

To Get Real Neapolitan Pizza, You Must Go to Naples

By Jami Johnson

Septemberish, 2012

Sure. You love pizza. Who doesn't? Certainly, you do. Yet true *aficionados* will understand two things.

First, you must understand that there is no pizza in the world like pizza from Naples.

Second, when you travel there, you must appreciate that the best pizza in the world is from *Pizzeria di Matteo*, and it will be the most *expensive-slash-inexpensive* pizza you will eat in your entire life.

Yes, friends will tell you that city's fame and glory begins and ends with its pizza. You must dismiss their advice when they tell you to skip Naples because the Amalfi coast is so much more breathtaking and Capri is just a hop-skip-jump away. Do not listen to the tour books when they delicately imply that Naples can be a tad bit gritty, if not altogether rough.

Decide that just because you happen to be in Rome and there is little reason to leave, you are in mortal danger of missing the whole point: this being, of course, the world's best pizza.

Off you go.

Buy a first- or second-class ticket on the fast train from *Roma Termini* to *Napoli*. Upon arrival, quickly learn that no one speaks English besides you and that no amount of Italian-inflected English will impart comprehension. The fistful of Italian words you use will not adequately prepare you for the rapid-fire responses returned by the tough-looking locals.

After a tense discussion with your *Napolitano* taxi driver, you will be dropped in front of a church instead of a pizzeria. He will try to explain—in Italian, which you do not speak—that Sunday services have already started. You will nod as though you understand. You will *not* understand. He will make a series of facial and hand gestures that can only be interpreted as the most dismissive version of “whatever” that one can muster.

In front of the cathedral, you decide whether or not to go in. The driver will squeal his tires and speed off. You are not to be offended by this. That is just how Italians drive on Sundays.

Locked arm in arm with your best bud, you will proceed slowly while staring at a glowing iPhone map. You walk carefully down a dirty, cramped alleyway towards what you hope is the

pizzeria. Maintaining polite yet assertive eye contact, you clutch your cheap handbag a little tighter and silently catalog the street names you pass them. Upon turning down *Via Dei Tribunali*, you will make a stunning revelation.

Either from personal experience or a delightfully flighty cousin-in-law who had raved about it for years, you will associate this street's name with a Napolitano-styled pizzeria in downtown Seattle. The PNW eatery is called *Via Tribunali*, which just so happens to be precisely the name of the street in Naples *where you are now*. It is also where you will find the world-famous *Pizzeria di Matteo*.

Naples will begin to make sense, but only for a moment.

Upon arriving at *Antica Pizzeria E Friggitoria di Matteo*—as it is officially known—you will find that it is, in fact, closed. Your heart will drop into the bottom of your grumble-belly. You will be a little dismayed and panicky until a passerby takes pity on you and says in broken English, “comme back ina leetle whileh.”

In hindsight, you will consider how the ovens probably just need to be stoked to temperature as no decent pizzeria could possibly open without the kilns being at full fire. You will do what anyone would do in your situation: you start embracing the concept of *dolce far niente*... and, uh, *pronto*. You will fall back on one of two of your newly acquired Italian pastimes: the ever-present opportunity to tour an Italian church or find a place to drink Italian beer.

After visiting the *Duomo di Napoli*, you will declare that the cathedral is lovely if slightly forsaken. You will quietly acknowledge that, just like its parishioners, the public restrooms are faithfully attended to with piety and fastidiousness. Around the corner, you will find the tumbledown *San Lorenzo Maggiore*. This church is smaller, yet it will offer you the perfect repose in which to wander and daydream about the precise formula of the perfect sauce-to-crust ratio.

With time left to kill, you may stumble upon the *Wine Café at the Piazzette Divino Amore*, if only because a shirtless, moped-driving, diaper-wearing toddler and his rider will force you into the café's direction out of sheer terror of being run over. The toddler will bite his hand towards you in a rude gesture, and you will immediately garner the meaning while simultaneously admiring his moto skills. The cozy outdoor café you have just stumbled upon is located two blocks from the pizzeria. They will serve you perfectly chilled glasses of beer and a heaping pile of salty potato crisps. Applewood fire logs are available for purchase for €3.00. You will actually consider buying a bundle.

You will return to *Pizzeria di Matteo* just as they are opening. You will be slightly buzzed as it begins to rain. You will buy hideous, overpriced umbrellas from a slick-haired street vendor. You will put your name on the waiting list and remark to your partner about the swelling mass of people who are arriving from every direction.

Standing outside, you will puzzle at the restaurant since there appears to be no dining area. After a brief wait outside—where the rain soaks everything, yet fails to cleanse the cobblestone streets to any measurable degree—you will hear your name being called on *la via*. You are beaming and slightly awestruck as you are marched through the vibrant, lively kitchen and up three flights of narrow stairs. It will dawn on you that there are apartments in the same building. As you hike the steps, you ponder whether or not you could live above a pizzeria.

You place your order for one *Quattro Formagi* pizza and a *Salciccia* pizza. You giggle when a neighboring American asks for a “pepperoni pizza,” but is given a ‘za with pepperoncini peppers instead of tiny salami slices. This must happen a lot.

The food arrives. Both pizzas will be incredible—not just because they are the size of your grandmother's Thanksgiving turkey platter—but because the dough will be perfectly baked. It is charred on the bottom yet has a warm, steamy crust. You consider that if you had any room left in your gullet, you would have tried the *Margherita* pizza or the *Arancini* (fried rice and cheese balls). Next time, for sure.

Inevitably, you will be subjected to some type of live entertainment. If you are lucky, it will be the oddly charming entertainer that can only be described as a gypsy-belt-wearing, tambourine-playing, one-man-band. You will tip him and politely clap when he is done with his song. He will thank you with a *grazie*, then go on to play approximately nineteen more songs before moving to the next floor. You are expected to tip him multiple times.

You were warned to come hungry: leaving any pizza left on your plate may cause offense. You regret the pre-lunch beer and crisps, but only a little.

You had the foresight to bring some Euros since they are a cash-only establishment. You will wait an indeterminable amount of minutes before asking whether you pay at the table or on the way out the door. You will be delighted to see that “service” is included on the tab.

Later you will learn that you have officially just become party to one of the longest feudal battles the city has ever seen. Every resident in Naples must swear allegiance to one of two pizzerias: *Pizzeria di Matteo* or *Pizzeria da Michele*. You consider how you might have taken a later train to investigate *da Michele* and weight in on whose pizza was superior.

But, since it is raining meatballs, you are glad to be heading back to Rome, leaving the ultimate question of your pizza fealty unanswered.

The excursion is both pricey and cheap, and you will take stock of your receipts on the return trip to Rome. The first wave will tally the cost of the two round-trip train tickets from Rome to Naples, the cab fare to and from the restaurant, the beers at the café while waiting for *Di Matteo* to open, the impulse-bought umbrellas, and the multiple tips you doled out to the awkward musical busker. The day trip to Naples will clock in at about €350.00. The *di Matteo* pizza, however, will be a steal at about €5.00 per pie.

For all of these reasons, not the least of which is an extraordinary pizza and overall experience, you will tell your friends that Naples is a *do not* miss.

Unfortunately, they are not prone to listening and will ignore you. Later, they will regale you of their terrible pizza experiences in Rome, Amalfi, Capri, et al.

It's not like you didn't warn them.

Antica Pizzeria E Friggitoria di Matteo

Via dei Tribunali, 94 80138

Naples, Italy

+081 455262

<http://www.pizzeriadimatteo.com/>