

Fire, faith and a perfect Margherita on Pizza Day

Posted on January 17, 2026 by Sabina Castelfranco

NAPLES — At the stroke of midnight on January 17 each year, a fire is lit outside the headquarters of the *Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana* (AVPN, the body that certifies authentic Neapolitan pizza) in Naples' Capodimonte district. It is not a marketing stunt. It is an act of devotion, and it signals that the city which invented pizza is, once again, claiming it back.

World Pizza Day falls on the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate, the patron saint of pizza makers and bakers, whose connection to fire runs deep. As legend has it, Saint Anthony ventured into hell, stole a spark of eternal fire, and carried it back to the world. It is a fitting tribute for a dish made complete by flames. In Naples, that tradition lives on in bonfires, free pizza distributed to the community, and a civic pride that no other city on earth can manufacture.

The date also carries formal cultural weight. On January 17, 2017, the Art of the Neapolitan Pizzaiuolo was officially inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a global designation recognising living traditions of outstanding cultural significance.

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Margherita coming out of the oven *(Credits: Italy Now)*

A day that circles the globe

For 2026, the AVPN launched a new digital platform accessible worldwide, offering free masterclasses in eight languages from January 17 through to the end of the month. At the same time, master *pizzaioli* (pizza makers) at the Naples headquarters baked hundreds of pizzas for the city's Caritas food charity in what the association calls its "Pizzas of Solidarity" initiative.

"For us, the Vera Pizza Day is much more than a celebration," said Antonio Pace, President of AVPN. "It is the moment when the Neapolitan pizza community recognises itself, shares its story, and looks together toward the future of the sector."

Ancient craft

On the streets, the traditions are older and simpler. Some pizzerias revive the historic *"Oggi a 8"* custom, allowing a customer to take a pizza today and pay in eight days, a gesture rooted in the trust and solidarity that defined working-class Naples for centuries. Special limited-edition pizzas appear, alongside the classics: Margherita, Marinara, and the Pizza Sant'Antonio, topped with pork fat, cheese, and salami.

At the historic Da Michele pizzeria in Naples, owner Sergio Condurro put it plainly. "Our entire history was born here with traditional pizzas, wheel-sized pies and classic varieties like margherita and marinara," he said. "From here, pizza reached the point of representing its history all over the world."

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