

Escape

Where to go. What to see. The deals to get you there.

It's all about the base

The thick and thin of Chicago's battle for pizza supremacy

JOHN BISHOP

THICK versus thin. Multiple toppings versus plain and simple. Modern innovation versus traditional and authentic. These are among the many questions pizza lovers love to argue about.

The thin crust style is associated with New York and its street food.

Big triangular slices slightly burnt with sauce, cheese and basil (and just those if you are a purist), which are hard to eat elegantly.

In Chicago it's deep dish, which means thick crust with sides like a pie and it's served to seated diners and eaten with a knife and fork.

Which is best? The argument is unresolvable, because in the end it is a matter of taste. But these arguments are never just about taste.

It's New York, America's "First City", versus Chicago, America's self-styled "Second City" – and it's one group of Italians versus another.

Pizza evolved from Naples, where the first official pizzeria opened about 1830.

Then, pizza was simply flatbread with leftovers on top to use them up. Pizza is Italian for pie.

In Chicago the pie ruled, and only in the 1920s did the Italians in Chicago start to call this pizza, and that was to try and win a national pizza competition. (It didn't work.)

I sampled the thick crust style at the first Gino's, Chicago's oldest surviving pizza parlor, now part of a chain. It was very simple: just a tomato

sauce with melted mozzarella on a thick dough base.

It was tasty enough and quite filling, but in the end unappealing because it was same taste, mouthful after mouthful.

Authentic doesn't always mean interesting, particularly when it comes to working class food, where the challenge is always to make a little protein go a long way and to make the unappetising as appealing as possible.

Later at the award-winning Labriola's on Michigan Ave, we sampled several types of thick crust deep dish pizza.

The ingredients were piled one on top of each other, then cheese layered over the lot to bind them together before baking. Personally, I found the servings very heavy, even stodgy, and laboured to even finish a whole piece.

One really important difference between Chicago pizza and the rest of the world is that in Chicago sausage is king, not salami, pepperoni, beef, ham or any other meat. This shifts the taste markedly, because often the sausage served is more like mince than sliced sausage.

The second difference is the way deep dish is cooked.

Thin crust goes into a hot oven at between 700 degrees and 1000 degrees, usually only for a few minutes these days.

Deep dish is cooked at 450 degrees for up to 45 minutes.

Few outside Chicago will wait that long for a pizza, which is one reason why even in Chicago thin crust outsells deep dish by four or five to one.



TUCK IN: The only way to settle the deep dish versus thin crust argument is to try them for yourself. Photo: iStock

HOT DEALS

Countdown to Christmas at sea

CELEBRATE Christmas on an ultra-luxurious holiday with Cruise Express's new cruise and stay package that includes free business class flights to Bali, departing December 19, and a two-night free stay in a deluxe pool villa before an indulgent Silversea voyage home to Australia. The 16-night cruise will sail to Komodo Island, as well as Darwin, Cairns, Townsville, Airlie Beach and Brisbane, with Christmas and New Year's Eve spent at sea. The cruise ends in Sydney on January 6, 2019. Priced from \$13,490pp, twin-fare until sold out. **DETAILS:** cruiseexpress.com.au

Rest your head after day at the races

WITH Melbourne's Spring Racing Carnival a month away, Metro Apartments on Bank Place is offering rates from \$140 per night throughout the carnival period. Book before October 7 and you can save up to 15 per cent on accommodation. The package includes one night in a Compact Room, 25 per cent discount voucher at Mitre Tavern, early check-in (1pm) and late check-out (11am). Valid for stays between October 18 and November 12, 2018. **DETAILS:** metrohotels.com.au

Sail South Pacific in style on Viking Sun

FROM Santiago, embark on an epic transoceanic journey onboard *Viking Sun* and witness the stone figures of Easter Island and the mountains around Tahiti and Bora Bora. Viking's 32-day Islands of the South Pacific itinerary departs February 12, 2019 from Santiago and is priced from \$12,995pp with a free upgrade to a Deluxe Veranda Stateroom. Fly from Sydney to Santiago for \$795pp one way in economy if booked by November 30. **DETAILS:** vikingcruises.com.au

Foodies, history lovers must take a tour or three to sample Chicago's offerings

ONE of the best ways for visitors to see the Windy City is by taking one, or more, of the hundreds of tours on offer.

For the history buffs

Architecture tours are popular in Chicago, and many people say the best vantage point is from the deck of a boat on the river.

First Lady Cruises runs excellent tours, hosted by Chicago Architecture Foundation, who interpret more than 50 landmark buildings along the Chicago River.

There are more than 85 tours to choose from. See architecture.org for more.

For the beer lovers

Craft beer is another Chi-

town highlight, with several tour companies guiding groups around the breweries producing the best beers.

Chicago Beer Experience offers three tours on tap, including: Bacon and Brewing, Sins and Suds and Pioneers and Pints, each combining 10 beer tastings, food pairings and a history lesson.

For more information, see chicagobeerexperience.com.

For the foodie fanatics

If you'd prefer to eat your calories, check out Food Planet Tours.

They offer neighbourhood tours of famous restaurants, favourite cuisines and unexpected tastes.

Come with an appetite. See chicagofoodplanet.com.

For sports fans

Consistently ranked as one of the best sports cities in the US, Chicago has teams in all five of the US's favourite sports (football, basketball, baseball, ice hockey and soccer).

Head to Wrigley Field to watch the Cubs compete in Major League Baseball; the White Sox's home turf is Guaranteed Rate Field.

The Chicago Bulls put on an all-star NBA basketball show, and the Bears are a respected football franchise in the NFL.

Go see a live game or check out the tours available of the fields. For more information see choosechicago.com.



MUST-SEE: The landmark Chicago Theatre on State Street. The historic theatre dates from 1921.

Photo: Contributed