



Walk into a good pizza restaurant and most people do the same thing first, they scan for pies. Fair enough. Pizza earns top billing for a reason. It is the star, the house specialty, the dish that usually built the place's reputation. But if you spend enough time in pizzerias, especially the independent spots that survive on repeat business rather than novelty, you learn something useful. The rest of the menu tells you almost as much about the kitchen as the pizza does.

A strong non-pizza menu reveals discipline. It shows whether the cooks understand timing, seasoning, texture, and how to move food through a busy service without sending out a plate that feels like an afterthought. Some of the best things I have eaten in a pizza restaurant were not slices at all. They were crisp calamari that arrived hot enough to steam when the basket hit the table, meatballs with a long-cooked depth you do not fake in an **Italian pizza restaurant** hour, and salads that tasted built for real diners rather than printed to satisfy an obligation.

This matters whether you are ordering for a group, feeding a family with mixed appetites, or trying to judge a place before committing to a large pie. Not every meal needs to revolve around crust. Sometimes the best order is a pizza for the table plus a few supporting dishes that carry their own weight. Sometimes the right move is skipping pizza altogether because the sandwich or baked pasta is what that kitchen quietly does best.

What the rest of the menu says about the kitchen

A pizza restaurant can hide a lot behind molten cheese and a hot deck oven, but side dishes and entrées expose weaknesses quickly. Fried food goes limp if the oil is not maintained. Pasta turns gummy if it sits too long or gets dressed carelessly. Chicken parm can become a heavy, breaded slab if the kitchen is more interested in volume

than balance. On the other hand, a thoughtful menu beyond pizza suggests a team that cares about the whole dining experience.

I often judge pizzerias by three less glamorous details. First, whether the appetizers arrive at the right temperature. Second, whether the sauce tastes made with intent rather than poured from a commodity bag. Third, whether greens look alive. These sound simple, but they separate reliable neighborhood spots from places that survive only on convenience.

There is also a practical side to all this. In many households, one person wants a classic cheese pie, another wants wings, a third wants pasta, and someone else is looking for a salad substantial enough to count as dinner. The modern pizza restaurant that handles those demands well earns loyalty. The one that treats every non-pizza item as filler usually loses it.

Appetizers that deserve a spot on the table

The best appetizers at a pizza restaurant do more than kill time while the pie bakes. They set the tone, and ideally they show a different skill set than pizza alone. Garlic knots are the obvious example, but they are not automatically great. Too many come out dry, overbrowned, or slicked in raw garlic and oil without enough salt. When they are done right, though, they are one of the most satisfying indicators that the dough program is strong. You get chew, tenderness, and a crust with real character in one bite.

Mozzarella sticks can be better than their bad reputation suggests. In a quality pizzeria, the cheese should stretch without leaking out of the breading, and the exterior should stay crisp long enough to survive the trip from fryer to table. The marinara on the side matters more than people admit. If the dipping sauce tastes flat, sweet, or metallic, it often foreshadows a disappointing red sauce elsewhere on the menu.

Then there are wings, perhaps the most useful crossover item in a pizza restaurant. A place that gets wings right understands timing and seasoning under pressure. Crisp skin, sauce that clings, and a balance between smoke, heat, butter, and acidity tell you the kitchen has standards. Some pizzerias par-bake their wings in the pizza oven before finishing them to order, which can work beautifully when done carefully. Others fry them. Either method can succeed. What fails is a soggy wing drowned in sauce because texture was ignored.

Calamari is a more ambitious test. Many pizzerias offer it, fewer handle it well. The margin for error is small. Undercook it and the coating slips. Overcook it and it turns rubbery. A restaurant willing to keep calamari on the menu and execute it consistently deserves credit. The same goes for clams, mussels, or baked stuffed mushrooms. These are dishes that require attention, not just assembly.

If I had to choose the appetizer categories that most often deliver in a strong pizza restaurant, they would look like this:

1. Garlic knots or house bread, because dough quality shows immediately
2. Wings, because execution depends on timing and texture
3. Meatballs, because sauce and seasoning are hard to fake
4. Fried calamari, because fryer discipline matters
5. Antipasto or a house salad, because freshness tells the truth

That mix covers several skills at once, oven work, frying, saucing, butchery, and produce handling. A kitchen that excels across those areas usually has more depth than its signage suggests.

The sleeper hit: meatballs and red sauce dishes

If a pizza restaurant has house-made meatballs, order them at least once. They are one of the clearest indicators of whether anyone in the kitchen still respects old-school prep. Good meatballs require seasoning restraint, enough bread or milk-soaked crumb for tenderness, and a sauce that can support them instead of smothering them. The best versions hold together but yield easily with a fork. They should taste of meat first, herbs second, cheese third, not the other way around.

I have seen this item separate serious neighborhood institutions from trendy operations more than once. A flashy new spot can open with a dramatic oven and social media appeal, but if its meatballs taste dense and one-note, it usually means corners were cut in the less photogenic parts of the menu. Meanwhile, a dated-looking family pizza restaurant with excellent meatballs and patient red sauce often turns out to be the place locals trust when they are feeding ten people and cannot afford a bad meal.

Chicken parm lives in the same family. It is one of the most over-ordered and under-discussed dishes in a pizza restaurant. When it is bad, it is aggressively bad, watery sauce, rubbery cheese, cutlet fried too early and reheated into submission. When it is good, it is deeply comforting, with a crisp cutlet, enough sauce to keep it lively, and cheese applied with some restraint. The best kitchens understand that chicken parm is a texture dish as much as a flavor dish.

Eggplant parm is another test of care. Properly prepared eggplant takes time. It must be salted or otherwise managed so it cooks creamy rather than spongy. A good version has structure without feeling heavy. A careless one collapses into oil and mush. In a busy pizza restaurant, the difference says a lot about the prep culture.

Pasta can be a smart order, if the kitchen respects it

Pasta in a pizza restaurant is often treated as backup food, but that is not always fair. Some pizzerias, especially East Coast red-sauce institutions, make excellent baked ziti, lasagna, penne vodka, and linguine with clam sauce. These dishes fit the rhythm of the kitchen. Sauces can be made ahead with care, portions can be generous without being sloppy, and the flavors tend to appeal to groups.

Baked pasta is particularly well suited to a pizza restaurant because it benefits from the same oven environment that gives pizza its appeal. A bubbling tray of baked ziti with browned edges, balanced cheese, and properly seasoned sauce can be every bit as satisfying as a slice. Lasagna is harder. It requires labor and consistency. The best versions have distinct layers, not a collapsed mass of ricotta and noodles. When a pizzeria serves an especially good lasagna, I take it as a sign that somebody in the back still believes in craft.

Seafood pastas are riskier. A pizza restaurant can absolutely do a strong linguine with clams or shrimp fra diavolo, but the room for mistakes is larger. Seafood must be fresh, cooked briefly, and supported by a sauce with real clarity. In inland locations or lower-volume shops, I approach these dishes cautiously. That is not snobbery, just pattern recognition.

Cream sauces deserve caution too. Alfredo and similar dishes often become excessively thick because they sit under heat lamps or are made to survive delivery rather than taste lively in house. If I am ordering pasta from a pizza restaurant for takeout, I usually lean toward red or oil-based sauces, which travel better and reheat more gracefully.

Sandwiches and subs, where many pizzerias quietly shine

The sandwich board is one of the most underrated sections in any pizza restaurant. People forget that a pizzeria often has all the makings for excellent hot sandwiches: fresh bread or rolls, cured meats, cutlets, roasted

vegetables, melted cheese, and a high-heat oven. Put those elements together with care and you get some of the most dependable lunches in town.

Chicken parm subs, meatball subs, sausage and peppers, and Italian heroes are classic for a reason. They suit the environment. The bread should hold up under sauce, the filling should be generous without turning unwieldy, and the cheese should bind rather than blanket. The best shops understand construction. They know where moisture belongs, how much dressing is enough, and when a sandwich needs sharp provolone instead of mozzarella to keep it from tasting flat.

Cold Italian subs can tell you plenty about ingredient standards. You do not have the disguise of heat or melted cheese, so quality matters. Fresh lettuce, properly sliced onion, balanced vinaigrette, and meats that taste distinct rather than generically salty all count. If the sandwich tastes muddy, the kitchen likely lacks discipline in other areas too.

There is also a business reality here. At lunchtime, many pizza restaurants move more sandwiches than whole pies. The places that recognize this do not treat subs as side work. They train for them. They portion consistently. They make sure every bite resembles the one before it. You can feel that professionalism immediately.

Salads that do more than occupy menu space

A serious pizza restaurant never needs to apologize for serving salad. In fact, some of the most useful menu items are the ones that cut through all the cheese, bread, and char. A crisp Caesar, a properly dressed arugula salad, or a classic antipasto can change the entire meal. The right salad makes a group order feel balanced rather than heavy.

What separates a real salad program from a token one is not fancy ingredients. It is condition and proportion. Romaine should snap. Tomatoes should taste like tomatoes, even if they are not peak summer fruit. Olives, pepperoncini, salami, chickpeas, and provolone should be distributed so the bowl eats evenly. Dressing should coat, not drown.

I have often noticed that better pizza restaurants keep salads intentionally simple. They are not trying to be a New American bistro. They are trying to offer freshness, acidity, and contrast. That is the right instinct. A salad served alongside pizza has a job. It should wake up your palate, not compete for conceptual attention.

For diners who want a lighter entrée, entrée salads with grilled chicken, shrimp, or cutlet can work well, though this is another section where execution varies. Warm protein over cold greens sounds straightforward, but if the chicken is bland or the shrimp overcooked, the whole plate loses momentum. When ordering a main-course salad from a pizza restaurant, I usually favor grilled chicken over fried. It places less stress on timing and tends to hold up better.

The underappreciated power of soups and house specials

Soup is not the first thing people associate with a pizza restaurant, yet it can be one of the most comforting and revealing choices on the menu. Pasta e fagioli, Italian wedding soup, lentil soup, or a rotating minestrone often tells you whether the kitchen still cooks from a real base of aromatics, stock, beans, and herbs. Soup rewards patience. It also punishes indifference.

At several long-running pizzerias I have visited over the years, soup was the item regulars guarded like a secret. They knew which day the escarole and beans showed up, or when the sausage lentil would be on. These were not flashy dishes. They were the kind people ordered when they trusted a kitchen and wanted the thing made with care rather than fanfare.

House specials also deserve attention, especially in family-run spots where the menu has grown organically over decades. Veal saltimbocca, shrimp scampi, baked clams, or a simple roasted chicken dish can sometimes reflect the owners' background more directly than the pizza does. Not every special is worth chasing, but if a restaurant has been making one dish for twenty years and regulars still talk about it, that is rarely an accident.

How to tell what is actually worth ordering

No menu section is universally safe, and no dish category guarantees success. A smart order depends on reading the restaurant in front of you. Is this a slice shop doing speed and volume, or a full-service pizza restaurant with a broader kitchen? Does the room smell like garlic and tomato or old fryer oil? Are takeout boxes stacked to the ceiling, suggesting delivery is the core business, or do tables linger over platters and wine?

A few practical signals help. If a menu is huge, lean toward items that overlap with the restaurant's strengths. In most pizza restaurants, that means baked dishes, red-sauce classics, subs, and straightforward salads. Be cautious with anything that seems to belong to a different genre entirely. A pizzeria can serve a decent burger or salmon entrée, but once a menu stretches too far, consistency often slips.

Server guidance can be useful if you ask the right question. Instead of "What's good?" ask "What do people come back for besides pizza?" That phrasing usually gets a more honest answer. Staff know the regulars' patterns. They know whether the chicken marsala moves every night or whether the fried zucchini is mostly decorative ink on the page.

Here are a few signs that the non-pizza side of the menu deserves confidence:

1. The restaurant has a short list of house specialties people clearly recognize
2. Appetizers arrive hot, crisp, and properly seasoned
3. Salads look freshly assembled rather than prepped hours ago
4. Red sauce tastes balanced, neither sugary nor harshly acidic
5. The menu shows focus instead of trying to imitate every restaurant type nearby

None of these guarantees greatness, but together they point toward a kitchen that pays attention.

Best choices for groups, families, and mixed appetites

The strongest use of a pizza restaurant menu beyond pizza appears when you are feeding several people at once. A table with one large pie, an order of wings, a salad, and a baked pasta often eats better than a table that orders three heavy specialty pizzas and nothing else. Variety helps. So does textural contrast.

Families especially benefit from knowing which supporting items hold up. Meatballs usually please both adults and kids. Garlic knots disappear fast. A chicken parm platter can stretch across a table if sliced. Baked ziti travels well for takeout and reheats better than many other pasta dishes. Wings bridge different cravings without requiring much negotiation.

For office lunches or casual parties, sandwich platters from a dependable pizza restaurant are often a smarter move than people expect. They are easier to portion, friendlier to mixed dietary preferences, and less prone to the "everything tastes the same after two slices" effect that can happen with all-pizza spreads. Add a salad that actually tastes fresh and the whole order feels more thoughtful.

That said, there are trade-offs. Fried items soften in transit. Delicate seafood can suffer during delivery. Cream-based pastas get heavy fast. If the meal is going to sit for twenty or thirty minutes before people eat, I would

rather trust a meatball sub, antipasto, or baked pasta than fried calamari or Alfredo.

Why the best non-pizza items tend to be simple

The deepest lesson from years of eating in pizzerias is that simplicity wins. The best dishes beyond pizza usually rely on a handful of ingredients treated properly. Good bread, sound sauce, crisp lettuce, seasoned cutlets, and careful oven work go farther than an overbuilt special with ten toppings and three drizzles.

That is part of the charm of a great pizza restaurant. It does not need to become something else to feed people well. It just needs to apply the same care it gives dough to the rest of the menu. When that happens, the rewards are substantial. A basket of garlic knots becomes memorable rather than filler. A salad sharpens the whole table's appetite. A meatball sub turns into the reason you come back on weekdays when you are not in the mood for a pie.

Pizza may bring people through the door, but a thoughtful menu beyond pizza is what often keeps them coming back. The places that understand this rarely advertise it loudly. They do not need to. Their regulars already know which appetizer starts the meal, which baked pasta satisfies a crowd, and which sandwich quietly outperforms half the menu. If you start paying attention to those dishes, you will find that the best pizza restaurant often has a lot more to offer than pizza alone.

Ruffrano's Hell's Kitchen Pizza Manitou Springs

9 Ruxton Ave, Manitou Springs, CO 80829

Phone: +1 719-685-4355

FAQ About pizza restaurant

Is There a Hell's Kitchen Pizza Restaurant in Manitou Springs?

Yes. Ruffrano's Hell's Kitchen Pizza Manitou Springs is located at 9 Ruxton Ave, Manitou Springs, CO 80829. Call +1 719-685-4355 to confirm current ordering and dining arrangements.

How Spicy Is a "Hellfire" Style Pizza Really?

The menu lists hot Italian sausage, pepperoni, cherry peppers and Hellfire sauce on the Hellfire pizza. Heat tolerance varies, so ask the restaurant about the sauce and possible adjustments before ordering if you prefer milder food.

What Kind of Sauce Is on BBQ Chicken Pizza?

The restaurant's menu lists BBQ sauce with mozzarella, chicken, onions and banana peppers on its BBQ Chicken pizza. Confirm current ingredients and any allergy requirements directly with the restaurant before ordering.