

# All stirred up over drinking water in restaurants



## Some eateries are upset over blogger's list of places that don't serve free water

Lee Xin En

A blogger, upset that a restaurant would not serve her tap water which she needed to take her medication with, is urging diners to boycott such outlets.

Miss Veron Ang – urged on by some netizens – went further and posted on her blog a list of 62 restaurants that she claimed do not serve free water.

It provoked angry reactions from several of the eateries which said they do serve water without charge.

One warned that the list Miss Ang, 24, a Web developer, created was “libellous”.

Miss Ang said that in May, she dined at a restaurant in the west that refused to serve her water although she needed it for her medication.

After she “Twittered” the incident, her friends urged her to create a list of similar eating places. She compiled an initial list from her own experience, as well as going to reviews on a food website, and asking friends on Facebook and Twitter.

After her list was posted on blog aggregating site Tomorrow.sg, other contributions started flowing in.

Her initial list, first posted last month, grew to 62 restaurants. It has been circulated by many Twitter users and websites.

The restaurants that do serve free water, but yet ended up on the list, are not amused. The Tapas Tree is one.

The marketing and sales manager for The Tapas Tree Group, Ms Lyn Yip, said: “We find this list to be libellous, and will not hesitate to engage our lawyer if we are not removed from the list and the situation is not rectified immediately.”

“We live in a time when the influence of Web opinion cannot be ignored, so bloggers have to approach their entries with responsibility, especially when composing defamatory lists.”

The list was still available at Miss Ang's blog when The Sunday Times checked yesterday at 4pm.

When contacted, 10 of the listed restaurants that admitted to a “no free water” policy defended their position.

The managing director of Italian restaurant La Forketta, Ms Gracie Vitale, said: “Our patrons are serious diners and come for our food, not to taste water. It's the customer with a budget who insists on tap water.”

She added that, outside Singapore, “nobody really asks for tap water”.

Mr Jeffrey Jumahat, manager of Cafe Le Caire which does not serve free water, also shrugged off the list's boy-

cott exhortation.

“To be frank, I don't think customers will just boycott because of water. There's no urgent need to take action at this point of time,” he said.

Mr Jack Chin, co-founder of Mad Jack's, said his chain of four restaurants does not serve free water because manpower is needed to refill and wash the glasses. He added: “People who complain are not educated about business costs because nothing is free.”

Bakerzin, which started serving free water in April last year, said it incurred costs of \$25,000 to install special water filters at its 10 sit-down dining outlets.

Taking the list seriously is Alps Cafe owner Danny Ang, who is rethinking his policy of “free water only if you ask for it”.

His cafe had stopped serving water at dinner only late last year, but he does serve free tap water to customers who want it.

He said: “I'm worried about the list. If customers really want it, I might consider raising the price of the food to give everyone free water.”

Several patrons contacted dismissed the reasons cited for not giving free tap water.

Sales manager Renee Koh, 32, said: “Serving plain water for free should really be part of the service experience and I find it hard to think that the costs are that high, given that the water served is just chilled tap water.”

Mr Aun Koh, director of media and lifestyle consultancy Ate Media which published Asia's first restaurant guide The Miele Guide, said: “In Singapore, there is no excuse other than snobbish vanity to drink bottled water and no reason other than an attempt to increase revenues for restaurateurs to refuse to offer tap water to their patrons.”

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Would you patronise an eatery that does not serve free water? Email [suntimes@sph.com.sg](mailto:suntimes@sph.com.sg)



ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM  
Mr Danny Tan, owner of Alps Cafe which serves free water “only if you ask for it”, is rethinking this policy.

## WATER ETIQUETTE IN DINING CAPITALS

■ **Paris:** While waiters will always try to push bottled water on their customers, customers can always ask for a “carafe” of water, which refers to tap water.

Usually, bread and a jug of tap water are provided free.

A BBC report showed that 51 per cent of Parisians drink bottled water. In 2005, the Paris municipality started distributing free designer carafes in a bid to convince Parisians that tap water is just as good as mineral water.

■ **Hong Kong:** Diners have been debating heatedly online about the quality of Hong Kong's drinking water. Critics include those who agree the water is drinkable but say the pipes that it passes through are dirty.

Still, most diners do not order bottled mineral water as there is a belief that the free tap water served at restaurants is boiled and, therefore, clean enough.

■ **Tokyo:** Eateries usually serve free tap water, and even if they do not, customers are not refused if they ask for it.

■ **London:** Most restaurants serve filtered tap water in a jug so that customers can refill their cups themselves.

However, British newspaper The Sunday Times reported in 2003 that thousands of consumers who ordered mineral water in restaurants were actually given filtered tap water and charged up to £4 (\$\$9.50) a litre at both top and mid-ranking restaurants.

■ **New York City:** Tap water is usually served free in restaurants and bars, on request. However, even the Big Apple is not spared the debate over this issue. New York Times restaurant critic Frank Bruni has bemoaned several times in his column the fact that restaurants push bottled water on patrons to pump up the bill, although the city has top-quality tap water.

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