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# Sustainable travel and eco-friendly countries

A look into what makes European countries eco-friendly

Nowadays there is a lot of talk about the environment and waste, in particular about plastic. If you were to think about the amount of disposable plastic and non plastic objects we use on a day to day basis there is no wonder we are ruining the planet: from plastic bottles and straws, plastic cutlery and plates that get left behind after a barbecue, to all the pointless packaging that comes with our food and the vast amount of litter that is taking over our beautiful landscapes, it's astonishing that there are still people that aren't worried about the amount of waste that we create.

The EU is taking more and more steps to try and reduce waste in general, the recent ban of single-use plastics with sustainable alternatives that was announced in March earlier this year is a perfect example of this. This could potentially mean reducing the amount of rubbish that ends up in landfills and into our oceans. According to the European Environment Agency, some countries like Austria, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark sent virtually no municipal waste to landfills between 2004 and 2014, which is a great step towards a cleaner Europe.

Coming from a household that is forever working towards a greener lifestyle, I want to explore some of these countries and try and pin-point what it is that makes them limit their municipal waste. I also want to make sure my research is as interesting as possible so I'll be inserting some tips on how to travel in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner.

I decided that the first country I would visit would be Great Britain - and yes I know what you're thinking, it is nor very eco-friendly nor very European at the moment, but still, why not explore a part of Europe that isn't doing so well on the whole 'saving the planet' front.



I started in Scotland. Famous for scotch, the beautiful Highlands and amazing landscapes. Renewable energy is embraced throughout the country, mostly wind power, which as you can imagine is a little more appropriate than solar power, due to the infamous Scottish weather.

Also Scotland has always tried to be nuclear free, I actually ended up seeing the Dounreay nuclear power development establishment near Thurso, a fancy term for nuclear power plant. Although everybody knows the dangers of nuclear reactors, the establishment seems to contribute to the

economy of the nearby semi-desolate Scottish towns, but not for long as the site has recently been decommissioned.

Scotland is an amazing place, it was nice to see places of the planet that seemed untouched by man, but I did see a lot of litter: there were signs that said to 'take your litter home' and a lack of bins tried to encourage that, but it looked to me that it had the opposite effect, as you could see road sides and carparks scattered with rubbish.



I ended up staying in a small town called Auchterarder and met some ladies that explained to me that although a lot of people wouldn't mind recycling that it's just not possible due to the fact that a lot of packaging is "not yet recyclable" and then they showed me a bag of potatoes. I always thought that buying fruit and vegetables in a packet was pointless and a waste of time, money and resources especially as you can choose to buy loose produce. Upon hearing this she enlightened me on the fact that buying loose produce is more expensive. Growing up my mum would always grow vegetables in the garden and as children we would always enjoy picking our produce and understanding where food comes from - and although it's not the same - I feel that picking loose produce instead of buying pre-packaged food is so much nicer and gives you the choice of what you're buying, as well as avoiding all that plastic that serves only for transport from the shop to home.

Scotland doesn't tend to differentiate a lot of different materials, for example plastic is put in the same bin as cans and tins. This means that these materials either get separated at the recycling plant, which can be very costly, or not at all, which means that differentiating at all is useless.



This being said, there is a positive aspect, the water in Scotland is amazing! It tastes really fresh and clean as you can imagine, and I realised that they have started to embrace this as I saw advertisements suggesting to drink tap water and to use a reusable bottle, which brings me to my first tip: take a BPA free bottle when travelling, most places will refill it for you for free. It's great even when flying, just make sure it's empty before going through security and fill it once you are airside. Not only will you avoid buying plastic bottles, but you're more likely to drink more water and you will save money.

Not only was the drinking water fresh and clean, but the rivers and lochs were amazing too, on the way to the most northeastern point of Scotland with my host I went for a brief swim in a loch and paddling in a river. Overall I think the government has a lot of work to do for the people, but it will be a long time before mankind and it's wicked ways will be able to destroy the amazing landscapes and nature that this beautiful land has to offer.

My next stop was Stockholm, Sweden. Obviously for the fact that it is one of the best countries for recycling. Less than 1% of household waste was sent to landfills since 2011, and

they have been importing waste from other countries (like Great Britain) to keep their recycling plants going, because - and this is the best part - they use the energy they produce to heat homes during the harsh Swedish winters. Why is Sweden so good at recycling? Well, one reason is fairly clear just by seeing all the green areas in the capital, I was amazed at the amount of parks there were, the Swedish people probably don't want to see those areas destroyed.



I met a chef from Malmö, originally Portuguese, in my hostel and he told me that when he came to Sweden it was a culture shock, because he had to recycle or his roommates would get angry with him as there were hefty fines. Also in the restaurant where he worked he had to follow a lot of rules and separate the waste by law, whereas in Portugal they just weren't used to strict recycling rules.

Other than all of the beautiful green areas, the water is outstanding. I went swimming in Långholmen and the beach was so clean, the water was beautiful and it was a great way to cool off in the great Swedish heatwave. Not only that, the tap water is potable and a lot of places were happy to refill my bottle, although there was a fountain in Gamla Stan, in the Stortorget square, where you can see lots of people refilling their bottles,



the best thing to me was seeing children doing it. It's experiences like these that can push the

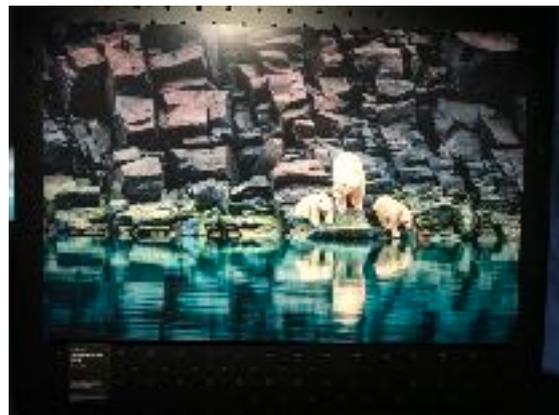


younger generations to want to make a change.

One of the days during my trip I decided to take a long boat trip to the Archipelago and discovered that the company that does the boat rides, Strömman, is collaborating with WWF to protect the Baltic Sea from pollution and overfishing. The goal of the collaboration is to increase the eco-awareness of the tourists that decide to explore the baltic sea. They also aim to reduce their own CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. I feel that it's also a lesson to us tourists, a sort of wake up call, that we make sure we respect recycling rules in the countries we are guests in and that we avoid littering at all costs. You can read more

about this amazing initiative [here](#).

I also visited the Fotografiska museum, an eye opening collection of photographs. One of the exhibitions called sea legacy/turning the tide was about saving the oceans and protecting the wildlife that occupy the sea, the photographer captured some really powerful images of animals whose habitats are being destroyed.



“Knowing that humans are the solution to many of the problems affecting the planet, each of us can do our part, not just for altruistic motives, but also for ourselves. After all, a collapse of the entire ecosystem would send shockwaves through the planet. The fate of our poles, oceans, and humanity depends on us.”

-The poles and the ice, Fotografiska museum Summer 2018

So how can you help keep plastic out of the oceans while you are travelling? First of all you can avoid going to fast food restaurants, as tempting as they may be, they do use a lot of single use plastics and packaging, instead try street food, it's a very similar concept, just without the rubbish, for example the hotdogs come with just a napkin. Also because Scandinavian countries are known for their expensive lifestyle, why not try some grocery shopping, it's cheaper than eating in a restaurant and you can pick up fresh fruit and vegetables from the market, just make sure to refuse the plastic bag, you can always use your backpack.

Altogether, Stockholm is one of my favourite cities in Europe and I really enjoyed my week there, I think that although it is a very old city with a very strong grasp on the past, it's also very innovative and is always looking to improve the future, towards a healthier planet.

My final destination was Copenhagen, Denmark. Denmark is famous for being a leader in wind power, providing 42% of the total electricity consumption in 2015. The country also has the world's highest level of social mobility and income equality.

During the time I was there, Copenhagen Pride was happening, which involved a lot of partying, positive energy and meeting a lot of friendly people. I was curious to see what the streets would look like after the event and was pleasantly surprised, because you see the clean-up didn't just take place after the event, but also during: a lot of people were drinking beer in cans from shops, as it was a lot cheaper than bars and street sellers, and the homeless would go around collecting these cans to take to a recycling point in return for money. I thought this was amazing to see, people would quickly figure it out and just hand the cans to them, or just leave them on the floor. I really loved the event and a lot of Danish people seemed to appreciate it too, every night I had new people to party with and the free concerts were great to watch. It's nice to see such a tranquil culture open up and express their support towards the LGBTQ community.



One of my favourite places was the Botanical Garden, it's part of the Natural History Museum of Denmark and holds a vast collection of plants and fungi. The garden also holds research facilities and is interested in spreading awareness for national and global nature



values, such as the conservation and knowledge of different species.

The garden was beautiful, colourful and just a really pleasant place to spend time.

My favourite exhibition was the Nordic Beer Garden, it was interesting to see all of the different plants and herbs that go into making beer, I had never really thought about it before, but there is such a vast variety of hops, starches and flavourings to satisfy any beer lovers need.

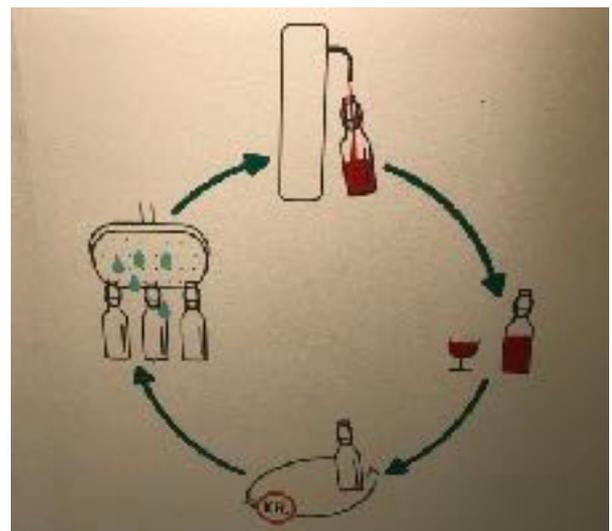
The garden also has 27 glass houses and greenhouses that mimic certain environments.



My personal goal in day to day life is avoiding packaging and useless plastics as much as I can, so I had to visit one of the zero waste shops in Europe. LØS is a zero waste shop in



Copenhagen, I was really interested in seeing it and was surprised how small it was, you could buy pasta, rice, grains, nuts, lentils and so much more. There was a large variety of different types of flours and cocoa. You can buy absolutely anything from biscuits, sweets and chocolate to oils, vinegars and beer & wine. The shop was also extremely busy when I went and it was nice to see how many people were embracing the opportunity to save money and reduce waste. You could also buy your containers in the shop to reuse anywhere you want.



I loved the Scandinavian cities a lot because they are so small and still packed with things to see and do, but by far the biggest perk - and also my final tip - was the fact that I never had to use the metro (apart from getting to the airport), buses or any type of transportation, because you can reach everywhere by foot, which means not only do you save money but you also reduce your carbon footprint.

I would like to thank the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe and my family for giving me the much appreciated opportunity to visit part of this beautiful continent and educate myself.