

# Drastic Plastic!

By Ayesha Cantrell

Today I want you to do something for me - just a small thing. I want you to notice plastic and its reckless wanton use. Please don't groan and turn over the page. I want you to notice and get as angry as I am! Just look!!!

Some days I feel like standing in the 7/11 next to the till and asking every person if they really need that bag. I mean come on - do you really need to put one pack of ciggies (which is wrapped in plastic) or one (plastic) bottle of water into a plastic bag. NO - you don't - so start refusing them! Put your purchases straight into your own bag - I know you are carrying one!

South East Asian tourism development has boomed over the last 15 years and its worth remembering that the popular islands that are top on the backpacker trail were virtually uninhabited not so long ago. So think about it - these islands have gone from virgin jungle and coastline to being littered with resorts, pools, cafes, bar, restaurants and shops and hundreds and hundreds of visitors who have consumed an inestimable amount of plastic.

Well actually they haven't - because it hangs around and this is why I'm picking on plastic today! Whatever source you look at - it takes a long time to decompose. In fact, a turtle who mistakenly eats a plastic bag, thinking it's a jelly fish, will die from it. The turtle will decompose and the plastic bag will be unharmed to float around the ocean and kill many many more turtles or other unfortunate creatures before it breaks down. Apart from the plastic that ends up in the water killing the very wildlife travellers are here to encounter, the rest ends up in rubbish dumps on these small islands which are hidden from the visitor. If you saw them you would both consider and understand the impact and then you would be as angry as I am.

Don't get me wrong this isn't the only environmental issue but it is one that you can easily make a commitment too and impact on without really trying! Here are a few things that you can start doing right away!

- Refuse plastic bags - believe me once you start doing this you will realise how many plastic bags are wasted and you too will be standing at counters abusing people for using a plastic bag!
- Find water refill stations and use them. Admittedly there aren't many but they are starting to appear.
- Talk to your guest house and explain to them what a huge impact a refill station will have. Business fear losing money from water sales but those large water bottles cost around 15B and you can get many refills from them - they only need to charge a 10B refill charge and they will be making more money than before while saving plastic waste. What's more those large bottles are all re-usable!
- Straws! Now I know some drinks are nearly impossible to drink without straws but many aren't and you really don't need one never mind two with each drink!
- It should go without saying that you should recycle as much as possible. Ask and you will find locations for plastic, glass and cans.
- Be nice to the crazy lady in the 7/11!



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