



Felician Village

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The History of Cheesecake

Cheesecake is a beloved dessert around the world. While many assume that it has its origins in New York, it actually dates back much further. Let's go back over 4,000 years to ancient Greece! Sit back, grab a creamy slice of cheesecake and learn all about this dessert's rich history.

Cheesecake Travels the Globe

The first "cheese cake" may have been created on the Greek island of Samos. Physical anthropologists excavated cheese molds there which were dated circa 2,000 B.C. Cheese and cheese products had most likely been around for thousands of years before this, but earlier than this goes into prehistory (that period in human history before the invention of writing) so we will never really know. In Greece, cheesecake was considered to be a good source of energy, and there is evidence that it was served to athletes during the first Olympic games in 776 B.C. Greek brides and grooms were also known to use cheesecake as a wedding cake. The simple ingredients of flour, wheat, honey and cheese were formed into a cake and baked – a far cry from the more complicated recipes available today! The writer Athenaeus is credited for writing the first Greek cheesecake recipe in 230 A.D. (By this time, the Greeks had been serving cheesecake for over 2,000 years but this is the oldest known surviving Greek recipe!) It was also pretty basic - pound the cheese until it is smooth and pasty - mix the pounded cheese in a brass pan with honey and spring wheat flour - heat the cheese cake "in one mass" - allow to cool then serve. When the Romans conquered Greece, the cheesecake recipe was just one spoil of war. They modified it including crushed cheese and eggs. These ingredients were baked under a hot brick and it was served warm. Occasionally, the Romans would put the cheese filling in a pastry. The Romans called their cheese cake "libuma" and they served it on special occasions. Marcus Cato, a Roman politician in the first century B.C., is credited as recording the oldest known Roman cheesecake recipe. As the Romans expanded their empire, they brought cheesecake recipes to the Europeans. Great Britain and Eastern Europe began experimenting with ways to put their own unique spin on cheesecake. In each country of Europe, the recipes started taking on different cultural shapes, using ingredients native to each region. In 1545, the first cookbook was printed. It described the cheesecake as a flour-based sweet food. Even Henry VIII's chef did his part to shape the cheesecake recipe. Apparently, his chef cut up cheese into very small pieces and soaked those pieces in milk for three hours. Then, he strained the mixture and added eggs, butter and sugar. It was not until the 18th century, however, that cheesecake would start to look like something we recognize in the United States today. Around this time, Europeans began to use beaten eggs instead of yeast to make their breads and cakes rise. Removing the overpowering yeast flavor made cheesecake taste more like a dessert treat. When Europeans immigrated to America, some brought their cheesecake recipes along.

Adding Signature Ingredient

Cream cheese was an American addition to the cake, and it has since become a staple ingredient in the United States. In 1872, a New York dairy farmer was attempting to replicate the French cheese Neufchatel. Instead, he accidentally discovered a process which resulted in the creation of cream cheese. Three years later, cream cheese was packaged in foil and distributed to local stores under the Philadelphia Cream Cheese brand. The Philadelphia Cream Cheese brand was purchased in 1903 by the Phoenix Cheese Company, and then it was purchased in 1928 by the Kraft Cheese Company. Kraft continues to make this very same delicious Philadelphia Cream Cheese that we are all familiar with today.

New York Style Cheesecake

Of course, no story of cheesecake is complete without delving into the origins of the New York style cheesecake. The Classic New York style cheesecake is served with just the cake – no fruit, chocolate or caramel is served on the top or on the side. This famously smooth-tasting cake gets its signature flavor from extra egg yolks in the cream cheese cake mix. By the 1900s, New Yorkers were in love with this dessert. Virtually every restaurant had its own version of cheesecake on their menu. New Yorkers have vied for bragging rights for having the original recipe ever since. Even though he is best known for his signature sandwiches, Arnold Reuben (1883-1970) is generally credited for creating the New York Style cheesecake. Reuben was born in Germany and he came to America when he was young. The story goes that Reuben was invited to a dinner party where the hostess served a cheese pie. Allegedly, he was so intrigued by this dish that he experimented with the recipe until he came up with the beloved NY Style cheesecake.

More Variations in America

New York is not the only place in America that puts its own spin on cheesecakes. In Chicago, sour cream is added to the recipe to keep it creamy. Meanwhile, Philadelphia cheesecake is known for being lighter and creamier than New York style cheesecake and it can be served with fruit or chocolate toppings. In St. Louis, they enjoy a gooey butter cake, which has an additional layer of cake topping on the cheesecake filling.

Cheesecake Around the World

Each region of the world also has its own take on the best way to make the dessert. Italians use ricotta cheese, while the Greeks use mizithra or feta. Germans prefer cottage cheese, while the Japanese use a combination of cornstarch and egg whites. There are specialty cheesecakes that include blue cheese, seafood, spicy chilies and even tofu! In spite of all the variations, the popular dessert's main ingredients – cheese, wheat and a sweetener – remain the same.

No matter how you slice it, cheesecake is truly a dessert that has stood the test of time. From its earliest recorded beginnings on Samos over 4,000 years ago to its current iconic status around the world this creamy cake remains a favorite for sweet tooth of all ages.

Source: <https://www.cheesecake.com/History-Of-Cheesecake.asp>