

Market tables with fresh fruits and vegetables on a narrow street in Bologna, Italy.  
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# BE A SAVVY TRAVELER!



**Below:** A roadside restaurant outside of Mexico City serves homemade tortillas with all the fixings.

**Bottom:** A selection of quick snacks and hot peppers at a Mexican market stand.



*Trdelnik, a common sweet treat from street vendors in Prague, Czech Republic.*

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY LISA BALLARD

# 10 TIPS TO AVOID GETTING SICK

In 1519, when Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés came ashore on what's now the east coast of Mexico, the great Aztec emperor Montezuma II invited him to his palace. Cortés stayed for several months. In one of the greatest mistranslations of humankind, Cortés mistook Montezuma's polite offer to make himself at home to mean the emperor had gifted his extensive domain to Spain. War broke out, European diseases to which the Aztecs had no immunity spread, and Spain conquered the Aztecs. Though Montezuma died in the melee, he has sought his revenge on travelers to Mexico and many other parts of the world ever since.

"Montezuma's revenge," also called traveler's diarrhea, is a common digestive disorder that afflicts millions of tourists and trekkers after they inadvertently consume contaminated food or drink impure water. It's one of a number of illnesses that can turn a life-list vacation or important business trip into an agonizing affair. The symptoms are not limited to an acute case of diarrhea. Fever, nausea, bloating, weakness, gas, cramps, and a loss of appetite can also waylay travelers without warning.





Locals in foreign lands are used to the various bacteria and parasites in their drinking water, but as a traveler, you need to be savvy about what you eat and how you stay hydrated, especially in less developed parts of the world. *E. coli*, a type of bacteria, and *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite, are common causes of digestive-tract illnesses abroad, though they are just two culprits on a long list of nasties that can make you sick.

To avoid spending your trip traipsing between your bed and the bathroom, the best policy is to adhere to the adage for food: If you don't peel it yourself, or if it's not cooked, don't eat it. For beverages, if it's not from a factory-sealed bottle or boiled, don't drink it.

Travelers attempting to follow these two rules often feel Montezuma's wrath because they miss a critical nuance. The classic mistake is rinsing one's toothbrush in tap water. Other mistakes include ordering a beverage with ice in it or washing your hands with contaminated water and then touching your food. A cook can also transmit a disease to you by touching your food or by washing it in contaminated water—key reasons to stick with cooked foods. You can still contract foodborne illnesses from cooked food, but the risk is much lower.

Sometimes a malady like Montezuma's revenge is short-lived and curable, but occasionally, it can be life-threatening, depending on what you contract. Besides eating or drinking tainted food or beverages, travelers can fall prey to serious diseases transmitted by insect bites, animal bites, intimate relations, and poor sanitation. Malaria, hepatitis A and B, typhoid fever, cholera, dengue fever, tetanus, and yellow fever are among the major maladies you're at risk for, depending on where your travels take you.

There can also be a time lag between the trip and the appearance of symptoms. If you suffer from any abnormalities in your health, even a month or two after you've returned home, see a doctor immediately, and don't forget to tell your doctor where you've been.

Fortunately, there are vaccines and other preventive measures to help you avoid many of these diseases, as well as ways of traveling more wisely to reduce your risk.

Children chase bubbles in Old Town Square, a center of tourism in Prague, Czech Republic.

**Opposite page:** A local restaurant in a small Mexican village.

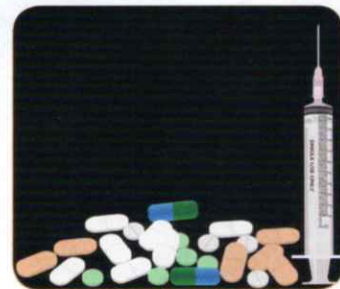


## 10 TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHIER ABROAD



**1 DO YOUR RESEARCH.** Check with a credible travel clinic, such as the International Travel Clinic at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center ([dartmouth-hitchcock.org](http://dartmouth-hitchcock.org)), to understand the health risks at your destination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)) is the go-to source online for information on most countries around the globe.

**2 PLAN AHEAD.** Two to three months before your trip, talk to your doctor to schedule the shots you need and the medicine(s) you should take. Some immunizations and preventive prescriptions require a series of shots or doses that start before you depart. Be sure your tetanus shot is up to date too.



**3 AVOID MOSQUITOES.** If malaria or another mosquito-borne or bug-inflicted illness is a risk, use repellent, wear protective clothing, and close a bug net around you when you sleep. Bring a bug net if it's not provided.





**KEEP THESE RULES IN MIND**

IF YOU DON'T PEEL IT YOURSELF, OR IF IT'S NOT COOKED, **DON'T EAT IT.**

FOR BEVERAGES, IF IT'S NOT FROM A FACTORY-SEALED BOTTLE OR BOILED, **DON'T DRINK IT.**

**4 KEEP YOUR DISTANCE.** Know what types of poisonous creatures, such as scorpions, spiders, and snakes, exist where you are going. Learn where they lurk and how to identify them.

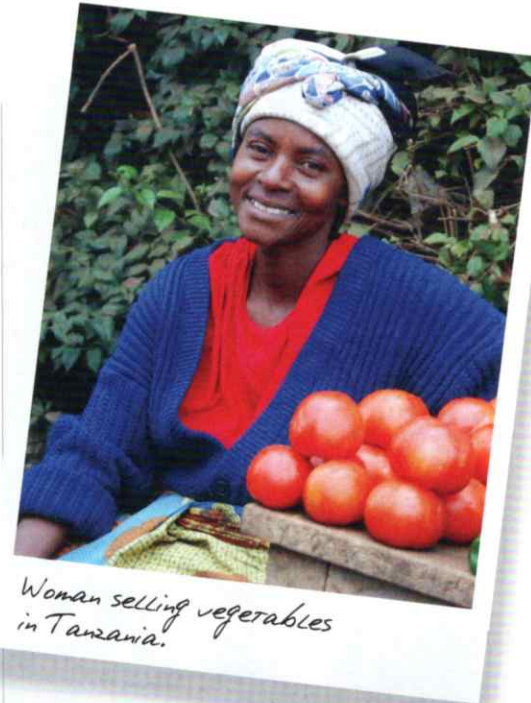
**5 BRING HAND SANITIZER AND USE IT FREQUENTLY.** Avoid touching your hands to your eyes, nose, and mouth to keep germs away.



**6 STAY OUT OF DIRTY WATER.** If water quality is a concern or if conditions are unsanitary, use baby wipes to wash your face and body instead of bathing or swimming.



**7 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Keep your immune system charged up by eating healthy food, staying hydrated, and getting enough sleep before you depart and while you're traveling.



*Woman selling vegetables in Tanzania.*

**How Travel BENEFITS MENTAL HEALTH**

**IT'S A REJUVENATOR**  
It helps to relax and recharge us by changing our daily patterns.

**IT CAN BOOST CREATIVITY**  
A change of scenery, sampling new foods, and experiencing a new culture are great ways to see life in a new light.

**IT CAN RELIEVE STRESS**  
Traveling helps you reset your outlook because you'll focus on the present moment.

**IT CHANGES YOUR VIEW OF THE WORLD**  
Exposure to different languages and new places, people, and ideas challenges you to broaden your worldview.

**IT CAN BUILD CONFIDENCE**  
Having to navigate in a different culture boosts your confidence.



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 As featured in the October 15, 2017 issue of  
*The New York Times Magazine!*

## 8 DRINK PURIFIED WATER.

Bring Aquamira, iodine tablets, or a SteriPEN if you are not sure you can obtain sealed, pure water or boiled water.

## 9 BE PREPARED FOR MINOR EMERGENCIES.

Carry a small first aid kit with medications to treat diarrhea, constipation, allergies, minor cuts, pain, fever, motion sickness, and other minor ailments.



**10 RESPECT ALTITUDE.** If you're planning a trek at high altitudes (above 8,000 feet), even if you are an uber-fit marathoner, you'll probably experience shortness of breath after only minimal exertion, and you may sleep restlessly until you acclimatize. Go slowly! If you get a headache and/or nausea, go lower—losing elevation is the only way to cure acute mountain sickness. A prescription medication like Diamox can help.

Traveling abroad, learning about other cultures, meeting people with different backgrounds, and having adventures unique to a particular region of the world are among life's most rewarding experiences. Don't stay home because you worry about picking up a strange disease. If you're a savvy traveler who takes reasonable precautions, chances are you'll have a fulfilling experience and a memorable journey—with no medical issues as souvenirs! ❖

An award-winning writer/photographer, Lisa Ballard has spent a lifetime traveling to remote, exotic places around the world. To read about her adventures, pick up any issue of image or go to [www.LisaBallardOutdoors.com](http://www.LisaBallardOutdoors.com).

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