetness. The result was "syrup ice" (modern-day sorbet), which became popular in the Islamic world.

Marco Polo's travels in the 13th century brought knowledge of Chinese frozen desserts to Europe. These recipes influenced the development of Italian "granita" and later, "gelato".

In Italy, in the 16th century, Catherine de Medici brought Italian frozen desserts to France when she married King Henry II. Italian chefs refined these recipes, creating creamy frozen desserts using milk and cream.

In the 17th century, ice cream gained popularity in England, where it was called "iced cream" and was served at royal banquets.

The Café Procope in Paris began serving ice cream in the late 1600s, making it accessible to the public. French chefs perfected custard-based recipes, leading to the creation of "crème glacée".

Ice cream made its way to America in the early 18th century. Records show that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson enjoyed eating and making ice cream.

During the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, innovations like the "hand-crank ice cream churn" (1843) and mechanical refrigeration revolutionized ice cream production. The first ice cream factory opened in Baltimore in 1851, enabling large-scale production. Ice cream parlors became popular eating places, introducing desserts like sundaes and ice-cream sodas.

In 1904, the invention of the ice cream cone at the St. Louis World's Fair made ice cream a portable treat.

Post-war advancements in technology made ice cream widely available in homes, with brands like Häagen-Dazs and Baskin-Robbins offering diverse flavors.

Ice cream is now enjoyed worldwide, from Italian gelato to Japanese mochi ice cream. Emerging trends include vegan, lactose-free, and artisanal varieties.



### 3. Pizza

Flatbreads, the ancestors of pizza, were among the earliest forms of bread made by humans. These were simple mixtures of flour and water baked on hot stones.

Ancient Egyptians were pioneers of leavened bread, a precursor to pizza dough.

In ancient Greece and Rome, flatbreads were topped with olive oil, herbs, and occasionally honey, creating dishes akin to modern focaccia.

In the Middle Ages, flatbreads became a staple in Southern Italy, particularly among the poor. They were topped with available ingredients like lard, garlic, and anchovies, providing a cheap but satisfying meal.

#### **The Birth of Modern Pizza: 16th Century Naples**

Tomatoes were introduced to Europe from the Americas in the 16th century. By the 18th century, they were widely used in Italian cuisine, especially by the working class in Naples. Neapolitan pizzaiolos (pizza makers) began topping flatbreads with tomatoes, creating the earliest versions of modern pizza. These were sold as street food to the poor people.

In 1889, during a visit to Naples, Queen Margherita of Savoy tasted a pizza made by a pizzaiolo. He used red tomatoes, white mozzarella, and green basil to represent the colors of the Italian flag. This became the “Margherita pizza”, today a cornerstone of Italian cuisine.

As Italians emigrated to countries like the United States, they took their culinary traditions, including pizza. Italian neighborhoods established “pizzerias”, introducing pizzas to new customers. Pizza became a sensation in the USA after World War II, with innovations like the New York-style thin crust and the Chicago deep-dish pizza. The post-war era also saw the rise of pizza chains like Pizza Hut (1958) and Domino's (1960), making pizza widely accessible and standardized.

Pizza is now available in all countries. Here are some examples:

- Japan: Squid and mayonnaise pizza.
- India: Paneer tikka pizza (“paneer” is similar to “cottage cheese”).
- Brazil: Sweet pizzas with chocolate and fruit.
- Middle East: Manakish, a flatbread similar to esfiha, like a small pizza.

Advances in food technology have made pizza a ubiquitous frozen food, and delivery apps have made it accessible everywhere. Today, pizza is a universal comfort food, celebrated and reinvented in every corner of the world.

World Pizza Day is on February 9th.



## 4. Panettone

Panettone is a traditional Italian sweet bread that has become a global holiday favorite, particularly at Christmas and New Year.

The origins of panettone can be traced back to ancient Rome, where sweetened leavened breads with honey were made for special occasions. During the Middle Ages, enriched breads with dried fruits and spices became popular, especially in northern Italy, as luxury items for the wealthy. The modern panettone originated in Milan, in the 15th century. The bread was known as a delicacy eaten at Christmas.



According to one story, a Milanese baker named Toni accidentally invented panettone when he added dried fruits to leftover bread dough to create a festive treat. The name "panettone" is said to come from the words "pane di Toni" (Toni's bread). However, this story cannot be verified.

In the early 20th century, Italian bakers Angelo Motta and Gioacchino Alemagna revolutionized panettone production. Motta introduced the tall, dome-shaped version by using paper molds and extended preparation times, making it lighter and fluffier.

Italian immigrants took panettone to South America, particularly to Argentina and Brazil, where it has become a staple during the Christmas season.

Today, panettone is enjoyed worldwide, with many variations in flavor and style, including chocolate, pistachio, and regional specialties.

The ingredients of panettone include flour, butter, eggs, sugar, candied fruits, and raisins. It requires many rounds of kneading, proofing, and resting, often over several days, to achieve its airy texture and long shelf life. Its luxurious ingredients and time-intensive preparation symbolize abundance and festivity.

Panettone has evolved from a Milanese tradition to an internationally cherished holiday treat!

## 5. Stollen

Stollen is a traditional German fruit bread, particularly associated with Christmas. It's known for its rich, sweet flavor, packed with dried fruits, nuts, marzipan, and it's often dusted with powdered sugar.

The first references to stollen date back to the late Middle Ages in the region of Saxony, specifically in the city of Dresden. It was a popular Christmas bread that was enjoyed by both the nobility and common folk.

The word "stollen" is derived from the Old German word "stol," meaning "pillar", maybe referring to the bread's shape, which was often oval-shaped. Some people speculate that the cake represents the shape of baby Jesus wrapped in a blanket, linking the bread to Christian symbolism.

The earliest versions of stollen were very simple, made with flour, water, and yeast, as butter was considered a luxury that was not allowed during Lent by the church. In 1474, the residents of Dresden requested permission from the Pope to use butter in their stollen. The Pope agreed and sent a special "butter decree" that allowed butter to be used in stollen and other baked goods. This marked the beginning of stollen's evolution into the rich, buttery version that we know today.

By the 17th century, stollen became deeply tied to Christmas celebrations in Dresden, where it was often shaped to resemble baby Jesus wrapped in a blanket. The bread was often presented as a gift, and bakers began creating more elaborate versions, adding ingredients like raisins, almonds, and marzipan, as well as dusting the bread with powdered sugar to create a snowy, festive look.

The Dresden Stollen Festival, held annually in Dresden, celebrates this bread, and the city is known for its world-famous Dresden Stollen, which is often protected by strict regulations to maintain its traditional quality.

Stollen's popularity spread beyond Dresden and Saxony to other parts of Germany and later to other countries, especially with the migration of Germans to other parts of Europe and North America.

Traditional stollen contains butter, sugar, flour, eggs, dried fruits (such as raisins, currants, and candied citrus peel), almonds, and spices like cinnamon and cardamom. A central feature is marzipan, which is often rolled into the center, providing a rich and sweet filling. After baking, the bread is generously dusted with powdered sugar, making it look like a snowy landscape, which adds to the festive appearance.

While the classic version remains popular, modern stollen can include variations like Chocolate Stollen, Gluten-Free Stollen and Nut-free Stollen. Some bakers experiment by adding flavors like rum or different types of nuts.

Stollen remains a delicious treat in Germany and many other countries. It has evolved from a simple bread into a symbol of the festive spirit, blending religious tradition, local history, and delicious ingredients into a beloved holiday treat.

