

**1****Wash your hands frequently and before you eat.**

While this is hardly breaking news, compliance remains poor. Proper hand hygiene (it's no longer called hand washing) interrupts transmission of most diarrhea-causing microorganisms. Such organisms abound in areas of poor sanitation. You acquire organisms via your hands, by touching doorknobs and money, and by shaking people's hands, for example, and then placing your fingers in your mouth. Easy-to-carry hand sanitizers are a good alternative to cleanse hands when soap and water is not available. Hospitals use them. Rub hands with the sanitizer for at least 10 seconds, though longer is better. Hand hygiene also helps reduce your risk of getting respiratory infections.

**5****Never season food with spices or uncooked condiments.**

The gathering, preparation and storage of spices favor contamination by rodents and insects. Folklore in Mexico and other countries says that "hot" spicy sauces (hot as in spicy, not hot as in temperature) and lemon juice kill organisms and make food safe. Not true. Spices added before cooking are safe. Be leery of dips such as guacamole; they often contain other raw vegetables.

**2****Eat foods that arrive at your table too hot to eat immediately.**

Such foods were heated to temperatures sufficiently high to kill organisms, and then did not stand around to be contaminated by flies, people's hands or unclean cutting boards. Hot soups and stews and many Chinese dishes are ideal, especially if they contain small pieces, not large chunks of solids, insuring that the center of each item reached the critical temperature. Pass up items such as ceviche, a cold, raw fish soup, popular in parts of South America. Ceviche probably causes more intestinal illness than any other single food anywhere, says the World Health Organization. And, especially in Southeast Asia, eat rice only if it is piping hot; often rice is prepared long before serving, and simmers lukewarm on backburners until served, an ideal environment for organisms to multiply.

**4****Order items that require little handling to prepare.**

Foods properly prepared in a wok, on a grill, or in boiling liquids are safer choices than hors d'oeuvres. In several cases of in-flight food poisoning only first class passengers became ill; they received canapés consisting of aspics, caviar and such. Economy passengers ate hot meat and potato-type dishes. (The reported incidences of in-flight food poisonings has decreased dramatically, thanks to improved catering techniques.) Hors d'oeuvres-type foods are prepared by hand, usually hours before serving, contain many ingredients, including raw vegetables, and may be stored at room temperature, allowing organisms to multiply. Omelets and food items rolled in dough - egg rolls, enchiladas and such - are generally safe if hot throughout and all the ingredients added before frying and cooking.

Breads, rolls and crackers are generally safe even after storage; these lack sufficient moisture for sustained bacterial growth.

Where sanitation is extremely poor, discard the crust and eat the inside.

Jellies and syrups are usually safe; high sugar items also contain little moisture.

**6****Be among the first in line at buffets, especially outdoor ones in the tropics.**

Buffet-type food requires much handling to prepare and then remains on tables for hours, increasing the risk of lapses in sanitation. Outdoors, food is exposed to heat and insects. Placing large casseroles on beds of ice does not ensure cooling the upper layers. Sternos may keep food only lukewarm. Desserts are generally eaten last, but are often placed on the table at the same time as other items. Organisms multiply rapidly in creamy products.

**3****Choose food items that are easy to clean.**

Avoid raw vegetables and salads. Removing particles of soil from leafy vegetables is virtually impossible. (Restaurants of major hotel chains claim they soak vegetables in disinfectant solution, making such items safer to eat.)



**7**

**Choose carefully in the dining room if there is a candle in your hotel room.**

Candles mean that electrical outages are common. Outages disrupt water disinfecting processes and refrigeration. Note: Candles are found even in rooms of some five-star hotels.

**8**

**Have milk and dairy products only in better restaurants.**

Even if such items reach you properly chilled they may have undergone thawing, allowing bacteria to multiply. Subsequent refrigeration retards further bacterial growth but preserves organisms already in the item. Many poor countries lack refrigerated trucks, for example. Packaged butter is likely safe.

**9**

**Foods that turn your stomach do not necessarily upset your stomach.**

Sanitarily prepared and stored snake soup, earthworms and insects may be difficult to get past your lips but are no more likely to make you ill than hamburgers, pizza and chicken wings.

**10**

**In poor countries street food deserves its reputation.**

Stalls, carts and equipment are dilapidated, virtually impossible to keep clean. Vendors have little or no knowledge of sanitation, buy the least expensive raw products available, lack refrigeration, and rarely have access to safe water for cooking, dishwashing or hand washing.

But should you find the street food scene too seductive to pass up, do the following: Choose a clean-appearing stand. Look for items kept for a prolonged time on a hot grill or in boiling liquid, that are removed with clean-looking utensils (preferably ones resting on the grill or in the hot liquid), have no condiments added, and are placed on a disposable plate. Supply the plate, if necessary. Eat with (clean) hands or your own eating utensils.

# 10 Tips

*for enjoying tempting food in exotic countries*



*— and not regretting it later!*



*To be or not to be* an adventurous eater, that is the question on the minds of many travelers. Is it safe to partake of enticing local dishes? Or, perchance, is it wiser to shun such morsels, knowing that they may later cause you a sea of trouble, to lose sleep, and to suffer the dreadful aches and all the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to? *(from Shakespeare, with apologies.)*

In fact, food sanitation is improving everywhere, making it possible to enjoy many savory dishes, even some from street vendors - if you know what you're doing.