



As an experienced senior traveler, I'm often asked: Is it safe to eat food from outdoor carts and stalls in a foreign country? If you have any doubts or fears at all .... just don't do it! If you follow that rule, you'll never get sick from that iffy type of food.

However, most senior travelers take the chance once in awhile. Since I retired many years ago, I've dined from street carts all over the U.S., and in many cities of the world: Paris, London, Rome, Acapulco, Venice, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Oslo, Copenhagen and others. Earlier, some Navy service assignments took me to the Far East, and I sampled outdoor goodies in Tokyo, Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul and Hong Kong. I was extremely lucky, because I never was sickened by eating street food anywhere.

However, the one time I ever was seriously ill from bad food was when Navy cooks on my ship used leftover ham to make ham croquettes. A dozen sailors were seriously affected, and several had to be hospitalized. Fortunately, I only had 24 hours of wishing I was dead.

If traveling this season and you're tempted to try some street food, here's some advice that could at least minimize your chances of getting ill.

First, if you're on medications, have a delicate stomach or are recently recovered from a severe illness, before you travel, check with your family physician. Heed the instructions, and go easy or totally avoid street vender food.

Wash everything thoroughly, preferably with bottled water, before you eat on the street. Of course, make sure your own hands are clean before you gobble anything.

Buy cooked street food only after you actually see it boiled, fried or steamed thoroughly while you wait. Avoid food that looks like it has been sitting around in the sun awhile, especially fish,

poultry and meat. If you see locals buying and eating at a cart, chances are its food is clean enough for you to try.

Before you venture out into outdoor marketplaces, ask hotel staff or cruise ship officials about the best places to get clean food in the town. If you're familiar with the language, check with police, taxi drivers and other locals.

The safest foods are those Mother Nature seal-wraps for you: bananas, citrus, nuts and coconuts. Freshly opened coconut milk is safe, delicious and nutritious.

Many foods not native to your own country may be safe for locals, but your stomach may find them unfamiliar and become upset, especially after you've eaten a large portion.