ONE BITE FITS ALL

A tapas crawl in Madrid is the most satisfying way to sample Spain's fabled snack and social ritual

KALPANA SUNDER

eramic plates and painted tiles decorate the walls. Huge pieces of cured ham hang from the ceiling. Platters of small green peppers fried in salt (known locally as pimientos de pardon), deep fried pieces of eggplant, chunks of chorizo sausage, special manchego cheese, jamon (Special Iberian ham made from pigs that only feast on acorns), swordfish with vinegar and garlic and the omnipresent tortillas with eggs and potatoes (Spain's signature dish, clearly) keep flowing in from the kitchen.

We are on a tapas crawl with Joanna Wivell, our vivacious guide who runs Insider Madrid, which does specialised niche tours on cooking, flamenco and shopping. Joanna tells us, "Madrilenos love to talk and converse, so the tapas is all about that, a kind of social ritual". The locals meet every evening to argue, discuss sports or politics and spend some time in a convivial atmosphere before heading home. A very important part of the ritual consists in moving from one bar to another looking for a particular atmosphere or speciality. Many locals joke that the only exercise they get is



walking between tapas bars.

Every culture has foods meant to awaken the appetite like hors d'oeuvres or mezze but tapas is more akin to a separate dining experience. It might have originally been just about simple snacks, maybe almonds fried in olive oil or just olives. Moreover, tapas used to be offered for free, but as dishes became more exotic they had to be paid for. Today, these bite-sized

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morsels that the Spanish wash down with beer, wine or sherry may be hot or cold but are always freshly made. The drink that I take to instantly is Sangria, the blood red mix of cognac, red wine and diced citrus fruits. Every restaurant has its own sangria recipe — typically a mix of wine, brandy and fresh fruits, served over ice.

And every bar across Spain has its signature tapas dish, usually a specialty from one region of the country. Some may specialise in grilled mushrooms; others may specialise in gambas or shrimps. In fact, the Spanish love tapas so much that they even have a verb for it — tapear, a verb that means 'to go out and eat tapas'.

The word tapas is derived from the Spanish word 'tapar' meaning a lid or cover. Legends say that the original tapas were the slices of bread and meat that were used to cover drinks in the bars in Andalusia to prevent fruit flies from hovering around sherry glasses. Some say that the practice originated from King Alphonso X, 'The Wise', who recovered from an illness by downing small dishes with wine. He decreed that the taverns could not sell wine to customers unless it was accompanied by a small snack or tapas.

TAPAS-TIOUETTE

- You can order for Banderillas while you wait for your tapas. It's bite-sized food on a cocktail stick and it's named after the barbed darts used during the bullfight
- Eat standing up by the barra (counter) as locals do. Bars charge a little more to serve tapas on a table
- If you are travelling in a group, order raciones (which is approximately a plate)

MORSEL MARVEL: Every bar across Spain

has a signature tapas dish

fruits and potatoes, and chili peppers and

corn came in from the New World.

With discarded tissues and olive pips on the floor, El Neru is an example of the grungy cider bars that the Spanish so love. This building used to be a printing press and is now well known for its 'filter coffee' style of pouring of a stream of cider into a pint glass by an adept barman. The cider has to be drunk fast so as to not lose the mix. We feast on small pieces of bread with creamy blue cheese before we walk to the

There are many stories about tapas' origin. One says that a few 16th century tavern owners discovered that the strong smell of mature cheese helped disguise bad wine. This offering of free cheese with cheap wine soon became wildly popular

Others say that it was King Felipe the Third, who ordered that drinks should always be served with a small snack so that his subjects stayed sober. We also hear about the claim that tapas was invented by hard-working farmers who needed to eat small amounts of food to keep them going until the main evening meal. But my favourite story is the one which goes that a few 16th-century tavern owners from Castilla-La Mancha discovered that the strong smell of mature cheese could help disguise the fact that they were serving bad wine to their customers. This offering of free cheese when serving cheap wine soon became wildly popular and was probably the precursor of the first tapas. And tapas evolved with many influences from different cultures: the Romans brought olives, the Moors brought almonds, citrus

new epicenter of tapas here — the swanky wrought iron and wooden Mercado de San Miguel, an old covered market which was converted into an Art Nouveau style gourmet food market. Instead of air conditioning, the market's ceiling is fitted with a misting system and we get sprayed by micro rain as we dig into our tapas. We enjoy trawling through the stalls selling a wide range of food and drinks from fried almonds and traditional sweets like rosquillas and bolitas de coco (a sweet with coconuts) to platters of seafood, oysters and thin slices of ham. The market remains open till 2 am on weekends and as we head back to our hotel we notice that the roads are still crowded as the vibrant night owls, Madrilenos, fortified by their afternoon siestas, are quite ready to party until dawn.

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THE WORLD ON A

PLATE: Tapas has

evolved with various

cultural influences

from the Romans to

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Ireasure island

What do Lederhosen, Swiss army knives and weinerschnitzel have in common? You can find all three in the medieval, island town of Lindau

JESSICA FALERIO

n the eastern side of the freshwater Bodensee in southern Bavaria is the beautiful island town of Lindau. This German town is one of the most beautiful locations on the Bodensee (also known as Lake Konstanz), which touches the Swiss and Austrian borders, as well as the German. On a hot summer's day, there's not much that beats sitting on the promenade of Lindau harbour watching the yachts and ferries sailing in on the glistening waters while sipping a cold Weissbier. The wonderful thing about this island town, connected to the mainland by only a narrow strip of road, is its collection of historic buildings which bring the medieval feel of the town alive. The island is small and can be enjoyed as a full day trip. From the train station, head over to the marketplace first, where you can view the churches and the state museum before walking around the rest of the island.

To guide your visit, here's a list of my top ten must-see items in Lindau:

The marketplace atmosphere is dominated by three main structures surrounding the fountain of Neptune with the King of the Seas in the centre. St Stephan's church, in one extreme corner of the market place, was built in 1180. Enter quietly to note the contemporary feel brought on by the cream-coloured walls with pastel green embellishments, modern, stained glass windows and use of open space that flows between the pews, the altar and the baptismal font behind it.

In sharp contrast, the inside of the Catholic church of St Mary's is a breathtakingly kitsch, Baroque vision of Italianate marble, gold and silver work. I was enamoured with the intricately carved wood ends of the pews which formed an ornate fantasy of flowers and leaves entwined against a background of fish scales and shell-like motifs. The massive silver organ at the rear of the church is impressive and fully functioning.

3 At the opposite end of the marketplace is the 18th century House Cavazzen that once belonged to a wealthy merchant and is now the city museum. It has a rich facade of colourful frescoes on the outside and contains collections of glass, pewter, paintings and furniture from the past five centuries. If you're an Art Nouveau fan, the 3 euros entry fee is worth the visit to the two rooms containing furniture and collectibles from the Jugendstil period.

From the marketplace, head west to the Diebsturm or 'Thieves tower', which was built around 1370 and housed prisoners in medieval times. It's a curious structure with four mini-towers built into the



pointy roof. The roof tiles sparkle in brilliant colours, making an otherwise plain tower rather attractive.

Next to the Diebsturm is the Peterskirche church and war memorial. This is the oldest church in the region, dating back to 1000 AD. However, what makes it truly remarkable is what it contains. I walked through the entrance into complete darkness. There was a button to the right of the entrance to switch on a light. Not knowing what to expect, I pressed it and gasped at the sight of the 15th century frescoes by Hans Holbein the Elder that came to life when the lights came on. These are the only wall frescoes by him that are known to exist in the world.

AT A GLANCE

Getting there: Lindau is two hours by a direct train from Zurich and three hours away from Munich

When to go: May to August

Food and drink: Bratwurst (sausage), kasespatzle (cheese noodles) and Maultashcen (dumplings) are the regional dishes to sample. Pretzels or flammkuchen (flatbread) go very well with a local Weissbier

What to buy: Swiss army knives, Lederhosen (leather breeches) and cow-bells

From the church, head towards the harbour via the Old Town Hall, a large box-like structure crammed into one end of Reichsplatz. The brightly coloured fres-

cos have been refreshed and contain

wonderful detail.

TLindau harbour is only a stone's throw from this spot. You'll easily spot the yellow and green tipped Mangturm, which once formed a part of the island's fortifications and served as a lighthouse for some years. It was built in the 13th century and was in use until 1856. Don't miss the Rapunzel plait lowered from the tower window. For 1.60 euros, you can climb up the tower for a panoramic view of the lake and surrounding mountains.

The promenade goes all the way around the harbour entrance, where you can get a closer look at the magnificent lion statue, the heraldic emblem of Bavaria, and the 'new' lighthouse flanking the mouth of the harbour. From here, you can catch day ferries to other lakeside towns in Austria, Switzerland and Germany. There are plenty of cafes and restaurants along the promenade. The Marmosaal Cafe and Cocktail Bar serves a great selection of food from breakfast to regional specialities and everything in between. They have tables outside to enjoy the harbour view with a Weissbier or, if it's wet and windy,

the inside is a combination of chandeliered luxury with brocade-covered sofas and high-backed wooden tables and benches. There's even a mock altar behind

After your meal, you might want to go for a quiet walk, leading from the promenade along the west side of the island. The old wall runs around this side and at the westernmost point, you'll find the Pulverturm or 'Powder Tower' dating to 1508 AD. It forms a part of the island's fortified wall. The views from here stretch across the lake to the Swiss and Austrian alps in the distance.

ON THE WATERFRONT: The Lindau harbour is perfect for enjoying regional food and beer (left). The Catholic church in Lindau (below)



The final must-see item is one that many tourists miss, simply because it's just off the island on the mainland. It's the local cemetery in Aeschach, where people have been buried since the plague came to the island in the 16th century. This beautiful, old cemetery has mausoleums dating from 1510 to 1915, in a range of styles including Baroque, Renaissance, Neo-classical, Gothic and Jugendstil. They are laid in a beautiful park, shaded by tall trees. Not far from the cemetery entrance are the remains of a Roman villa dating back to 200 AD when the first settlers came to Lindau. Stones from the Roman ruins were used to build the cemetery.



ART ON THE

century House Cavazzen is now a

city museum. It

boasts of a rich

OUTSIDE: The 18th

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