

Good Taste on Tap

Advanced technology and strict standards makes Tokyo tap water about as tasty as bottled water.



The iconic red brick intake tower of the Kanamachi Purification Plant, on Tokyo's Edogawa River.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 will be scorching hot. Not only from the athletic competition but also the heat—they'll take place in July and August, when the mercury in the capital can easily top 30 degrees Celsius. What's the best way to beat the heat? For starters, try quaffing lots of Tokyo tap water. You might find that it's surprisingly tasty.

In March 2018, the Bureau of Waterworks of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) kicked off a new campaign to promote Tokyo water as being clean and delicious thanks to advanced purification and rigorous standards. Staff installed a dispenser, about the size of a vending machine, at the Tokyo International Forum's plaza in Chiyoda Ward. It's supplied by an underground pipe and dispenses chilled water every day from 7:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Some thirsty passers-by who tried it expressed disbe-

lief that the liquid wasn't spring water.

The bureau is combating notions that tap water may taste or smell differently than bottled water because of methods used to ensure it's clean and safe. The key message is that the bureau has been implementing advanced purification technology to make Tokyo tap water the best in the world.

Tokyo's waterworks delivers an average of 4,167,000 cubic meters of water per day to more than 13 million people, a population that tops 15 million during the daytime. It's sent through a pipeline network that's over 27,500 kilometers long and features more than 130 automated water-quality meters.

The water comes from three rivers that irrigate the Kanto plain—the Tamagawa, Tonegawa and Arakawa. The latter two supply about 80 percent of the capital's water, and the Tamagawa accounts for the rest. The Tamagawa begins at Lake Okutama

in the mountainous western part of Tokyo. There, and in the Tamagawa upstream area, volunteers conduct reforestation activities to ensure the woodlands are a good source of water.

River water from all three sources undergoes standard purification treatment to be potable. But water from the Tonegawa and Arakawa also goes through advanced steps, specifically ozonation and biological activated carbon adsorption, which are known as Advanced Water Treatment.

Of course Tokyo's tap water meets the 51 standards set by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. In addition to this, the TMG has 200 additional standards regarding safety and taste that are checked before the water is piped to consumers. The TMG has an independent target for deliciousness. Under Japanese law chlorine used for water sterilization must be more than 0.1 mg per liter but no more than 1 mg per liter. However, the standards that the TMG requires are even more stringent; more than

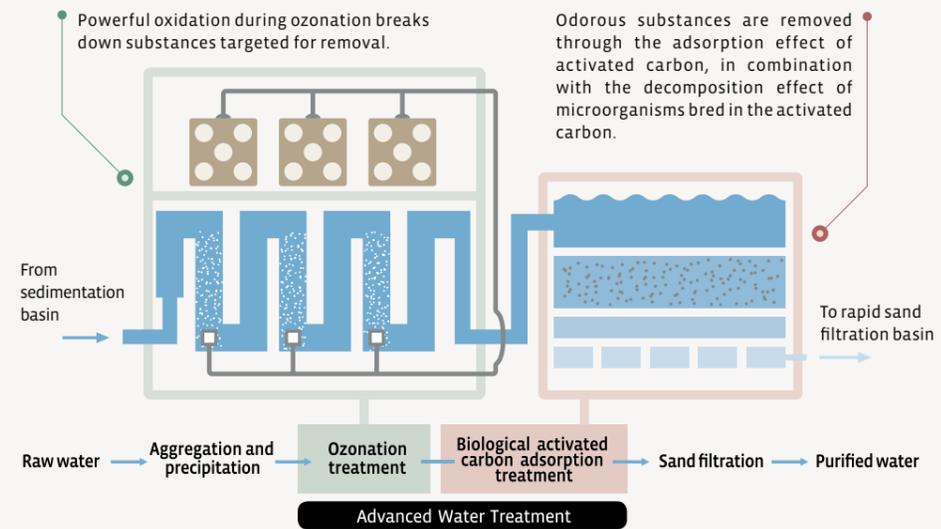
0.1 mg per liter and no more than 0.4 mg per liter. Thanks to that, residual chlorine is so low that it is

hard for consumers to perceive any taste of chlorine. According to the drinking comparison questionnaire targeting 30,613 people that the Bureau of Waterworks carried out in 2017, 58.9 percent of the people answered that Tokyo tap water is tastier or tastes just as good as bottled water.

Another contributing factor behind the great taste of Tokyo water is its softness. In contrast to many waters in North America and Europe, water in the Tokyo region has a lower hardness level. It's "soft" because it has fewer dissolved minerals such as calcium and magnesium. This gives Tokyo spring and tap water a milder taste than water in the West. Soft water in Tokyo and the rest of Japan is said to be effective at enhancing the flavors of foods like tofu and soba, drinks such as green tea, and cooking stock such as dashi, a fish broth made from dried bonito. It's perhaps not surprising, then, that one sake brewer uses Tokyo tap water in its production process. Tokyo tap water offered in PET bottles has also been popular among foreign tourists.

Tokyo tap water will take center stage in September 2018 when the International Water Association holds a congress in the capital with 6,000 participants from 100 countries around the world. Climate change, water scarcity, drought, flooding and growing water demand will be on the agenda.

"Tokyo boasts its sophisticated waterworks which allows us to provide remarkably safe and clear tap water of the highest quality," Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike has said. "As the host city we will use this conference to actively share Tokyo's accumulated technologies and know-how."



Tokyo tap water offered in PET bottles has also been popular among foreign tourists. The label design incorporates a traditional Edo kiriko pattern.

