

Slice up your Life: The Papa John's Pizza Experience.

If you put your mind to it, it's easy to think of a hundred slogans that try to convince you of the value of one product over another. Slick taglines and clever, million dollar ad campaigns are fine but there is something about Papa John's "better ingredients, better pizza" motto which is charming in its refreshing simplicity. No weird grammar to confuse you; or jumpy exclamation marks to shout you into compliance. Just a quiet altruism that the better ingredients the better the pizza. It's hard to argue with that kind of logic.

If you're looking for pizza's place in today's Chinese dining culture, you'll find it carving out its niche at the junction of *Western cuisine* and *Eastern eating habits*. The appeal of being able to sit around a table and share a meal from the same plate, where everyone gets the tastiest morsel of the dish because each slice is just as good as the last, is a strong one. Therefore Papa John's Pizza's rapid assimilation into the mainstream of Chinese culture should come as no surprise. In a world where to remain closed to international trends means to get left behind, Chinese diners are as keen to keep their palates up to speed as they are their business and academic endeavors.

For the urban population, a growing number of whom are converting from the "pizza-curious" to pizza aficionados, disposable income is higher now than it has been at any other stage in recent history. Yet we are still as demanding of value for our money as we've ever been. We want quick, convenient, quality food and Papa John's pizza, which has become synonymous with all three of those qualities throughout the United States, delivers on this. The Papa John's brand has succeeded in maintaining this Western ethos among all the cultures in which it is found. And you don't just have to take their word for it that everything is prepared in-house. You can watch the entire busy production – from dough slapping to oven tending to pizza topping – through a glass partition that divides the kitchen from the dining area in a typical Papa John's restaurant.

Food is something we all like to feel we are experts on. After all, everyone gets an equal amount of practice at eating it. So you have to wonder how long it will be before the age old debates start to rear their heads amongst pizza enthusiasts in this

corner of the globe. Is pizza finger food or should you be eating it with a knife and fork? Is it better enjoyed by making evening of it and eating at the restaurant or ordered in after a long day at work when you'd rather pick up the phone than wrestle with the pots and pans in your kitchen? What is the ideal number of cheeses to add to your "customize your toppings" creation? And, culinary purists look away now, just what is it about leftover pizza for breakfast that makes it taste so darn good?

One suspects that these are all questions with no definitive answer. But that they even exist, is testament to the choice that pizza offers. There's something for every palate. Look at any Papa John's menu: The meat eaters and the vegetarians are strongly represented. As are the spice-lovers and those who like their pizzas mild. Fans of the thin and crispy base versus those of the thick crust with the cheese-filled rim. Or go for the half and half option where you can combine two pizzas in one. If you can decide on it, there's a pretty good chance that Papa John's can make it.

It's tempting to end by thinking of a pizza as some sort of metaphor for life. But that would be pretentious and overcomplicated – something pizza itself certainly isn't. It might be a while before we can call pizza conventional Chinese food but while Papa John's continues to build its reputation on the simplicity of "better ingredients, better pizza", we know that good food and quick service and competitive prices will remain a staple once it does.