



Tapas

A **tapa** (Spanish pronunciation: [ˈtapa]) is an appetizer or snack in Spanish cuisine. Tapas can be combined to make a full meal, and can be cold (such as mixed olives and cheese) or hot (such as *chopitos*, which are battered, fried baby squid, or patatas bravas). In some bars and restaurants in Spain and across the globe, tapas have evolved into a very sophisticated cuisine. In some Central American countries, such snacks are known as *bocas*. In parts of Mexico, similar dishes are called *botanas*.

History

The word "tapas" is derived from the Spanish verb *tapar*, "to cover", a cognate of the English *top*.^[1]

In pre-19th-century Spain tapas were served by *posadas*, *albergues* or *bodegas*, offering meals and rooms for travellers. Since few innkeepers could write and few travellers read, inns offered their guests a sample of the dishes available, on a "tapa" (the word for pot cover in Spanish).^[2]

According to *Joy of Cooking*, the original tapas were thin slices of bread or meat which sherry drinkers in Andalusian taverns used to cover their glasses between sips.^[3] This was a practical measure meant to prevent fruit flies from hovering over the sweet sherry (see below for more explanations). The meat used to cover the sherry was normally ham or chorizo, which are both very salty and activate thirst. Because of this, bartenders and restaurant owners created a variety of snacks to serve with sherry, thus increasing their alcohol sales.^[4] The tapas eventually became as important as the sherry.



Tapas have evolved through Spanish history by incorporating new ingredients and influences. Most of the Iberian Peninsula was invaded by the Romans, who introduced more extensive cultivation of the olive following their invasion of Spain in 212 B.C.^[5] and irrigation methods. The discovery of the New World brought the introduction of tomatoes, sweet and chili peppers, maize (corn), and potatoes, which were readily accepted and easily grown in Spain's microclimates.

It has also been claimed that tapas originated in the south of Spain during the time of the Spanish Inquisition as a means of publicly identifying *conversos*, Jews who had converted to Christianity. Since tapas often consist in part of ham or other non-kosher foodstuffs, the reluctance of the

Tapas



Tapas in Barcelona

Course	<u>Appetizer</u> or <u>snack</u>
Place of origin	<u>Spain</u>
Serving temperature	Hot or cold
Main ingredients	Various
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Tapas bar and restaurant at Plaza Mayor, Madrid.

conversos to eat whatever tapas dish was offered to them could be taken as a tacit admission that they had not abandoned their Jewish faith, thus tapas were a tool of the Spanish Inquisition.^[6]

There are many tapas competitions throughout Spain, but there is only one National Tapas competition,^[7] which is celebrated every year in November. Since 2008, the City of Valladolid and the International School of Culinary Arts^[8] have celebrated the International Tapas Competition for Culinary Schools.^[9] Various schools from around the world come to Spain annually to compete for the best tapa concept.

Origin

Though the primary meaning of *tapa* is *cover* or *lid*, in Spain it has also become a term for this style of food. The origin of this new meaning is uncertain but there are several theories:

- The tapas tradition may have begun when king Alfonso X of Castile (1221-1284) recovered from an illness by drinking wine with small dishes between meals. After regaining his health, the king ordered that taverns would not be allowed to serve wine to customers unless it was accompanied by a small snack or "tapa".^[10]
- Another popular and more modern explanation says that King Alfonso XIII (1886-1941) stopped by a famous tavern in Cádiz (Andalusian city) where he ordered a glass of wine. The waiter covered the glass with a slice of cured ham before offering it to the king, in order to protect the wine from the blowing beach sand, as Cádiz is a windy place. The king, after drinking the wine and eating the ham, ordered another wine "con la tapa" ("with the cover").^[11]

See also

- List of tapas
- List of hors d'oeuvre
- Aahaan kap klaem
- Antipasto
- Crostino
- Hors d'œuvre
- Meze
- Pincho
- Pu pu platter
- Smörgåsbord
- Smørrebrød
- Zakuski



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External links

- About.com Guide to Tapas in Spain. (<http://gospain.about.com/od/fooddrink/qt/tapas.htm>)
- El mundo de las Tapas. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070226122225/http://www.arrakis.es/~jols/tapas/index.html>) History and recipes in Spanish and English
- Tapa Tells All (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180308041326/http://www.mightypen.nyc/humor/tapa-tells-all>)

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