

To drink or not to drink: avoid falling sick abroad with our tips on drinking tap water | Skyscanner Australia

With human bodies comprising about 60% water we require constant topping up just to stay alive. It's thought that humans could survive perhaps three to four days without water, seven tops. Which makes safe drinking water an essential element to any holiday. Enjoy [Skyscanner Australia's](#) tips on safe holiday hydration (sorry, cocktails are not involved!) to avoid falling sick.

Why do we need to drink water anyway?

Water provides the lubrication our bodies need to function. It lubricates our joints and muscles, controls our body temperature and helps us to eliminate waste. In a nutshell, without water our bodies would shut down. The Dietitians Association of Australia advise that adults need at least 1.5 to 2 litres per day. Having access to safe drinking water is therefore a no brainer.

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How do I know when tap water is safe to drink?

When travelling overseas it's not so easy to stay hydrated when you're on the go all the time. One of the first questions travellers often ask is 'is the water safe to drink?' If you're like me and try to reduce plastic waste, you'd probably prefer to drink tap water if it's safe, rather than constantly buying bottled water. When it comes to holiday health though, it's best to err on the side of caution.

If your hotel provides complimentary bottled water in the bathroom, near the kettle or beside the bed, assume that tap water is unsafe for drinking or teeth brushing.

As a general rule, developed countries (pretty much most of Europe, for example) have safe drinking water while developing countries have questionable drinking water. Switzerland take a bow – your tap water is of similar quality to bottled mineral water.



Safe travelling habits

Travellers diarrhoea, gastro, typhoid, cholera and hepatitis A can all be transmitted through dirty water, whether drinking, eating, showering or swimming in it.

Fresh water streams that may look clean and clear in mountainous areas are at risk from fecal matter (from humans and animals), decaying animals and agriculture runoff upstream. Don't be tempted to fill your water bottle unless you have a means of purifying it by boiling or with water purification tablets.

Salads and fruit washed in contaminated water are a prime source for travellers getting sick. Lettuce is a prime culprit but so too are tomatoes and apples – any fruit in fact where the skin is edible.

It's the same deal with ice cubes (including cocktails and smoothies made with crushed ice) which are best avoided unless you're in a hotel, bar or restaurant that guarantees that ice is made from filtered water.

As a last resort you could disinfect 3.7 litres of unsafe water with 8 drops of regular household bleach, stirring well and waiting 30mins before drinking.

Keep your mouth closed when showering to avoid swallowing contaminated water. So too when swimming.

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Alternatives to drinking water

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating suggests milk (particularly low-fat varieties) as a healthy alternative to water. Containing important nutrients like protein and calcium, milk is actually about 90% water anyway. Find milk boring or tasteless? Try chocolate or strawberry flavoured milk.

If you're holidaying in the tropics fresh coconut juice is probably the best hydration around – not only does it taste delicious, it's good for you!

Bottled fruit juice is another alternative though it's often high in sugar so you'll need to go easy if you don't want to pack on holiday kilos. The upside is that they're healthier than soft drinks and fruit drinks which have minimal fruit and maximum sugar. Boiling tap water in your hotel room should make it safe to drink so long as it's boiled for at least one minute. At higher altitudes (above 2,000m) make that 3 minutes or more.

Then there is those cocktails we we weren't going to mention...

About the author

Fiona Harper is a north Queensland based travel writer at [Travel Boating Lifestyle](#). Widely travelled, highly acclaimed and much published, when she's not writing she's probably running a marathon or exploring the world by foot, bike, kayak, camel or boat: whatever mode of transport she can get her hands on!

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