

LIGHT, SIMPLE TAPAS BRING SPAIN HOME

Once simple pieces of bread or meat the Spanish used to shield glasses of wine from fruit flies, tapas have expanded into substantial snacks, easily turned into meals. My husband and I toured Barcelona in June, and tapas taverns were our favorite places to dine as well as the most fun and least expensive.

What fascinated me most was how a tapas bar works.

The kitchen prepares plates of tapas for the bartenders to whisk into the restaurant, placing them on the bar stacked with shelves holding more plates of tapas. Or, they might be passed around like hors d'oeuvres.

Upon arrival, you order a drink, grab a plate and select any items



Healthy Dish
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that tempt your taste buds. You can take a lot or just a few and, when you're ready to pay, the cost of your meal is determined by the number of toothpicks on your plate.

Here are a few of my favorites tapas selections, light and easy to replicate at home.

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Goat Cheese-Stuffed Piquillo Pepper Tapas

- 4 whole roasted smallish piquillo peppers (jarred or canned)
- 6 tablespoons soft goat cheese with herbs, softened
- 2 teaspoons chopped chives
- 1 teaspoon syrupy aged sherry vinegar (or aged balsamic vinegar or balsamic syrup)

Carefully remove peppers from container, drain, place on a paper towel and blot. Fill one corner of a small plastic resealable bag with goat cheese and squeeze a few times with your hand to soften. Cut a bottom corner at an angle to make a hole the size of a medium grape. Hold a pepper open with your fingers and fill the pepper with cheese. Repeat with remaining peppers and cheese. Sprinkle with chives and drizzle with the vinegar or syrup just before serving.

Shrimp and Egg Tapas With Dijon Sauce

- 1 tablespoon olive oil mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon milk
- 4 slices slender baguette, cut 3/4-inch-thick at an angle
- 2 medium hard-boiled eggs, peeled and cut in half lengthwise
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 bite-size baby dill pickles
- 4 small shrimp, peeled, deveined and cooked (poached, grilled or sauteed)

Stir mayonnaise, mustard and milk together in a small bowl.

Toast baguettes in a wide-mouth toaster (or oven) until golden.

Place eggs on top of toast. Drizzle the eggs and toast lightly with oil and place a dollop of Dijon sauce on top of each egg. Skewer one pickle and shrimp on each toothpick, pushing to the opposite end. Then, poke the toothpick through the egg and toast. Serve immediately.

Anchovy and Olive Skewer Tapas

- 4 excellent-quality anchovies, drained and blotted
- 8 Castelvetrano green olives, pitted

Wrap part of an anchovy around an olive and push onto a toothpick. Push another olive onto the toothpick, wrapping the remaining part of the anchovy around the second olive. Repeat with remaining anchovies and olives on separate toothpicks (two anchovy-wrapped olives per toothpick).

Makes 4 servings (each serving has 1 of each tapas variety).

Approximate values per serving: 213 calories, 12.5 g total fat (4.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat) 1022 mg sodium, 127 mg cholesterol, 13 g total carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 11 g protein.