

Don't Be a Trashy Tourist

October 2023

The average person living in the United States produces 4.9 pounds of municipal solid waste, or trash, every day, resulting in 1788.5 pounds per person per year. This large production of trash resulted in 292.4 million tons being disposed of in 2018. Furthermore, the amount of trash produced in the U.S. rises every year.

Within the realm of trash, plastic products are considered especially dangerous since they do not disappear over time. Rather, UV rays, ocean currents, and other physical forces break the plastics into smaller pieces, known as microplastics, over time. Some scientists deem



microplastics more dangerous than larger plastics because they can contain harmful chemicals and can hold onto and transfer pathogens which can be detrimental to both human and the health of the environment. It is important to note that 12.2% of trash produced is plastic, and 14 million tons of plastic enters the oceans every year. This large output of plastics into the environment can be attributed to the fact that only 9% of plastics are recycled.

Photo Credit: Cassidy Fredette-Roman

Improperly disposed trash negatively impacts beaches, oceans and reefs, community health, tourist destinations, and freshwater environments. These impacts can be seen through physical trash on the beaches, 100,000 marine animals dying annually from plastic entanglement and ingestion, and toxic chemical pollutants from plastics entering aquatic systems and the human food chain.

In some places, tourists produce up to twice as much waste as residents – in fact, U.S. tourists produce an estimated 4.8 million tons of trash annually! Whether this waste is attributed to the carefree mindset that comes with vacationing or the ease that comes with using single-use products, it is harmful to the environment and the locals living in popular tourist destinations.

Luckily, there are several simple steps you can take to be an eco-friendly tourist. Regardless of your travel destination, you can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Here are some ways you can limit your trash production, avoid plastic use, and help the environment while on your next vacation.

Preparing for Your Trip

- **Bring your own:** When preparing for your trip, make sure to bring your own reusable items, such as water bottles, straws, and grocery bags. Considering over 22 million plastic water bottles are thrown away yearly, and only one in six of those water bottles are recycled, this easy step can make a big impact. In addition, bringing your own toiletries in refillable personal containers can limit the trash produced when using hotel toiletries in single-use plastic bottles.
- **Pack a backpack:** By bringing a backpack or large purse, you have a place to store your reusables so you do not forget them when you are out and about. By making sure you always have your reusable water bottle with you, you won't need to buy single-use plastic bottles.
- **Bring reusable paper garbage bags:** Whether you are hiking or going to the beach, you will likely produce some amount of trash. If you bring a garbage bag with you, you can limit the temptation to litter out of convenience and won't be dependent on infrequent garbage bins. Putting your trash in a bag can also prevent it from blowing away in the wind or being accidentally left behind.

Proper Disposal of Trash

- **Recycle versus garbage can:** It is important to recycle all appropriate materials. Different states, cities, and counties often have different rules about which materials can be recycled. Make sure to educate yourself on what recycling options are available at your vacation destination. In addition, carry your recyclable items in your backpack to a recycling bin rather than throwing it in the most convenient garbage can.
- **Lose the loop:** Make sure your trash does not have any loops can to help prevent wildlife from becoming entangled. When it is time to dispose of a mask, make sure to either cut or tear the ear loops. The same principle applies to plastic garbage bags and the plastic packaging that holds six-packs together. Whenever there is a loop on your trash, make sure to eliminate it prior to disposal.



Photo Credit: Cassidy Fredette-Roman



Limiting your Plastic Use

- **Sit down at a restaurant:** When traveling, take the time to enjoy your meal at a restaurant rather than ordering takeout or requesting your food to go. This can prevent the production of trash and allow you to use the restaurant's reusables instead.
- **Souvenir shopping:** If you purchase souvenirs, carry them in your own backpack or reusable grocery bag rather than accepting a bag from a gift shop or museum.

Be a Trend Setter

- **Small trash clean-up:** While you are at a beach or park, spend five minutes picking up trash before you leave. Many of these places are free to the public, so think of this as the small cost of using the space. Other tourists and locals may even see you picking up trash and offer to join your effort!

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Preparing for Your Trip

Bring garbage bags- Whether you are hiking or going to the beach, you will likely produce some amount of MSW. If you bring a garbage bag with you, you won't be dependent on frequent garbage bins. Putting your trash in a bag can also prevent it from blowing away in the wind or accidentally left behind. Trash bags can also limit the temptation for littering out of convenience.

Pack a backpack- By bringing a backpack or large purse, you have a place to store your reusables, so you do not forget them when you are out and about. By making sure you always have your reusable water bottle with you, you won't need to buy plastic bottles.

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Proper Disposal of MSW

Lose the loop- When it is time to dispose of a mask, make sure to either cut or tear the ear loops. Making sure your MSW does not have any loops can help prevent wildlife from becoming entangled in your trash. The same principle applies to plastic garbage bags and the plastic packaging that holds six-packs together. Whenever there is a loop on your trash, make sure to eliminate it prior to disposal.

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Limiting your MSW and Plastic Use

Souvenir shopping- If you purchase souvenirs, carry them in your own backpack or reusable grocery bag rather than accepting a bag from a gift shop or museum.

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Sit down at a restaurant- When traveling, take the time to enjoy your meal at a restaurant rather than ordering takeout or requesting your food to go. This can prevent the use of MSW and allow you to use the restaurant's reusables instead.

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Be a Trend Setter

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Small trash clean-up- If you are spending time at a beach or park, spend five minutes picking up trash before you leave. Because many of these places are free to the public, think of this as the small cost of using the space. Other tourists and locals may even see you picking up trash and offer to join your effort!

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