

# THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA: (UN)SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



Last week we spoke about the issue of [\(un\)sustainable travelling](#), especially with regards to plastic and its huge amounts located in the Mediterranean. The issue was analyzed thoroughly with precise figures from a report made by WWF. This time we will build on it and look through how humanity is trying to deal with the issue of plastic wasting while on the road in order to prevent a natural catastrophe from striking our world.

Society is aware of this problem. Since 2018, the United Nations Environment Program has placed marine pollution by plastic as one of the six most serious environmental emergencies. In the case of the EU, **a package of measures has been proposed to reduce the production of plastic by EU legislators.** But what about individual countries?

France has banned plastic bags in supermarkets. Cotton swabs will be banned in 2020 and the country aims to achieve 100% recycled plastics by 2025. Even Italy has banned single use of plastic bags in supermarkets and it was recently extended to small bags for fruits and baked goods. The likes of Spain, Greece, Croatia and Turkey are also planning regulations in this direction to support their image of sustainable destinations.

## **What are non-European countries doing?**

But obviously this is a global issue and thus, even outside Europe countries and officials are trying to find solutions. In the USA there are many cities and states tackling this issue. For example, Washington D.C. has tax on plastic bags and this measure led to a 85% fall in plastic bag consumptions. San Francisco, meanwhile, was the first American city to completely ban plastic bags already in 2007.

The Indian state of Karnataka has also banned plastic bags. Manufacturers in the state are prohibited from producing single-use plastic items. Kenya were even more harsh and in 2017 the African country launched a ban on plastic bags all over the country. The potential punishments for disobeying are large fines or even four-year jailtime. Chile, Australia, China are other non-European countries who have been attempting to tackle the issue.

A special case is Dominica. The Caribbean country's ambitious goal is to become the first "climate resilient" nation worldwide. The first step to achieving this goal is banning plastic single-use food containers. The idea is to do so by the beginning of next year. The island wants to protect its tourism industry but also become stronger and more resilient to hurricanes and become an example to the world.

## **What are tourism companies doing?**

Tourism plays a key role in the pollution and consumption of plastic waste. Every year about 200 million tourists arrive in the Mediterranean basin, so the amount of waste increases by 40% during the summer in this area.

This is why it is important that companies in the sector are involved in reducing the consumption of

plastics and contribute their grain of sand. And some of those companies have already taken action.

For example, Hilton has proposed to eliminate plastic straws from its 650 properties. They are going to replace them with paper or biodegradable straws. On the corporate side of the company, they are developing the “Meet with Purpose” project in which they have eliminated plastic bottles from meetings and events. Melia has also decided to replace single-use plastic with biodegradable materials throughout 2018.

Airlines are also contributing to an extent. For example, Iberia have removed plastic protection of their headphones and masks and now wrap them in paper. Meanwhile, Air Europe is studying replacing the protection of blankets and pillows and wrapping of cutlery. United Airlines have banned plastic straws on their flights.

A giant in the industry Thomas Cook is also planning to take measures in this direction. **The company has promised to remove more than 70 million single-use items made of plastic like straws or cutlery from operation of their hotels and airlines.** Their goal is to replace all single-use plastics with biodegradable or 100% recycled and recyclable options, with the planned date of achievement still not set.

It is obviously a long run, and everyone needs to make a little bit of effort for results to arrive globally and to increase the number of sustainable destinations. But it is important to make the population aware of this issue and those connected to it. It is necessary to educate people and explain that there is still time to reverse this negative trend in view of a more sustainable tourism industry and world.

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