

TAINTED ALCOHOL: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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Sensational headlines attract attention, but the articles to which they draw readers often lack the nuanced information needed to make responsible choices. Here are some facts about the current issue making news:

To date, twenty deaths have been reported, caused by consumption of guaro-like alcohols tainted with methanol. It is believed that all of these victims have been Costa Rican nationals.

While still unverified, there's been some suspicion that many of the affected victims are members of specific sub-classes usually in environments distant from a tourism-focus (such as those struggling with poverty and substance-abuse issues).

So far there have been **no reported cases of tourists being sickened** because of this methanol poisoning, and it appears quite unlikely that tourists who obtain alcohol through legitimate channels are at risk.

Affected brands include *Guaro Montano, Guaro Gran Apache, Aguardiente Estrella, Aguardiente Barón Rojo, Aguardiente Timbuka, and Molotov Aguardiente*. The health ministry has recommended that these brands be avoided until further notice (it is very rare for tourists to buy or consume these lower-end products).

It's believed that empty bottles of some of these brands (which are registered for legal sale in Costa Rica) had been refilled with bootleg liquor and then sold outside of conventional retail outlets (often for less than \$2), and that those who became ill did so after drinking from those bottles.

According to health ministry officials, fatalities included 15 men and five women between the ages of 32 and 72, and most occurred in or near the capital: Seven people in San Jose; four in Cartago, and one in Heredia. But there were coastal cases: three in Limón and two in Guanacaste.

Based on the information available, it appears that a tourist relying on quality brands purchased through reputable sources is extremely unlikely to be exposed to the methanol that is apparently present in this bootleg liquor

SOURCES:

Tico Times

New York Times

Costa Rican Health Ministry

World Health Organisation

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