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Environment

Five ways to cut down on one-use plastics when travelling and reduce the mountains of trash

Flying may not be the most eco-friendly way to travel, but we can at least reduce our use of disposable, one-use plastic. From brushing your teeth to drinking water, here are five ways to cut down on plastic pollution

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The next time you travel, consider how much plastic you use only once on airlines, and in fast-food restaurants and hotels. A water bottle or two, plastic spoons, straws, chopsticks, toothbrushes, wrapping on food, wine bottles, shopping bags and coffee cups (yes, they have plastic in them) all get used just once before being slung in the bin.

A United Nations report issued last week warned that our planet could be awash with 12 billion tonnes of plastic waste by the middle of the century. But plastic pollution is beginning to be addressed.

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Concerned about its toxic impact, particularly on the oceans, pressure groups such as Travellers Against Plastic (Tap), the Plastic Pollution Coalition, and the Life Zero Cabin Waste Project are becoming more prominent.

"In Sri Lanka one operator is wrapping food in banana leaves instead of cling film, and an Egyptian hotel offers glass pots for jams and butter at breakfast instead of single use plastic pots," says Justin Francis, CEO and Founder of Responsible Travel, which has just launched 'plastics-free' trips.

Isole Tremiti, a group of islands off the east coast of Italy, banned plastic plates, cups and utensils as of May 1 this year.



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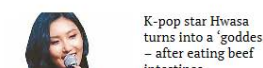
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Being 'plastic-free' could also soon become a selling point for holiday packages. "As travellers, we see places spoilt by bins overflowing with plastic bottles and rubbish-strewn beaches and oceans," says Francis. "The travel industry has a key role to play and we're already seeing many pledges from travel companies to be plastic-free by a certain date."

But this is a trend that will only go mainstream if more travellers start asking questions and making demands of airlines, hotels and restaurants. In the meantime, here are some easy ways to help reduce the amount of plastic waste you create next time you travel.



Avoid travel-sized toiletries

Mini-toothpastes and 'travel-size' shampoos are all the rage in chemists and in airports. They may be convenient, but they don't last a week, making them a single-use plastic nightmare. So find some mini reusable glass, plastic or ceramic containers, and decant your favourite toiletries into them, topping-up before each new trip.

"Three-ounce bottles of shampoos and mouthwashes are cute, but stocking up before every trip is expensive and wasteful," says Adam Coulter, managing editor at Cruise Critic. "[Reusable containers] keep your toiletries fresh and organised – and help you save money as well as reduce your carbon footprint without even trying."



Get a transparent washbag

Even if you do have refillable 100ml containers, you still need something to put them in. Instead of relying on those single-use plastic bags handed out for free at airport security for storing liquids (and which regularly split and need to be thrown away), buy a tough transparent washbag that can last for many years.



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Say no to the 'comfort bag'

Although they're now being phased by a lot of airlines, the bag containing toothpaste, a toothbrush, an eye mask, socks, and a small pen still used in business class and in some long-haul economy cabins merely duplicates a lot of the things you have probably already brought with you.

It's a single-use plastic nightmare, so reject it. If you want to brush your teeth on a flight, pack your toothbrush in your hand luggage.



Bring your own cutlery & earphones

You can avoid using endless plastic forks and chopsticks when on the go by bringing a Spork or some collapsible pocket chopsticks designed for travellers. Just as bad for the environment are those cheap and poor quality, plastic-wrapped earphones that are given to airline passengers at the beginning of each flight. So bring your own earphones and, better still, invest in some noise-cancelling earphones that will help your work or sleep.

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Use a refillable water bottle or a reusable cup

There is no longer any excuse for buying bottled water while you travel. With clean, drinkable water available for free in almost all airports, and in many other public places, the 2.7 million tonnes of water bottle plastic used globally every year is testament to traveller's laziness.

So bring a refillable water bottle and check WaterAtAirports.com to see where you can fill-up, or buy a SteriPEN, which uses ultraviolet light to destroy bacteria and viruses in water.

If you're the type who gets through endless takeaway coffees – for which almost all of the cups go to landfill – consider buying something like the Ecoffee Cup, which is made from sterile bamboo fibre and corn starch, and can be used again and again.