

## cover story

6 SLICES: FABULOSO!



5 SLICES: DAMN GOOD



4 SLICES: GOOD



3 SLICES: NOT BAD



2 SLICES: EHH



1 SLICE: BLECH!

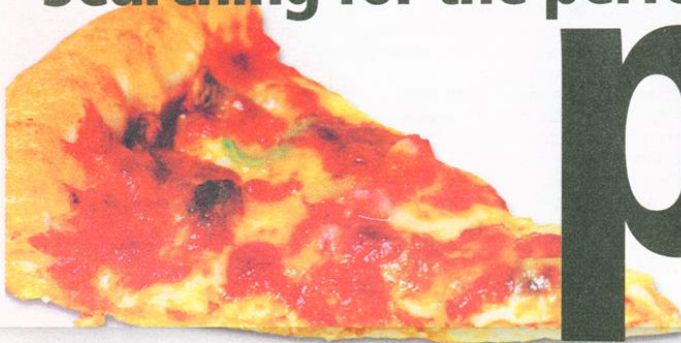


# Searching for the perfect



# pizza

Weekly staffers rate some of the local joints



**M**onday: "What's for lunch?" Pizza. Tuesday: "What's for lunch?" Pizza. Wednesday: "What's for lunch?" PIZZA. It was a greasy job, but someone had to do it.

With the release of "Tale of Two Pizzas" on Friday, April 22, at Cinemas Palme d'Or, we here at the Weekly had the half-baked idea of scouring the Coachella Valley and sampling many of its local pizza joints.

Why? After you see the film, you're sure to be craving a hot, saucy pie yourself. So, hoping that you'll break the mold of going to the same joint you usually frequent, Weekly staffers Dan Carlin, Judith Salkin, Valerie Christopher, Kevin Necessary and Brian Medricka decided to slice up the valley, scarf down some pizza, rate it and serve you up some options.

### Matchbox Vintage Pizza

**Where:** 155 S. Palm Canyon Drive, second floor, across from The Falls Steakhouse, Palm Springs. (760) 778-6000

**Selection:** Two pizzas, half portabella, half Prosciutto and half Spicy Meatball and half Q Special

**Damages:** \$19 for the mushroom/prosciutto pie; \$20 for the Q special/meatball

**The verdict:** There's a place in the desert that knows what an East Coast thin-crust pie is all about!

The secret to the Matchbox pies is the brick wood-fired oven that cooks at between 800 and 850 degrees Fahrenheit, giving the crusts a slightly singed edge and the entire pizza a rich, smoky flavor — although a real East Coast pizza is cooked in a coal fired oven.

The pies aren't covered with so many toppings that the delicate, thin (we're talking about 3/8-inch) crust cracks under the weight.

The portabella has nice sized slices of mushroom, chunks of artichoke, not too much garlic and mozzarella cheese on a crust brushed with extra virgin olive oil.

The Q special offers grilled marinated chicken, portabella mushrooms, roasted red peppers, a zesty tomato sauce and mozzarella. There's not too much of anything, except flavor and crunch.

A couple of words of warning: thin crust pizzas should be eaten as soon as they come

out of the oven or shortly thereafter to preserve the crispness of the crust. Don't overload them with toppings, though, because they're too delicate.

If you don't like red sauce, you have options at Matchbox: extra virgin olive oil, house-made pesto or zesty red.



### Good Stuff Pizza

**Where:** 78-383 Highway 111, La Quinta on the corner of Washington Street and Highway 111 in Vons Center. (760) 771-4440

**Damages:** \$5 lunch special, includes a drink

**Selection:** 7-inch personal pizza with spinach, feta cheese and onions

**The verdict:** It's a pizza that left us feeling great. Much more like a light European pizza than any of its American relatives, this pie featured feta, spinach and red onions piled on top of a subtle layer of mozzarella and tomato sauce, all placed on a rich, thin crust.

The effect is something like eating grilled pita bread topped with a hearty tapenade. There's barely any grease on this pie, just a little juice oozing from the fresh spinach that blends with the feta to make a squishy, salty mash of delicious flavors.



### NYPD Pizza

**Where:** 260 N. Palm Canyon Drive, across from the downtown Hyatt Hotel, Palm Springs. (760) 778-6973

**Damage:** 2 slices for \$5.39

**Selection:** One slice of Misdemeanor pizza (cheese, black olives, onion, green peppers and artichoke hearts); second slice pepperoni

**The verdict:** Now, this is New York pizza!

If you have ever eaten a NYC pie where the grease greets your mouth before the slice does, then you know that's a good thing. NYPD is one of those pies.

The sauce doesn't quite measure up to NYC, but the slices are light and filled with enough flavor in each bite that you can taste everything you order on it.

The cheese is scattered throughout, which first made us think, hmmm, we're not sure we're going to like this. But boy were we ever wrong.

From the onions to the mushrooms, everything is well proportioned enough to wow. The crust is thin, but will have you wishing there was more.



### Sammy's Pizza

**Where:** Agua Caliente Casino, 32-250 Bob Hope Drive, Rancho Mirage. (760) 202-6068

**Damage:** \$12.01 for a 10-inch pie

**Selection:** Half pepperoni and half olives, green pepper and onion

**The verdict:** After nearly a week of eating pizza, the thought of another pie was practically more than anyone could bear. But, surprise! This 10-inch pie exceeded all expectations. The crust was light and tender. It probably would have been a bit crunchier and crispier if we'd had a chance to eat it straight out of the oven.

No matter. There was no skimping on toppings, but no over-abundance either. Like Goldilocks proclaimed, "It was just right."

The pepperoni side wasn't greasy, and the veggie side had the tang of kalamata olives instead of the ordinary canned black olives you generally find on a pizza.

The only drawback to this pizza: They only make the one 10-inch size pie. The upside: The pies are reasonably priced, and if there's a group of folks, you can order two or three different pies and sample instead of scarf.



### Caffé Italia Spaghetteria Pizzeria

**Where:** 2500 N. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. (760) 864-1833

**Damage:** \$11.95

**Selection:** 12-inch primavera (green

peppers, onions, black olives and mushroom)

**The verdict:** You can barely pick up a slice of this pie without the grease dripping off the bread.

Each bite of the primavera is like eating lasagna where the pasta has been replaced by delicious dough that's neither chewy nor soggy.

The grease seems to disappear as the tomato sauce and the cheese become one.

This pie, served on a thin crust, is just darn memorable. At last, a pie that tastes as though the bread has been dipped in the right amount of olive oil and has been dressed so delicately, it melts in your mouth and falls apart in your hands.



### Ciro's Ristorante & Pizzeria

**Where:** 81-963 Highway 111 Indio. (760) 347-6503 (second location at: 78-110 Calle Estado, La Quinta, (760) 564-8646)

**Damage:** \$13.31 (\$2 tip included)

**Selection:** small pepperoni pizza

**The verdict:** Lots and lots of pepperoni distributed evenly on this pie made it tasty from the first to last bite. There was nothing special about the sauce, but the crust was nice and chewy — not too thick but not too thin, either.

Given the amount of pepperoni, this pizza wasn't as greasy as most we tasted and, in fact, didn't need any dabbing at all before digging in.

Several pieces re-warmed nicely for a late-night snack.



### La Trattoria Pizzeria (Formerly La Pizza Loco)

**Where:** 68-525 Ramon Road #A-101, Cathedral City. (760) 202-3999.

**Damages:** 2 pies for \$31.72 (Mexican Specialty Pizza, \$15.99; regular pizza, \$10.99, extra for toppings bacon, pepperoni and cheese)

**Selection:** 16-inch Mexican Pizza with beans, cheese, jalapeños and onions and