

Pay-It-Forward with Caffe Sospeso

Many cafes in Naples Italy, have an old-fashioned Neapolitan coffee pot sitting in the corner waiting for customers to drop receipts inside. These coffee pots serve an important purpose, as a way for others to participate in the old tradition of café sospeso. Roughly translated as suspended coffee, this tradition is a unique way to ‘pay-it-forward’.

Some say that this tradition began in the 1800s when a customer would share their good fortune such as getting married, having a baby, or getting a new job by buying two coffees- one for themselves and one for someone who might need it in the future. The second drink is considered “suspended” until someone who can’t afford coffee could inquire if a sospeso was available for free. This small act of kindness is especially charming as the giver and receiver would probably never meet. Café sospeso has been regarded as a small but symbolic gesture that reminds individuals they are not alone.

This gesture received a revival in 2010, when a group of small Italian festivals led to the creation of the Suspended Coffee Network to encourage solidarity in response to cultural budget cuts. The purpose was to weather the budget cuts by organizing and promoting their own activities together. It also started solidarity community initiatives for those in need, encouraging a donated coffee was one of them.

The tradition has spread throughout Italy and around the world. In some places in Italy, the generosity now extends to a suspended pizza, sandwich, or book. The concept of “suspended baskets” also gained popularity as a result of café sospeso. Poorer residents would leave baskets hanging from their homes in the hope of food being left by kind strangers.

This trend has extended to the United States and has become popular especially at coffee shops as

individuals pay for the customer behind them. A pay-it-forward chain 378 cars deep was reported in St. Petersburg, Florida in 2014. Sometimes a simple gesture can have a strong and lasting effect. It was reported that a barista gave a suspended coffee to a man who appeared to be having a rough day. He later donated \$500 to the café because the barista’s kindness had such an impact on him.

Consider participating in the ‘pay it forward’ movement by completing one of the following acts of kindness:



- › Compliment the first three people you see today
- › If you are last in line, let someone go in front of you in line
- › Leave quarters at a laundromat
- › Return shopping carts at the grocery store
- › Leave a treat in the mailbox for the mail carrier
- › Share your umbrella
- › Let someone else have a prime parking spot
- › Pay for someone’s movie tickets

These simple gestures can boost feelings of confidence, happiness, and optimism. They can also promote a more positive community as others are encouraged to repeat good deeds. Don’t be afraid to spread kindness today!

