

The Ice Issue

Damiano Beltrami (December 13, 2008)



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Natives are free to disagree, but I really believe that the most difficult achievement in America is not becoming President. It is obtaining a soft drink with no ice. In New York ice is like American flags: ubiquitous. Whether it is an unbearably hot summer day or a freezing winter one, ice boldly floats in gigantic water jars, invades fast food plastic glasses, and surrounds transparent boxes of pineapple chunks.



For a foreigner, the war against ice is a serious issue and has to be handled professionally. I sense that the best strategy to defeat General Ice varies depending on the battle field. Take the easiest ground, restaurants. Here you have to convince the waitress from Prague, Cordoba or Mexico City that even if she gives you water with no ice, you'll tip her well. If you are lucky enough to meet a waitress on her first week of training you might succeed. If she has been working there for more than a month, relax. Focus on the food. You'll drink when you get home.

Now let's consider an ever tougher combat zone, the bar. Getting a rum and Coke without tons of ice is harder than convincing an Italian not to eat pasta for a week. You have to yell in the bartender's ear: "No ice please," and hope he is not deaf, disinterested or disconnected.

Restaurants and bars, however, are a piece of cake compared to fast food places. Here, if you request a drink with no ice they will think you want to challenge them. They take it personally. So I found that the best strategy is to follow the rules of the Ciceronian rhetoric. You say what you are going to say (anticipate you want a drink with no ice), you say it ("No ice please"), and finally you say it again ("As I said, no ice please.") It doesn't always work, but it reduces the chances of getting a cold.

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