

Opinions

Holiday weekends underline need for litter elimination

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Hoteliers are doing so much good in terms of sustainability, reducing waste and targeting environmental causes, but they must take the fight right to guests.



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This is an unashamed rant.

Plastic is not fantastic, and the world is waking up to that realization.

Plastic is wonderful, but the very idea of it being a temporary solution is where the problem begins.

Most of the United Kingdom enjoyed a tremendously warm Bank Holiday weekend recently. Three days of unbroken sunshine and warmth, especially over a holiday weekend, is almost unheard of here, so seemingly all 65 million of us Brits clogged up the roads, bought up all the remaining sun protection cream and hit any one of our gloriously beautiful beaches.

When they all left, some beaches became a national embarrassment. Litter everywhere.

One example was Southend-on-Sea in Essex, of which numerous media outlets published photographs of the before (people enjoying themselves in the sun) and the after (litter-strewn strands).

Other spots left sullied were in sections of the national park Dartmoor and Barry Island, Wales, [according to The Mirror newspaper](#).

There were reports of good people picking up litter after other more disrespectful people, with local authority workers finishing the job, but that is not the point.

No one drops litter in their own gardens, do they? Do they? So this to me seems to be a problem of selfishness, ignorance and education—mostly selfishness, as it must be evident that one should take their litter home or at least put it in a rubbish bin.

And if that bin for rubbish, the British word for trash, is full, take it home to your bin that probably isn't.

Hotels and restaurants—as places people go to away from their own homes and gardens—have a duty to tackle this problem, and it is wonderful to see that many have put into place initiatives to combat this scourge.

The World Travel & Tourism Council [has a good webpage](#) on plastics and waste and how to minimize our own part in this epidemic of consumption.

The WTTC's four requests are that guests recycle when possible, refuse to use single-use toiletries, carry personal water bottles and pack collapsible tote bags that can be used to bring rubbish back with you.

U.K. Hospitality, formerly the British Hospitality Association, on Friday launched its new initiative “Unpack the future of hospitality,” that seeks to share “good practice and new ideas to proactively tackle the problem of packaging waste without the need for government intervention and to highlight the efforts already being undertaken by venues.”

[U.K. Hospitality](#) will host a conference on the subject in London on 9 July.

My colleague Robert McCune [wrote an article in January](#) about sustainability and recycling efforts from hotels and hotel chains.

Good work is being done. More needs to follow that. Is it the right course of action to have hotels nanny-state guests into doing more? I sincerely understand that these guests are not the main cause of the problem, but they represent one element that can do more, and often does as their worldliness leaves within them a definite love and care for the planet.

McCune spoke to executives at [Anantara](#), [Avani](#) and [Cayuga Collection](#) hotel chains about their commitments.

Many other hotels, independents or from chains, and the chains themselves, realize the problem and see economic sense in being more sustainable and less wasteful, and it would be silly of me to list a few but not all.

Some major hotel chains have had best practices in place for many years.

Governments are also weighing in, but it will take everyone to make sure public attitudes change across the board.

Hoteliers must say no to providing takeaway plastics. Extra charges must be applied if guests request plastic containers.

I have always thought the following should be done:

Everyone needs to insist those responsible for collecting rubbish from bins and other receptacles should do so more regularly, and far more regularly when they know certain areas will be popular. Show sun-seekers that rubbish will be collected, and these sun-seekers will be far more likely to discard of their rubbish responsibly;

Advertise the fact more robustly that the best solution is for guests to either discard rubbish back at the hotel or, preferably, back in their homes. No one wants more signs up telling us how to behave, but we must cancel the small-mindedness that allows people to think it is perfectly acceptable to litter;

Fine litterers on a regular basis. That always hurts, although this is probably not something for hoteliers to be pursuant of;

Make hotels, hotel grounds and surrounding areas as beautiful and litter-free as possible. That might just help people realize a pretty area is something that requires work and good community sensibility.

Hoteliers will make sure their own properties are immaculate. If the opposite business does not share the same view, put pressure on them to do so, or alert the necessary people who might make them see the light, or even clean it for them. Yes, that is not the perfect solution, but would these people's lack of selfishness change anyway? Probably not.

The travel and tourism industry is a force for good, and we can and should continue to do good things for the environment and our own overall sense of well-being.

Email [Terence Baker](#) or find him on [Twitter](#).

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