

Chocolate – Food of the gods

The Aztecs loved it



Chocolate, Chocolat, Schokolade – no matter in which language you say it, the very word itself melts on your tongue, makes your mouth water. And then there's its aroma! It holds the promise of creamy sweetness, velvety happiness. Chocolate is seductive, sensual, irresistible.

It's always had the power to enthrall people. Goethe, Casanova, Napoleon I and Maria Theresia – they were all addicted to it. Yet the history of chocolate and its seductive ways stretches back much farther into the past.

The Mayas had brewed a bitter beverage from cocoa beans, water and spices, to which they attributed healing powers. The Aztecs later went on to refine this South American "ambrosia" with vanilla and

honey, calling it tchocolatl: The original form of today's hot chocolate.

Cocoa beans were brought to Europe in 1527 by Hernán Cortéz, the conqueror of Mexico. However it wasn't until the 17th century that chocolate set out on its triumphal march through Europe. That's when it began to be produced in the form of chocolate bars that were based upon innumerable recipes. In the 18th century, these recipes might have consisted of cocoa, vanilla,



cloves, cinnamon and sugar, optionally enhanced with such other ingredients as egg yolk and Madeira.

Milk chocolate was invented in Switzerland during the second half of the 19th century. The Italians, on the other hand, created the combination of chocolate and hazelnut. The Belgians, first and foremost, are also masters of the art of chocolate

making. In 1912, they created the first compact chocolate coating, and with it the prerequisite for a very special delicacy: Belgian boxed candies, famous for their sumptuous, rich taste.

Germans, on the other hand, are masters when it comes to consuming chocolate. In 2001, Germans nibbled away at an average of 8.5 kilograms of chocolate each. This puts Germany near the very top of the world rankings – surpassed only by the Swiss at 9.7 kilograms. So it's all the nicer that medical research is increasingly discovering that while chocolate does add pounds to the hips (100 grams contain around 550 calories, it is nevertheless quite healthy when enjoyed in moderation. It raises the level of serotonin in the blood, which reduces irritability and enhances the mood. Moreover, the cocoa contained in chocolate lowers the risk of heart attack and stroke. If that's not a good reason to reach for chocolate!