A WARM WELCOME ...

... but no room for single-use plastics and unnecessary packaging.
Plastic waste: toxic for nature and for the tourism industry

Plastic is everywhere, and it’s never far from ending up in our waters. A gust of wind is all it takes to carry plastic from illegal dumps or unsecured landfill sites into rivers – or into the sea. And there it ends up where it never should be: in the water, on the seabed, or on the beach. Up to 95 per cent of the waste in the Mediterranean sea and coastline is plastic waste. Much of it comes from top holiday destinations in Italy, Spain, France, Turkey, and Egypt. It is estimated that over half a million tonnes of plastic waste from the Mediterranean states ends up in the sea every year. The reasons are well known: particularly high use of single-use products and plastic packaging, inadequate waste management systems, unsecured landfill sites, illegal waste disposal, and insufficient recycling rates. The financial impact of plastic-related pollution on the tourism industry runs to 268 million euros per year.

Waste: the last thing any holidaymaker is looking for

Rubbish-strewn beaches and waters cast a shadow over even the sunniest of holidays and remain a talking point long after your guests have returned home. Plastic waste is toxic both for the tourist industry and for the natural environment. Around 800 animal species are affected by plastic waste. Worldwide, over 50 per cent of all turtles are plagued by plastic waste in their stomachs – a fate they share with countless other sea-dwellers.

The tourism industry is both a cause of this environmental damage and impacted by it. None of the 200 million people who take their holiday in the Mediterranean want to spend the loveliest days of the year lying on rubbish-strewn beaches, swimming among plastic bags, or stumbling upon maritime animals that have died due to plastic waste. Waste is ugly, hazardous, and the very opposite of what we look for on holiday. Yet holidaymakers themselves also have to take up their share of the responsibility: in the Mediterranean, waste levels rise by up to 30 per cent every summer.

Concerted action and careful consumption

Images of maritime animals killed by plastic waste and reports on the potential dangers of microplastics in the human food chain have had a rapid impact on European policies. Consumers are also responding quickly to these dangers and are supportive of concerted action at all levels. They are aware of the issues involved and are ready to do without plastics wherever possible.

Responsible tourism

The world is awash with plastics. The spread of this unsightly waste not only undermines the promise of a carefree stay in the midst of untrammelled nature; it also impacts the tourism industry as a whole, which has to live up to the high standards of hygiene and cleanliness demanded by guests. Although the scale of the problem is so vast, the industry can and must do its part to protect the natural environment. And that’s also what guests expect. Because the link between the plastic-packed portions of jam, milk, and shampoo inside and the growing mountains of rubbish outside is just too obvious to ignore – as are the plastic highball glasses by the pool and the sumptuously decorated cocktail glasses lying just a few metres from the sea. Along any busy stretch of beach in the evening, the overflowing waste bins speak volumes. The tourism industry has to take its fair share of responsibility. It also has to use its influence on local waste disposal companies, which may well be able to improve their seasonal collection services.

Live up to your guests’ expectations

Every business has to take a careful look at itself and ask what steps it needs to take. What plastic or single-use utensils can we do without? What plastic products can be justified at all? What can we do to ensure that the mountains of plastic waste shrink rather than grow? How do we make sure that no plastic waste ends up in the sea? What do our guests expect of us? How can we communicate our initiatives to them?

In collaboration with Wikinger Reisen, the Institute of Waste Management at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, and the Austrian Consumer Association, WWF has identified the most important measures that hotels can take to rapidly reduce their plastic waste.

Make your mark! If your strategy is communicated openly and credibly, it’s not only nature that will benefit; your guests will also thank you for it and carry your message to the four corners of the world!
Tell your guests and get them on board

- The better informed your guests are about your recycling measures, the more successful these are likely to be. You could put out a leaflet, for example, about the hotel’s commitment to waste reduction. Your guests will then be fully aware of what you stand for when booking their stay. And you can then look at your bookings as a sign of respect for your dedication to the cause. What’s more: on your way to becoming plastic-free, you’ll be able to count on your guests’ understanding, and even on their active collaboration.
- Your hotel is no island, and only if your guests are well-informed about your goals can they help you reach them. Make sure they know about waste management practices in the region and about local initiatives and measures. Encourage them not to use single-use items outside the hotel as well, and to dispose of their rubbish in appropriate rubbish bins. If these aren’t (yet) in place, then let them throw away their waste at the hotel. But most importantly, let them know how to avoid generating waste outside the hotel in the first place.

Monitoring: assess how much plastic you use and throw away

- You can only start to reduce your plastic waste when you know exactly where you use disposable packaging and plastics. That’s why it’s important to carefully evaluate each area of your hotel to see where disposable items and plastics you are really necessary. You should be able to recognise your products with alternatives that use either reusable or no packaging. And you might well find that others you don’t need at all. Every single piece of waste in your hotel is your responsibility, so you can use this list of your waste reduction measures as a start.
- Make sure you put out a leaflet and ambition (former) recycling systems in your hotel to raise your guests’ awareness.

Avoiding Single-Use Plastics and Packaging in Your Hotel

- When it comes to food, drinks, and cleaning materials, you can definitely reject disposable packaging. Try to use reusable packaging for your products. If they don’t offer reusable packaging, you can try to avoid them, rather than keep using individually packed items. And in order to package for cleaning materials, you can often source them from cheaper, bulkier ones and then dilute them down for use.
- Avoid single-use packaging for food and drinks, and cleaning materials. When it comes to food and drinks, avoid single-use, disposable, or alternative packaging. Ask your suppliers to reject packaging for your products. If they don’t offer reusable packaging, you can try to avoid them, rather than keep using individually packed items. And in order to package for cleaning materials, you can use cheaper, bulkier ones and then dilute them down for use.

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Prioritising avoidance

Materials such as paper and biodegradable plastics are increasingly being hailed as environmentally friendly alternatives to single-use products and plastic packaging. Unfortunately, though, they don’t get rid of the plastic problem. The only real solution is to use less packaging or completely do without single-use plastics, since:

- Manufacturing alternative single-use packaging and single-use materials also has an environmental impact.
- There is often no suitable means of disposing of biodegradable plastics. Many compost facilities refuse to accept biodegradable packaging.
- Compostable plastics only degrade under ideal conditions. If they are carelessly thrown away or disposed of in the wrong way, they simply remain in the environment.
- So called oxo-biodegradable plastics only break up into small particles, but don’t decompose completely. WWF, along with many other environmental organisations, has spoken out against the use of these materials.
- Plastics can’t be allowed to end up in the environment. We need to make every effort to collect plastic materials and recycle them as fully as possible.

Since the beginning of 2013, WWF Germany and Wikinger Reisen have been working together to promote sustainable tourism. Our partnership aims to enable people to experience nature and its incredible diversity while limiting the environmental impact of tourism as far as possible. Our present focus is on fighting plastic waste in the hotel sector.

STOP THE FLOOD OF PLASTIC

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