

Travel Tip: It's All About the Water

You've probably heard or read somewhere that you should always use bottled water for drinking and toothbrushing when traveling to a developing country. Yes, that's correct!

But smart, experienced travelers go a step further: they use **bottled water for every destination** they visit, regardless of the country or perceived risk. Why?

"It eliminates the guesswork of which country has a safe water supply, and it's easier to remember," say experienced travelers, "especially if you are traveling in and out of multiple countries".

Using the **same approach for all countries** makes a lot of sense because it's easy to either underestimate or overestimate the risk of contaminated water in specific countries.

Travelers tend to be very cautious in African countries or Southeast Asia (where the perceived risk is high), but then they relax and let their guard down in Mexico (where the perceived risk is low: "it's so close to the U.S.!").

However, many travelers get sick with gastrointestinal illnesses in Mexico because they brush their teeth with tap water, add ice to their drinks, or listen to upscale resorts telling them their water supply is perfectly safe (it's not).

So, how do you get clean, safe water when you travel?

- Use **bottled water for every destination**, whether it's Germany or Ghana.
- Buy your bottled water only from major airports, hotels, and supermarkets in any country. Not from the sweet-looking child on the street trying to sell it to you. (Several years ago, street kids in India were caught re-bottling tap water and selling it on the street.)
- No ice in your drinks!
- Here's a simple tip to remember to brush your teeth with bottled water: Take your toothbrush and a rubber band, and wrap them both around a water bottle. Place the wrapped bottle on the bathroom sink in your hotel room. When you pick up your toothbrush, the bottle stays attached, making it more likely you'll use it.
- Don't rinse your mouth out in the shower (some people like to do this); otherwise, taking a shower is fine.

- Any hot drink from a restaurant or vendor should be steaming hot. Don't accept lukewarm beverages. Similarly, hot food should be very hot, and cold food should be icy, not tepid or lukewarm.
- Ensure that any water you use for making coffee or tea has boiled completely for one minute (or three minutes if you're above 6,500 feet in elevation).
- Be cautious and stay alert: if something doesn't seem safe, it probably isn't. Trust your instincts.