

The International Happiness of Ice Cream

By Dennis Knight

With the hundreds of flavors and brands of ice cream in our country, it is quite understandable that Americans think of it as our very own, like hot dogs and baseball. In fact, Americans have done many happy things with ice cream, but we didn't invent it.

The ancient Greeks and Romans gathered and stored snow to mix with fruits, nectars and honey, even wine. The Arabs may have been the first to use cream as an ingredient, sweetened with sugar rather than fruit juice, and in the tenth century ice cream was available in Damascus and other cities in the Middle East.

In the year 1295, Marco Polo returned to Italy from the Far East with riches, including a recipe that resembles sorbet, a frozen product made from fruits and not dairy products. In the 1660s, when creative Italian cooks added cream to the mixture, it became the rich *gelato* we know today.

Later in that century the indulgence came to the French public when a Sicilian opened a café in Paris serving a recipe blending milk, cream, butter and egg yolks into a custard. The French call it *glace*. Aaah, French Vanilla. It is rich and silky, and, like buying a yacht, if you have to ask how many calories, you can't afford it.

Quaker colonists from England brought the art of ice cream to the new world. The first advertisement for the product in America appeared in New York in 1777 when confectioner Philip Lenzi announced that ice cream was available "almost every day". One New York merchant kept records of George Washington spending about \$200 for ice cream in 1790, and Dolley Madison served it at her husband's inauguration in 1813. Augustus Jackson, an African American confectioner who had served as a chef in the White House and created many ice cream recipes, in 1832 invented a superior technique for its manufacture.

In Mexico it's *helado* and you can find it at *La Michoacana*, a popular chain that has been selling it for more than a century. The Germans formally call it *die eiskrem* but mostly they just ask for *das eis*. In Ghana, *fanice* can be bought from vendors on bicycles with ice chests. In Greece, favorite *pagoto* flavors include Olive Oil with figs, and *mavrodaphne* made from a dessert wine.

The Russians love *morozhenoe*. An indulgence called a White Russian is made with vodka added to the chilling custard. The alcohol doesn't cook off so it keeps its kick. They make a Black Russian, too, with cola and vodka.

Folks in China call their ice cream *pinyin*. It comes in vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and local flavors like black sesame and red bean. Japan imports a great deal of American ice cream but they love a green tea flavor with *anko*, a sauce made of sweet red beans.

Australians and New Zealanders are among the leading consumers of ice cream in the world. *Hokey Pokey* is a popular flavor there and in Japan as well. It is vanilla with lumps of honeycomb. The

name derives from Italian ice cream vendors in New York and London singing out words that sound like “hokey pokey” to the Anglo ear.

Ice cream has conquered the world. It is a delight for every palate, and every culture has refined it in a way that makes it uniquely theirs. Here at Windsor Gardens, at our Ice Cream Social on September 11th we’ll celebrate rich, creamy ice cream, with toppings, and proclaim it as American as apple pie.