

Journey to Health: Healthy Summer Travel

By Eli Follick

Summertime vacations usually involve copious amounts of food. For my family, that usually meant visits to places like Disneyland, the Grand Canyon, and other sight-rich, activity-oriented, and calorie-laden destinations. There were also a few excursions to Europe and the Middle East, where we learned and experienced a lot, and almost always over-sampled the local cuisine. While tasting new foods and indulging in favorites should be part of any time off, there are ways, with a bit of planning, to dine well and still maintain a healthful lifestyle.

For domestic travel, search online for restaurants that offer nutritious foods. Look for places with a salad bar or a sit-down restaurant where you can ask the server about how food is prepared and what ingredients are used. Request that foods be baked rather than fried, that no butter or salt be added, and that any sauces come on the side. You can also make substitutions, including salad instead of french fries or vegetables instead of pasta or potatoes. Try to stay away from all-you-can eat buffets and most fast-food restaurants. On menus, look for words such as baked, broiled, grilled, diet, healthy, steamed, and whole wheat.

Pack some nutritious snacks. I like celery and carrot sticks, apples, bananas, bell pepper slices, and dried fruit like raisins and apricots. If you have are on a road trip and have a cooler, take plain low-fat yogurt, sugar-free applesauce, or even some baked chicken. Stay hydrated and try not to skip meals.

While I emphasize nutrition, and it is critical, there are obviously other components of healthful travel. Washing your hands regularly is one of the easiest things you can do to

help avoid getting sick. Pack some over-the-counter medications for “just in case” moments. Ibuprofen, antihistamines, decongestants and motion sickness aids are some to consider. Keep any prescriptions with you at all times. Even though you may have a fun-filled schedule, make sure to get adequate rest.

Use sun blocker regularly, according to directions on the bottle, and wear appropriate clothing (a hat, etc.) to protect yourself from sunburn.

International Trips

If planning international travel, you’ll do well to take a few extra steps. Enroll with the U.S. Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Monitor travel warnings for your destination(s). Enrolling ensures that the Department of State knows where you are if you encounter serious legal, medical, or financial difficulties while traveling. In the event of an emergency at home, STEP can also help friends and family contact you. A few other good sources of health information include the Centers for Disease Control’s National Center for Infectious Diseases (Travelers’ Health), the Federal Aviation Administration (information for the air traveler with a disability), the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers, the World Health Organization (International Travel and Health), and the National Institutes of Health. You may also have some luck contacting the U.S. embassy of the country(ies) you will be heading to.

Make an appointment with your health care provider to get destination-specific vaccines, medicines, and advice at least a month before you leave. Discuss your itinerary and planned



activities with your provider so that he/she can make customized recommendations to help ensure a healthful journey.

Find out if your health insurance covers medical care abroad. Make sure you have a plan to get medical care should you need it. If you will be traveling to remote areas, consider buying travel insurance that covers health care and emergency evacuation.

Choose safe transportation and if you plan to do any driving, know in advance what the rules of the road are in the places you’ll visit.

Use insect repellent to avoid bug bites. Bugs, fleas and ticks can spread diseases that are not common in the America. Also, be careful about choosing safe food and drink to avoid traveler's diarrhea. Generally, foods served hot are safe, as is dry and packaged food. Bottled, canned, and hot drinks, too,

are usually safe. Stay away from ice cubes made from locally available water, and be careful about anything edible you buy in some of the open markets.

At the Hotel

Free breakfast at the hotel? Choose healthier, satisfying foods like fruit, plain yogurt, and egg whites as opposed to processed carbohydrates s like pastries, pancakes, cold cereals (oatmeal is better), and waffles.

Overall, whether you travel domestically or internationally, stay active. Explore on foot or rent a bike to get around. Sign up for some guided tours. Consider an appointment at a spa for a massage and a facial. Any activity that restores and energizes you is usually good for you and will help keep you on your journey to health.

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