



THE TIRAMISU *MYSTERY*

A Coffee and Cream Delicacy with Blurry Origins

Written by Jenna Sents | Photographs by Ola Czartorjska

Tiramisu: a long-adored Italian layered dessert. But for how long? Tiramisu has a rather disputed origin with its argued creation ranging from the 1800s to the 1970s. The translation of “tira mi su” means “pick me up,” which could not more accurately describe the feeling you get when you take a bite of soft coffee-soaked ladyfingers surrounded by sweet and creamy mascarpone. However, where this pick-me-up of a dessert came from remains somewhat of a mystery.

One urban legend of tiramisu’s origin is that in the 1800s, a woman who worked at a brothel invented it to reinvigorate her customers before going home to their wives. Other claims point to the dish called the “Duke’s Soup,” which was created for the Grand Duke Cosimo III de’ Medici.

However, it’s hard to believe these tales since they lack much evidence. In fact, the word tiramisu wasn’t used in text until the 1980s and wasn’t commonly known in America until 1993 when it was mentioned in the film “Sleepless in Seattle.”

One 20th-century theory traces the origin of tiramisu back to a hotel restaurant in Tolmezzo, Italy where it was known as “Vetturino Tirime Su” and served in a cup. While this was a slightly different version of the tiramisu we know today, it’s hard to say whether this dish was close enough to be the first version, if it had an influence on modern tiramisu, or was just a legend like the rest.

Through all these indeterminate theories, there is one popular story that is most widely considered to be the origin of tiramisu. The cool, creamy dessert was said to have been created in December of 1969 at a restaurant called Le Beccherie by Alba Di Pillo-Campeol and Roberto “Loli” Linguanotto.

Linguanotto described the creation of the dessert as an accident when he dropped mascarpone into a bowl of eggs and sugar. Later, he and Di Pillo-Campeol perfected the recipe by adding coffee and ladyfingers. The original recipe was actually made in a circular, cheesecake shape and served in slices.

Traditionally, tiramisu is made with eggs, sugar, mascarpone, ladyfingers, coffee, and cocoa powder. The ladyfingers are soaked in the coffee and layered with a whipped combination of eggs, sugar, and mascarpone with a final sprinkling of cocoa on top. Newer

recipes call for a small amount of liquor, normally Kahlúa or rum.

In my house, tiramisu has always been a rare, yet much-loved dessert. As a kid, I can remember quietly watching my mother soak ladyfingers in coffee and place them neatly in rows sandwiched between sweet mascarpone. The practice of assembling the tiramisu is a tranquil and rewarding experience. Layers of sweet and bitter are intricately stacked into each bite with a creamy yet slightly gritty texture. Much like Starbucks’ marketed “first sip feeling,” there is this first bite feeling you get from tiramisu. It’s almost as if all the muscles in your mouth relax as soon as they are hit with the dessert’s complex flavors.

In my mom’s recipe book, I found a page of her sworn tiramisu recipe “courtesy Steven Ullman” from the Food Network with the words “#1 Recipe!” penciled in at the top.



Ingredients:

- 2 eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- 12 tablespoons sugar
- 500 g mascarpone cheese (1 large tub)
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- Pinch of salt
- 10 tablespoons white rum or Marsala wine or Kahlúa
- 2 cups espresso (or to taste)
- 1 large package ladyfingers (about 50 biscuits)
- 1 whole cup chopped semisweet chocolate

Assembly:

One at a time, quickly dip each biscuit in the espresso mixture and then place on the bottom of a 9 by 13 glass baking pan. Continue until you have an entire layer of biscuits on the bottom of the pan. (Note of caution: dip quickly or biscuits will become soggy).

Using a spatula spread half of the mascarpone cream over the biscuits. Repeat the process above to make a second layer. This should fill the pan.

Finish:

Refrigerate 8 to 10 hours or overnight. Grate the chocolate over the top. Enjoy!

Instructions:

1. In an electric mixer bowl, combine 2 eggs and 2 whole egg yolks then add approximately 8 tablespoons of sugar. With whisk attachment, beat until shy of soft peaks. Once the correct consistency is achieved, whisk in the mascarpone cheese.
2. In a separate bowl, whip the cream along with 2 tablespoons of sugar and a pinch of salt. Once hard peaks form, add the whipped cream to the egg/mascarpone mixture and beat until smooth, adding approximately 2 tablespoons of alcohol of choice.
3. In a separate bowl, pour the hot espresso and add 2 tablespoons sugar and 8 tablespoons Marsala.

