



From Italy to New York and Back. Our First Experience with the American Giglio Feast

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Here is the Giglio Feast as seen from the point of view of two 16-year-old Italians who just arrived in New York and found an unexpected lively Italian community in the heart of Brooklyn

The Giglio feast is one of the greatest Italian events in Brooklyn, NY, featuring an authentic mix of music, food and religion from the old country.

It's a fantastic opportunity for all kinds of people, children, adults and teenagers, to have a great time joining the different activities organized during the event; to feel the taste of traditional food



like sausages, zeppole and calzone; and to learn something about the religious message behind the symbol of the Giglio

The Feast finds its origins at the start of the 20th century when people coming from the little village of Nola, near Naples, moved to Brooklyn and settled down in Williamsburg, the neighborhood that hosted the highest number of Italians and Italian-Americans at that time

The Giglio feast has a very important religious meaning, since it is a homage to Saint Paolino of Nola who put his life at risk to save his people in 409AD. His heroic gesture is still remembered nowadays in different areas of NYC, where he is celebrated every year.

In his honor the participants to Williamsburg's Giglio Feast carry a hand-sculptured tower dedicated to Saint Paolino and the Lady of Saint Carmel along the streets of Williamsburg.

Aside of this religious aspect, the feast is renowned to be a great entertainment moment for all kinds of people, being them children or adults, Italian or not. The event has somehow changed as years passed by also due to the increasing participation of people who are not of Italian origin, but are still able to enjoy this unique atmosphere.

The feast takes place on a main street of Williamsburg, where stands offering typical Italian food alternate with game stalls where one can win handmade Italian figurines and items.

In the stands one can find every kind of merchandise, from t-shirts featuring images of Italy and the Giglio feast to typical homemade Italian cigars called "Toscanelli".

All the vendors that we met were not only nice to talk to and kind, but were also of Italian origins. Although many of them have never visited Italy, they all showed great pride for their cultural background

Most of the Italian-Americans attending originated from Southern Italy, especially from Calabria, Sicily and Puglia, being that during the first half of the XX century poverty brought their ancestors to move to the US in search of a better life, and many of them fortunately found it and remained here.

All the people we talked to were of a very kind and outgoing nature, which is very typical of Italians, and accepted to answer to some of our questions.

The greatest number of them found this last edition better than the others, both because the feast got bigger and also because it attracted more people than the average. Also the stands were somehow more attractive and offered a better variety of foods and merchandises.

We interviewed people from Italy or of Italian origin but also Americans that were there just to have fun. We met Francesco, an old Italian man who moved to Brooklyn 50 years ago. He told us how the feast has changed in the last years, attracting a more consistent international public. Matilda, whose grandparents moved to NY when still very young, told us how she feels proud of her origins even if she doesn't speak Italian and she's never visited Italy. Francis was having lots of fun at the feast. She told us that nowadays more and more Americans, especially those who live in Brooklyn and Manhattan, go to Williamsburg during the feast to enjoy the activities, the food and all the joyous atmosphere this event offers.

We definitely encourage you to attend the celebrations and experience live the Italian life style that can still be found in Brooklyn. Just take the L train and jump in the heart of Nola... you have time until July 18, hurry up!

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