

Third World Water

By Don Van Veldhuizen, Circuit Rider

A thought to me came not long ago about the phrase, "Awesome place, but don't drink the water." Why is it that such wonderful places have water that can make a trip terrible? Prior to getting to some of these places, you have invested money and time to have a dream vacation. The last thing you want to do is to spend most of the time in your room with some jungle crud or tropical trots making you miserable.

Living in the not well known paradise of Papua New Guinea for nearly two years, I got to learn first hand what their water systems consist of and see effects of the unclean/treated water in such a third world paradise.

My first stop was a center outside of Madang. A place where the untouched big game fishing is making this a more and more popular destination for the sports minded adventurer. The water system at the center consisted of collecting rain water and storing it. This is common throughout the country due to the large amounts of rain. Usually, the water is collected off the roofs and placed in anything from three to fifteen thousand gallon tanks. Most likely, the tanks were made of galvanized roofing, riveted together and sealed with lead based solder. The cisterns, when full, made a wonderful birdbath as the birds could land on the screen designed to keep the debris and large bugs out. No disinfection at all.

The next place was a town called Ukarumpa. This town was in the highlands and the population (about 1500) was mainly from the western world. They also used these cistern systems along with water pumped from the river. Disinfection consisted of a UV system at the river. It was then pumped to storage tanks up the hill. The river system was not used very consistently due to muddy water. No other disinfection occurred. Nearly all of the residents either boiled or filtered their water prior to drinking.

The final place was the town called Alotau in the Milne Bay Province. Divers and historians find this community very popular as it was here where the Japanese experienced their first land defeat in

WW2. There are shipwrecks to dive, along with many other things that make this some of the finest diving in the world. It has a system similar to Ukarumpa but does not use cisterns in town. The water is collected in an open reservoir prior to treatment. The distribution system was put in by the Army Corps of Engineers during the war and has had little maintenance since. Water is provided to the town from about 5am to 10pm. The system is not tight and drains each night so you can hear the whistle when the system turns on each morning. How it has lasted this long is a real acknowledgement to the Army Corps and the job they have done.

When visiting this country or others like it, keep in mind, that a few precautions will make your dream vacation dreamy. Bring a small filter to drink water from. Many forms of filters exist from straws to water bottles and are very portable. Also, avoid any iced drinks as freezing is not an effective treatment for pathogens. Some destination resorts say they have certified wells, ask to see results from testing.

Coming soon "Third World Wastewater!"