

Travel Tip: It's All About the Water

You've probably heard or read somewhere that you should always drink bottled water and brush your teeth with it when traveling to a developing country. Correct!

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

"It eliminates the guesswork about which country has a safe water supply, and it's easier to remember," say 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 perceived risk is high), but they relax and let their guard down in Mexico (where perceived risk is low: "it's so close to the U.S." or "we're staying in a high-end resort").

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

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

- Use **bottled water at every destination**, whether in 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 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 in the shower (some people like to do this); otherwise, it's fine to take a shower.

- 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 to make coffee or tea has boiled for at least one minute (or three minutes if you're above 6,500 feet).
- Be cautious and stay alert: if something doesn't feel safe or tastes "off," it likely isn't.

Trust your instincts!

Be smart, stay alert, and drink only bottled water from reliable sources —everywhere and at all times.