

Home › The Library › Breaks & Getaways › Sorry, Italy, New York, and Chicago: Connecticut Still Has the Best Pizza

## Sorry, Italy, New York, and Chicago: Connecticut Still Has the Best Pizza

Oct 30 | Written By Lindsey Olander



*Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana. Photo by Tom McGovern.*

That's right. I said it. Let Chicago have its carb-heavy deep-dish. Let New Yorkers wax on about Roberta's, Joe's, and John's of Bleeker Street. Italians will always have Naples. I've ordered pizza in Italy. I've eaten my way through countless slices around New York City. I haven't made it to Chicago yet, but anyone who considers deep-dish to be the end-all to pizza pies, be honest with yourself – it's basically fancy bread. Don't @ me.

If you consider yourself a pizza lover, for God's sakes, do yourself a favor and drive to New Haven, Connecticut. Yes, this is the home of Yale University, but it also happens to be one of the pizza capitals of the world. New Haven-style apizza (pronounced "ah-beets") is what happened when Neapolitan immigrants moved in during the early 1900s and started recreating – or rather, perfecting – Naples-style pizza. The pies are baked in coal-fired ovens and, when done right, feature thin, crisp, charred crusts and messy oval shapes. No perfect circles here. And get this: cheese is considered an extra topping, so don't forget to order it if you want it. Whatever it is – New Haven's hard water, the longer fermentation process, the brick-oven char – it's created a slice unlike anything you've eaten before.

Okay, so I may be a little biased. I grew up not too far from New Haven, and often took trips to the city to attend concerts at Toad's Place, get a cone from Ashley's Ice Cream, and catch movies at the Criterion. My dad lived in New Haven after college, and loved rounding up the family for day trips through his old stomping grounds. Of course, we'd stop on Wooster Street to pick up a pie. Sally's was always our go-to, though I discovered Pepe's, right down the road, later in life. The age-old argument of Pepe's versus Sally's remains hotly debated to this day.

I'm not going to tell you which one is the best. I'll leave that up to you. For now, here's a lead on where to head first to get an authentic taste of apizza.

## The Best Pizza Spots in Connecticut

### 1. Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana, New Haven

Anyone who knows anything about pizza (especially pizza from Connecticut) knows about Pepe's. The original Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana opened in 1925 in Wooster Square before moving over to its current resting place on Wooster Street. Although the brand has since expanded across Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and, yes, even New York, history calls for sitting down at the first location, which is still run by Pepe's great-grandchildren. All the recipes here are the originals, but the best, by far, is the famous white clam pizza, which comes topped with freshly shucked littleneck clams, garlic, olive oil, oregano, grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, and no sauce in sight.

### 2. Sally's Apizza, New Haven

Pepe's may have a one-up on the history — Sally's, which was started by Pepe's nephew, Salvatore Consiglio, opened over a decade later in 1938 — but for a no-holds-barred New Haven pizza experience, nothing can compare to Sally's' hole-in-the-wall interiors, old-school vibes (it's cash-only here), or coal-baked pies. Not to mention Sally's still operates out of its original location. You're not here to snap Instagrams or chat up the servers. Instead, it's sit down, order up, and dig in. What sets Sally's apart is their tomato sauce and the fact that this is the only location in the world

where you can get a taste of it. In fact, when Frank Sinatra had a show in New York, he'd send his driver to Connecticut to pick up a pie from Sally's. Naturally, go for the tomato pie. Still craving some "mootz"? The garden pie topped with tomato, mozzarella, zucchini, and basil is also lip-smacking good.

### **3. Modern Apizza, New Haven**

Despite its name, Modern opened in 1934 on State Street and, unlike its coal-loving competitors, still fires its thin-crust pizzas in one of the last-surviving oil-fed, wood-fired brick ovens in the country. Truer to the brand are the interiors, which are far more sleek and up-to-date than that opening date might suggest. The pies here tend to be wetter and heavier than Sally's or Pepe's due to the amount of toppings they cram on the surface, but that just means every pie packs a bigger wallop of flavor. For the true experience, go for the Italian Bomb, which comes with a crowded mixture of seven toppings: sausage, peppers, pepperoni, bacon, onions, garlic, and mushrooms.

### **4. BAR, New Haven**

The newest of New Haven's pizza meccas, Bar opened in 1996 and attracts a younger crowd with its hipster-chic interiors, house-made beer, and club-like atmosphere at night. Unlike the coal- and oil-fueled ovens of its more famous neighbors, Bar fires its pies with gas, but the crust still ends up being light and crispy. Plus, there's even – gasp! – a salad on the menu, to break up all that cheese and dough. Choose from a bevy of topping combos like the offbeat mashed potato and bacon, or stick to the classics (white or red, mozzarella or not) and wash it all down with a seasonal house brew like their OktoBAR fest bier or Toasted Blonde Ale.

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### 5. Roseland Apizza, Derby

Just like Sally's, Roseland's bric-a-brac interiors have that historic, collected feel of long decades in the business, which hasn't changed much since the place opened in 1935. Also like Sally's, everyone raves about their plain tomato pie, but it's worth branching out for house-made toppings like sausage or, if you have cash to burn, fresh seafood specialty pies like their weighty Ponsinella pie made with lobster, shrimp, scallops, and breadcrumbs.

### 6. Colony Grill, Stamford

New Haven might have the monopoly on Connecticut's most famous pizza joints, but a few outliers are equally worth the drive. One of them is Colony Grill, in Stamford, which has been serving loyal customers as far back as 1935 with one thing and one thing only – pizza. This spot serves theirs with limited toppings including their signature hot oil, which is infused with Serrano chili peppers for a tangy, spicy twang that makes their pies truly unique.

## 7. Zuppardi's Apizza, West Haven

It may have been a bakery in its former life, but that just means Zuppardi's has perfected the art of baking pizza dough. This West Haven institution, which has operated out of this location since 1934 and still sports an old-fashioned sign out front, remains in the family and even operates a food truck that makes its rounds to parties and events for a personalized touch on the apizza experience.

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Lindsey Olander is a writer, editor, and insatiable traveler based in New York whose words have been published by *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Departures*, Tripadvisor, and others. Read more of her work at [lindseytravels.com](https://lindseytravels.com) or say hi on Instagram [@lindseytravels](https://www.instagram.com/lindseytravels).



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