

Meet the Two Incredible Teenage Girls Who Convinced Bali to Ban Plastic Bags

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By [Lauren Kearney](#)

When you think of Bali, you think tropical paradise. But there's one thing standing in the way that's making Bali far from idyllic: trash. Those iconic beaches tourists from all over the world flock to are now littered in mass heaps of rubbish. Plastic bags make up the [largest majority of the waste](#). And it's getting worse. We're sorry to deliver the bad news, but it appears sunbathing on Bali's beaches isn't going to be worth that long flight because – and we're not being melodramatic here – you'll literally be sunbathing amongst debris. Unless you want to lie in plastic waste, we recommend you steer clear.

But hey presto, two individuals aren't letting Bali's reputation go down the drain just yet. Melati and Isabel Wijsen, two teenage sisters from Bali, have managed to [convince Bali to ban plastic bags by 2018](#), in an attempt to tackle the island's pressing trash problem. How did they do it!? It all started around three years ago....

These Two Sisters Prove Teenagers Can Do Anything

While most teenagers have their eyes fixed on their iPhone screen, tweeting and taking selfies, the Wijsen sisters' eyes focused on the heaps of plastic bags that littered their beloved home. At the time they were only 10 and 13 but, regardless of their age, they refused to watch their home drown in waste and decided to take action. In 2013, the "[Bye Bye Plastic Bags](#)" campaign was born, to ban plastic bags in Bali.

From participating in beach clean ups, going on a hunger strike, and creating petitions, nothing was going to stop these two young sisters. They also [delivered a TED talk](#) in which they explain how action had to be taken in order to protect their island from plastic pollution.

Click here to watch “Our campaign to ban plastic bags in Bali | Melati and Isabel Wijsen”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8GCjrDWWUM>

“In Bali, we generate 680 cubic meters of plastic garbage a day,” [said Isabel](#). “That’s about a 14-story building. And when it comes to plastic bags, less than five percent get recycled.”

The great news is, their hard work paid off. They convinced Governor Pastika to ban plastic bags in Bali by 2018. It just goes to show that, no matter how young you are, you can accomplish anything if you have the passion and the commitment.

Let’s just hope he sticks to his word!

Bali’s Trash Problem is Threatening People and the Planet

Traditionally, the [Balinese people used only organic materials](#) like palm leaves when collecting or storing food, leaving behind no waste. When plastic was introduced, the island of Bali soon became covered in non-degradable waste, making it resemble less of a tropical oasis and more of a giant waste bin. In Southern Bali alone, [over 240 tons of solid waste is produced](#) on a daily basis.

Not only is this excess waste displeasing to the eye, but it also poses serious health risks to both people and the environment. Like Isabel Wijsen mentioned earlier, only a tiny percentage of plastic gets recycled in Bali. Instead, [plastic waste is burned](#) in public places, and this comes at the cost of human and environmental health. The emissions from burning waste including benzene, methane, dioxins, and nitrogen dioxide – which have been [related to numerous health issues](#) including increased cancer rates, immune system weakening, kidney disease, birth defects, and many respiratory illnesses. Not to mention, they [contribute to the effects of global warming](#) as well. Because the plastic waste is not disposed of properly, it also ends up polluting waterways and [affecting marine life](#). There are currently [700 marine species](#) in danger of extinction due to plastic pollution – and if things don’t start changing soon, it’s been estimated that there will be [more plastic in the oceans](#) than fish by 2050!

Bali’s waste crisis isn’t doing any favors for its economy either. Bali depends on tourism and it was once estimated that the country attracted [over 10 million international tourists](#) each year. But because it’s getting such a bad name for its waste issues, [fewer tourists are flocking to Bali](#) for a vacation and you can’t blame them. Who on earth wants to sunbathe in debris?

Two Million Plastic Bags are Used Every Minute Around the World!

Bali, however, isn’t on its own in terms of plastic bag consumption. A staggering [1 trillion](#) plastic bags are used each year worldwide, according to the Earth Policy Institute. It’s hard to believe that [over 2 million](#) plastic bags are used around the world, every single minute. [Plastic](#)

[bags](#) are made out of non-renewable resources like petroleum and natural gas and because they take [hundreds of years to decompose](#). When plastics do eventually degrade, [they don't biodegrade](#). Instead, [they photodegrade which means](#) they break down to smaller fragments and easily soak up toxins which then contaminate waterways, soil, and animals upon digestion of the plastic materials.

Essentially, plastic is the environment's worst enemy. For that reason, we all need to cut down on our plastic consumption and after hearing about Bali's potential ban on plastic bags, we sincerely hope a seed will be planted in the minds of other governors, politicians and presidents around the world so that someday, the whole world can be plastic-bag free.

How You Can Help

Thanks to their Bye Bye Plastic Bags Campaign, the Wijzen sisters have extraordinarily convinced the governor of Bali to commit to a ban on plastic bags by 2018. Now it's time we did our bit too. Support Melati and Isabel Wijzen in their campaign to ban plastic bags in Bali by signing [this petition](#).

It's said that [one plastic bag takes up to 500 years](#) to degrade and given the state of marine life in the ocean, the impact of that single bag can be devastating.

"Plastic is ubiquitous in modern society and seemingly unavoidable. But is it worth risking the lives of marine species, the health of the oceans and our own future in the name of convenience? By taking steps to minimize everyday plastics in our lives, we can crush plastic at the source and give marine life a fighting chance," says [Nil Zacharias](#), Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief of One Green Planet.

If we all make an effort to identify where we use plastic and actively look for alternatives, we can drastically cut down on the amount of plastic pollution that finds its way into the oceans.

As the leading organization at the forefront of the conscious consumerism movement, [One Green Planet believes](#) that reducing everyday plastics from our lives is not about giving up anything or sacrificing convenience, but rather learning to reap the maximum benefit from the items you use every day while having the minimum impact.
