

### **Tapas: The little dishes of Spain**

Tapas are not a particular kind of food; rather, they represent a style of eating and a way of life for the Spanish. Tapas are as varied as the cooks who create them and in Spain range from the simplest fare to sophisticated dishes. The variety includes cold tapas, tapas in a sauce, baked, grilled or fried tapas. They can be foods we traditionally eat as appetizers, but more often than not cross the line into what we might think of as first course or main course dishes. All tapas do, however, have several things in common. They are generally served in small portions, and they are meant for immediate gratification.

### **The tapas life-style**

A Spaniard will rarely visit a tapas bar with the express purpose of eating; he/she is there to parley with the owner and the waiters, strike up conversations with other patrons, and invariably come upon friends who frequent the same bar. Jokes will fly, arguments will rage, and everyone will have a grand time. Even business meetings may be combined with tapas.

Tapas, besides serving an important social function in Spain, are also a means to fill the long hungry hours between meals. In a country where lunch is rarely eaten before 2:00 or 3:00 PM and dinner is typically served at 10:00 PM, tapas are almost a necessity. For a Spaniard a tapa is just an appetite teaser to be followed by a three-course lunch and in the evening by a complete dinner.

Tapas bars are far from orderly; as many as possible squeeze along the bar, while the rest stand two and three deep and place their orders by yelling across the room. In really crowded bars the clientele spill over into the street, taking with them their beverages and dishes of tapas. Sometimes the flow of traffic is disrupted, yet Spanish motorists, usually so volatile, don't seem to mind at all. In a tapas bar there are no bills and no written count taken of what you consume; when the time comes to pay, a combination of the incredible ability of the barman to keep tabs on everyone, coupled with the client's honesty, brings a more or less accurate accounting.

Discovering what food a tapas bar offers could be an experience. You may ask, and the barman will rattle off a seemingly litany of tapas, never pausing between items or stopping to catch his breath. Some bars will paint a list of tapas on the outside display window, others will write them on a chalkboard, and a more serious tapas bar might even have a typewritten tapas menu. Of course, platters and casseroles of tapas are always lined up along the bar to stimulate your appetite. In some cities it is the custom to take what you please from those dishes and give your own count to the waiter when it is time to pay. In other bars, where tapas come speared on toothpicks, a toothpick count is taken at the end. And there are still some bars where a tapa is automatically brought to you as part of the price of your beverage. In any case, eating tapas is a communal experience. Forks, if needed, are provided for all, but everyone in your party will share from the same plate.

## **TORTILLAS**

Spanish *tortillas* have no connection with Mexican *tortillas* except the word, which comes from the Latin *torte*, meaning a round cake. In Spain *tortillas* are omelets, often potato omelets, and are standard tapas just about anywhere in Spain. They are usually served at room temperature and may be made in two- and three-egg sizes when the filling is soft or as large, thick omelets when the ingredients are more solid.

## **EMPANADAS & EMPANADILLAS**

*Empanadas*, large savory pies, and *empanadillas*, small turnovers with fillings often similar to those of the *empanadas*, are always popular tapas.

## **BANDERILLAS**

*Banderillas*, tidbits of marinated fish, olives, vegetables, and the like skewered on toothpicks, are a separate class of tapa. Some tapas bar will have none, while others, especially in the north of Spain, specialize in them and serve nothing else. To determine the price of what you have eaten, the custom is to count up the empty toothpicks. The trick when eating *banderillas* is to put everything that is on the toothpick in your mouth at once so that as you chew the taste of each ingredient comes forth and merges with the rest. By the way, *banderillas* are so called because of their resemblance to the colorful ornamented darts used in the bullring.

## VOCABULARIO UTIL

### MEDIDAS

*Dab or pinch* una pizca  
*1 teaspoon* una cucharita  
*1 tablespoon* una cuchara  
*1 cup* una taza  
*1/4 cup* un cuarto de taza  
*1/3 cup* un tercio de taza  
*1/2 cup* media taza  
*3/4 cup* tres cuarto de taza

*1 pound* una libra

*a wedge/portion* una porción

### UTENSILIOS

*(big) bowl* una fuente  
*spatula* la espátula  
*pot* la olla

### ADJETIVOS / ADVERBIOS

*beaten* batido(a)  
*minced* picado(a)  
*chopped* en pedazos/trozos  
*powdered* empolvado(a)  
*lightly* ligeramente  
*smooth* sin grumos

*a mixture* una mezcla

*a slice* una rebanada

*a thin slice* una rebanada delgada

*baking dish* una fuente para horno

*colander, strainer* el colador

*pan, skillet* la sartén

\_\_\_\_\_ *to add* añadir  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to beat* batir  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to bake* cocer al horno  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to blend / mix* mezclar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to boil* hervir (e->ie)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to chop, mince* picar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to coat* cubrir de  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to cut* cortar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to drain* escurrir  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to fold* doblar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to form (balls)* formar (bolitas)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to fry* freír (e->i)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to flip over* dar vuelta a (irr.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to grate* rallar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to heat* calentar (e->ie)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to make* hacer (\*)

\_\_\_\_\_ *to peel* pelar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to place* poner (\*)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to pour* verter (e->ie)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to roll* aplanar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to sauté* saltear  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to secure* sujetar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to serve* servir (e->i)  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to shake* agitar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to simmer* hervir (e->ie)  
\_\_\_\_\_ a fuego lento  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to slice* rebanar /  
\_\_\_\_\_ cortar en rebanadas  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to soak* remojar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to stir* revolver  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to trim* recortar  
\_\_\_\_\_ *to wrap* envolver

## RECETAS

### TORTILLA DE PATATA Y CEBOLLA (*Potato omelet*)

3/4 cup olive oil  
2 pounds potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced  
2 onions, finely diced  
6 eggs, lightly beaten in a large bowl  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a large skillet; cook the onions until soft. Add potatoes and cook over medium-heat until almost done with no color, about 10 minutes. Break the potatoes up a bit with a spatula, then transfer the potatoes and onions to the bowl with the eggs. Stir the potatoes around to cover well with the egg, and season with salt and pepper. Remove most of the oil from the skillet, leaving about 1 tablespoon. Add the egg mixture, reduce the heat to low and cook omelet slowly until golden and firm enough to flip. Carefully flip omelet, slipping it onto another plate if necessary, and cook until done. It should still be soft inside, and about 1-inch thick.

Cut omelet into squares and serve immediately hot, or let cool to room temperature and serve.

\*\* DO NOT FOLD THIS OMELET LIKE YOU WOULD FOR AN AMERICAN OMELET

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### ALBONDIGAS DE ATÚN (*Tuna tapas*)

1/3 cup fresh bread crumbs  
3 tbsp. plus 3/4 c. chicken stock  
1/3 cup dry white wine  
1 can (1/2 oz.) tuna water packed, drained  
1 hard-boiled egg, chopped  
1 raw egg, beaten  
3 tbsp. minced parsley  
1 lg. clove garlic, minced  
1/4 tsp. salt  
Pinch of pepper  
2 tbsp. olive oil

In medium bowl, moisten bread crumbs with 3 tablespoons broth and 1 tablespoon wine; mix in tuna, hard-cooked egg, raw egg, parsley, garlic, salt and pepper.

Form tuna mixture into 1 1/2 inch balls and dust with flour. Heat oil in large skillet. Add tuna balls and saute over moderately high heat, turning until browned all over, about 15-20 minutes.

Add remaining 1/3 cup wine and 1/2 cup broth. Cover reduce heat, simmer 30 minutes, adding broth as needed. Serve hot from a chafing dish or at room temperature.

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### **TOMATES** (*Tomatoe Tapas*)

2 large plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped  
12 sun-dried tomato halves in oil, drained and chopped  
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Italian 6-cheese blend  
1/3 cup crumbled Gorgonzola or blue cheese  
1/4 cup minced sweet onion  
1 tablespoon minced fresh basil  
1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary  
1/4 teaspoon garlic pepper  
24 baguette slices

In a bowl mix first 8 ingredients. Arrange baguette slices on a baking sheet. With a spoon, spread tomato mixture evenly over slices. Bake tapas at 350°F (175°C) for 7 to 8 minutes or until cheese melts.

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### **CALAMARES FRITOS** (*Fried Squid Tapas*)

Sea salt  
4 oz prepared squid, cut into rings  
lemon wedges, to serve  
2 tablespoon seasoned flour  
1 egg  
2 tablespoon milk  
olive oil, for frying

Throw the squid rings in the seasoned flour in a bowl. Whisk the egg and milk together in a superficial bowl. Heat the oil in a heavy-based frying pan.

Tip out the floured squid rings one at a time into the egg mixture, shaking off any excess liquid. Put in to the hot oil, in batches if necessary, and fry for 2-3 minutes on each side until golden.

Bleed dry the fried squid on kitchen paper, then sprinkle with salt. Move to a small warm plate and serve with the lemon wedges.

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### **GARBANZOS CON ESPINACA** (*Chick-peas and Spinach Tapas*)

10 ounces fresh spinach leaves, rinsed, or 1 (10-ounce) package frozen leaf spinach  
19-ounce can (2 cups) chick-peas, drained and rinsed  
1 red bell pepper, finely diced  
1 tablespoon snipped fresh chives  
1 to 2 lemons, juiced or to taste  
1/4 to 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

If using fresh spinach: Cook the spinach in a saucepan with the water clinging to its leaves, stirring, until wilted. Drain, squeeze dry, and finely chop. If using frozen spinach, follow package directions, drain, squeeze dry, and finely chop.

In a bowl combine the spinach with the chick peas, pepper, chives, lemon juice, oil, salt, and pepper. Serve as is or chilled with toasted bread.