

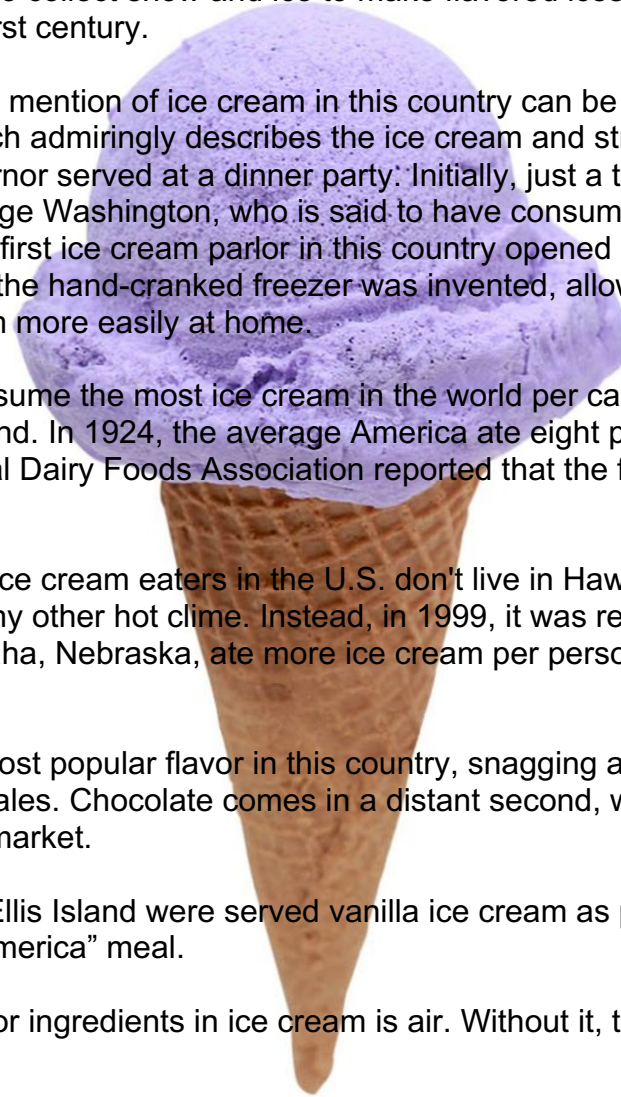
Thirteen Fun Facts about Ice Cream

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It's almost summertime and the scoopin' is easy--but just how much do you know about one of America's oldest desserts? Check out these fun facts about our favorite frozen treat.

1. Legend has it that the Roman emperor Nero used to send his slaves scurrying to the mountains to collect snow and ice to make flavored ices, the precursors to ice cream, in the first century.
2. The first written mention of ice cream in this country can be found in a letter from the 1700s, which admiringly describes the ice cream and strawberry dessert a Maryland governor served at a dinner party. Initially, just a treat for the elite (including George Washington, who is said to have consumed enormous quantities), the first ice cream parlor in this country opened in New York City in 1776. In 1845, the hand-cranked freezer was invented, allowing Americans to make ice cream more easily at home.
3. Americans consume the most ice cream in the world per capita, with Australians coming in second. In 1924, the average American ate eight pints a year. By 1997, the International Dairy Foods Association reported that the figure had jumped to 48 pints a year.
4. The most avid ice cream eaters in the U.S. don't live in Hawaii, the South, California, or any other hot climate. Instead, in 1999, it was reported that the good citizens of Omaha, Nebraska, ate more ice cream per person than any other Americans.
5. Vanilla is the most popular flavor in this country, snagging anywhere from 20 to 29 percent of sales. Chocolate comes in a distant second, with about 9 to 10 percent of the market.
6. Immigrants at Ellis Island were served vanilla ice cream as part of their "Welcome to America" meal.
7. One of the major ingredients in ice cream is air. Without it, the stuff would be as hard as a rock.
8. Among the most unusual flavors of ice cream ever manufactured are avocado, garlic, azuki bean, jalapeno, and pumpkin. Perhaps the weirdest of all: dill pickle ice cream, which was marketed to expectant mothers. Sales were disappointing.
9. One out of every five ice cream eaters share their treat with their dog or cat.



10. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan declared July as National Ice Cream Month, citing the food's "nutritious and wholesome" qualities. He decreed that patriotic Americans should mark the month with "appropriate ceremonies and activities."
11. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the biggest ice cream sundae in the world was made in Alberta, Canada, in 1988. It weighed nearly 55,000 pounds. The same year, a baking company and a sheet-metal firm in Dubuque, Iowa, teamed up to produce the world's largest ice cream sandwich, which tipped the scales at nearly 2,500 pounds. And, in 1999, Baskin-Robbins created an ice cream cake at a beach hotel in the United Arab Emirates that weighed just under 9,000 pounds.
12. Ice cream novelties such as ice cream on sticks and ice cream bars were introduced in the 1920s. Seems like kid stuff, but today, adults consume nearly one-half of all such treats.
13. While popular lore claims that the ice cream cone was invented at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. It was Italo Marchiony, a New York City ice cream vendor that, created the cone in 1896 to stop customers from stealing his serving glasses. He patented the idea in 1903 and it took off in popularity at the World's Fair the next year.

