Sandwich Encyclopedia Article

Sandwich

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Now an integral part of nearly all Western cuisines, the sandwich was named after John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich. A prominent eighteenth-century English statesman known both for corruption and administrative savvy, Montagu was also apparently devoted to gambling. It was during an epic, 24-hour stint at the gaming tables in 1762 that he--or the cook who brought him his snack--invented the sandwich by calling for bread and meat so that he could keep playing. Word of this prestigious gentleman's unusual meal spread, and it was soon being copied by England's fashionable aristocrats. During the nineteenth century the sandwich gained popularity elsewhere on the European continent, eventually entering the French language.

Still admired for its simplicity, portability, and limitless variety, the sandwich may incorporate any type of bread and filling and may be served hot or cold. Versions from around the world include the British tea sandwich, the Scandinavian open-faced smorre-brod, and those American favorites, the hamburger and the peanut-butter-and-jelly. One popular modern variation is the wrap, in which a flour tortilla or flat bread is topped with an array of ingredients, then rolled into a burrito-shaped package. Another is the pocket, in which the filling is placed inside hollow pita bread.