



# Pie-Town

Chicago's deep-dish pizza is mostly for tourists

Matt Alderton | Special to USA TODAY

The deep-dish pizza for which Chicago is known is 2 inches tall and “upside-down” — cheese on the bottom, then toppings, and sauce on top. It’s delicious. Whether it even counts as pizza, however, is the subject of a simmering feud between Chicago and New York.

Chicago is home to famed Roman pizza chef Gabriele Bonci's first U.S. location. He'll open a second storefront in the city this spring. NEIL BURGER

“As a proud native New Yorker, I take great pleasure in the delegitimizing of Chicago-style deep-dish pizza, from food writer Ed Levine’s outright dismissal — it is, ‘at best, a good casserole’ — to Jon Stewart’s less kind *Daily Show* rant: ‘It’s a effing casserole,’” says Daniel Young, editor of *Where to Eat Pizza*.

“But,” Young says, “I disagree with Levine and Stewart’s characterization. First, because Chicago pizza is not a casserole. It’s a pie. A pizza pie. Second, most pizza in the world, including New York-style, is a corruption of classic Neapolitan pizza. And let’s face it, no one does corruption better than Chicagoans.”

An analysis for USA TODAY by Chicago-based Grubhub found that Chicagoans order deep-dish 722% more often than the rest of the country. Still, unless they’re hosting out-of-town guests, the truth is most locals prefer thin.

“Everyone thinks Chicago is a deep-dish town. But that’s a myth,” says Chicago native Jonathan Porter, founder of

Chicago Pizza Tours. “We have all different types of pizza.”

If you want to eat like a local, therefore, skip the pizza pie and check out these neighborhood favorites, instead.

## VITO & NICK’S

**Type: Tavern-style**

Conceived during the Depression by South Side bars that wanted to keep patrons thirsty, tavern-style pizza has thin crust — more “cracker” than “bread” — cut into snack-size squares for group consumption. “It was basically engineered to sell more beer,” explains Porter, who estimates that as many as 85% of Chicago pizzerias serve tavern-style pizza. One of the originals is Vito & Nick’s, which has been doing it since 1946.

■ 8433 S. Pulaski Rd., 773-735-2050, [vitoandnicks.com](http://vitoandnicks.com)

## PIZANO’S PIZZA & PASTA

**Type: Tavern-style**

Deep-dish pizza was created in 1943 at

Chicago’s Pizzeria Uno, where Adolpho “Rudy” Malnati Sr. was one of two cooks rumored to have invented it. His sons, Lou and Rudy Jr., are pizza royalty. The latter started Pizano’s Pizza & Pasta in 1991. A fixture on Porter’s tours, it’s known for deep-dish but is a serious tavern-style contender, too.

■ 864 N. State St., 312-751-1766, [pizanoschicago.com](http://pizanoschicago.com)

## SPACCA NAPOLI PIZZERIA

**Type: Neapolitan-style**

Purists should head to Spacca Napoli, says Young, who calls the restaurant “a must” for its “wood-fired Neapolitan pizza that’s thin in the middle, puffy around the rim and bendy throughout.” It’s the real deal: Owner Jonathan Goldsmith is a certified *pizzaiuolo* — a pizza maker certified by the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, the official trade group of Naples’ pizza makers.

■ 1769 W. Sunnyside Ave., 773-878-2420, [spaccanapolipizzeria.com](http://spaccanapolipizzeria.com)

## BONCI PIZZERIA

**Type: Roman-style**

This is the first U.S. outpost of Gabriele Bonci’s beloved Roman pizzeria. “His Roman-style square pizza (see photo), cut from rectangular slabs, is a thick, airy platform for the finest Italian toppings,” Young says. “Neapolitans might say it’s not pizza at all, which kind of makes Bonci feel right at home in Chicago.”

■ 161 N. Sangamon St., 312-243-4016, [bonciusa.com](http://bonciusa.com)

## COALFIRE PIZZA

**Type: Coal-fired**

Coalfire’s charred pizza is part Naples, part New York and 100% Chicago. Baked in a 1,500-degree oven fueled by clean-burning coal, its blistered, thin-crust offering is often the grand finale on Porter’s tours. “It just kind of wows people,” he says. “Most people don’t even realize we have that kind of pizza in Chicago.”

■ 1321 W. Grand Ave., 312-226-2625, [coalfirechicago.com](http://coalfirechicago.com)