



## España - Tapas



A **tapa**, in Spanish cuisine, is an appetizer or snack. It may be cold (such as mixed olives and cheese) or hot (such as *chopitos*, which are battered, fried baby squid). In select bars and restaurants in Spain, tapas have evolved into an entire, sophisticated cuisine.

In Spain, patrons of tapas can order many different tapas and combine them to make a full meal. In some Central American countries, such snacks are known as *bocas*. In parts of Mexico, similar dishes are called *botanas*. The word "tapas" is derived from the Spanish/Portuguese verb *tapar*, "to cover", a cognate of the English *top*.

There are many theories as to how "tapas" became to be. One theory states that before the 19th century, European roads were in bad condition. Some were originally old Roman roads (*viae romanae*); some were trails dating from the Middle Ages. Travelling was slow and exhausting. Most people could not read or write, and Spain was no exception. Inns, called *posadas*, *albergues*, or *bodegas*, grew up along the roads, offering meals and rooms, plus horses for travelers. Since few innkeepers could write and few



travelers read, inns offered their guests a sample of the dishes available, on a "tapa" (the word for pot cover in Spanish). In fact, a "tapa" was (and still is) a small portion of any kind of Spanish cuisine.

Another theory, according to *The Joy of Cooking*, states that the original tapas were thin slices of bread or meat which sherry drinkers in Andalusian taverns used to cover their glasses between sips. This was a practical measure meant to prevent fruit flies from hovering over the sweet sherry. 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. 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 the olive 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.

Nowadays, the most popular tapas include foods such as olives, cured meats, seafood like mussels and shrimp, and marinated vegetables often served on sliced baguettes.