

# WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

## Where do 'tapas' come from?

In this week's WEP, Kez relates three possible origins of the tiny, tasty **treat** known here in the Basque Country as a 'pintxo', but in Spain and around the world as 'tapas'.



Photo by Agent J on Unsplash

Tapas are so characteristically typical of Spanish gastronomy - almost as much as Iberian ham. There are many differing types (from elaborate to simple, and light to **greasy**). However, they all have something in common: they **whet your appetite** and etch a smile on your face. How much do you know about the origin of tapas?

Contrary to what you may believe, they're not an invention from this century. Like many phenomenon with a long history, there are various theories about the origin of tapas. In this article, we'll look at just three of them, going from the oldest to the most recent.

### Story 1: Alfonso X 'the Wise' and his illness

The first version takes us back to the 13th century, during the **reign** of Alfonso X 'the Wise'. During his rule, the King suffered from an illness and was advised to take several **sips** of wine between meals. The wise monarch listened to his doctor, but decided to have a small amount of food with his drink in order to counteract the effects of the alcohol. Once he was better, he announced a law which ordered all the taverns in Castile to serve something solid for people to

put into their stomachs along with the wine so that it would cover up (tapar) the least wanted effects of this **beverage**.

### Story 2: The Catholic Monarchs on their journey to Andalusia

A couple of centuries later, a second theory leads us to the era of the Catholic Monarchs. The rulers found themselves on the way to Andalusia when King Ferdinand II of Aragon decided to take a break along the journey, with all his **entourage** stopping in a tavern that was full of flies. The **innkeeper**, embarrassed by the situation and worried that an insect might end up **flapping** around inside the royal glass, decided to put this unusual 'tapa' on top of it: a slice of **sausage**, delivering the following words: "Here is your 'tapa', Your Majesty".

### Story 3: Originated from 19th century farmworkers

Not all these theories are linked to royalty. There is also a version connected to simple village life, and in particular, to the workers. We find ourselves in the 19th century, when fieldworkers made it fashionable to have a few **swigs** of wine alongside a bit of food during their long, hard working days, thus avoiding large, heavy meals which would prevent them from carrying out their tasks.

As you can see, there can be many beliefs surrounding the origins of something as common as tapas. From their beginnings, they're known to have consisted of slices of **sausage** accompanied by a drink. Nevertheless, they have evolved over the years, offering truly surprising creations.



Translated from [this page](#)  
by ECP coach

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## Word list

**treat:** something which isn't ordinary and gives great pleasure

**greasy:** covered with, resembling or produced by oil

**whet your appetite:** to induce or increase one's interest in something

**reign:** the period of rule of a monarch

**sips/swig:** drinking small (sip) /large (swig) amounts

**beverage:** a drink other than water (usually brewed)

**entourage:** a group around an important person

**innkeeper:** a person who runs an inn (pub)

**to flap (flapping):** to move wings up and down

**sausage:** a cylindrical length of minced meat, encased in a skin, often sold raw to be cooked before eating

## Let's chat about that!

1. Do you know any stories about where tapas come from? Tell them.
2. What's your favourite tapa/pintxo? Can you describe it?
3. Is there any difference between a tapa and a pintxo? Please explain.
4. Should tapas be free or should you have to pay for them? Why?
5. If it were very elaborate, how much would you pay for the best tapa?
6. Where's the best place you have ever eaten a tapa? Describe your experience.

## Pronunciation (4): Use a dictionary

The first piece of pronunciation advice was to listen to examples of authentic speech and to "shadow" – or copy short sentences or phrases, trying to imitate sounds, intonation and word stress. Tip number two was to record yourself doing this. Tip number three was to get to know the International phonetic alphabet (IPA). Here's tip four:

Whenever I ask my students which dictionary they use, the most common answer is WordReference. Just because it's the first dictionary that appears on the Google list, that doesn't mean that it's the best. Far from it. Printed dictionaries will give you a phonetic transcription of a word and there are lots of online dictionaries where you can click and listen to the word being spoken. A particularly good one is **howjsay** - even the name of this website is a useful guide as to how to pronounce the common question 'How do you say...?' in a natural way. It's a great resource for checking how new words sound.

Other recommendable (online) dictionaries are:

Collins: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>

MacMillan: <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

Oxford: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

Cambridge: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Urban (**careful!**): <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=urbandictionary>

Linguee: <https://www.linguee.es/>

SpanishDict: <https://www.spanishdict.com/>

...or you can simply ask your ECP coach and test their knowledge!

Happy hunting!!