

SICILIAN CONFECTIONERY

Sicily boasts a very lavish confectionery of both professional and home-made pastries.

The Queen of Sicilian sweets is the 'Cassata'. Originally an Easter cake, it is now made for any occasion and can be found anywhere. Every City, Area, Town, or Family has its very own recipe and they all proudly claim it is 'the real Sicilian Cassata'.

Cassata is made from the basic ingredients of ricotta cheese and candied fruit, and originated during the time of Arab domination. Its name in fact comes from the Arab term "Quas'at", meaning 'round bowl'.

It is said that around the year 1,000, at the height of Muslim domination, in the Emir's palace at the Kalsa in Palermo, the court's chefs enjoyed mixing flavours and colours together. They produced this cake from the different ingredients in Saracen cooking.

For centuries, it was only the nuns in monasteries and the cooks in noblemen's homes who held the recipe secret.

From a typical Easter sweet, and purely from Palermo, even defined as "indispensable" in a document approved during the Mazara Synod in 1575, the Sicilian Cassata, now known all over the world, gradually became the typical cake of Sicilian confectionery. It is now produced all year round.

In Catania a smaller version for just one person is popular and called "Minnuzze'e Sant'Ajta" (Saint Agata's breasts) in honour of the City's Patron Saint's Martyrdom consisting in the amputation of her breasts.

Sicilian 'cannoli', which are also made from ricotta cheese that's inserted into cylindrical wafers, are known worldwide.

"Geli" (jellies), also of Arab origin, are fruit-flavoured or spiced puddings: cinnamon, chocolate, coffee, lemon, melon, orange, mandarin



The "Bianco Mangiare" made from almonds (blancmange) stands out among them. Almonds are widely used in Sicilian confectionery, especially to make "Paste di Mandorla" (almond pastries) that are very traditional sweets, but still eaten today.

Almond paste is used to create the nice, tasty "Marzapane" (marzipan) compositions of different types of fruit

On Mount Etna, where Hazel trees have always been grown, you can easily find, especially at Sant'Alfio, the tasty "Paste di Nocciole" (hazelnut pastries), which look like the almond ones, but have a strong sweet hazelnut flavor.