

Is New Zealand really as 'Clean and Green' as We Think?

New Zealand. Made up of breathtaking unspoiled scenery, lush forests, beautiful beaches, and snow-covered mountains, a diversity like no other place on earth. Bird and plant species can be found here that exist nowhere else in the world. Forests have an abundance of diverse plant life, ranging from ancient kauri trees to nikau palms. New Zealand is home to the kiwi, a small, flightless bird that has become New Zealand's national symbol.

I looked up on the internet 'Why you should visit New Zealand' on 10 different websites. The paragraph above is an example of what was written.

Yes, we do have amazing scenery and wildlife. And yes, we do have unique flora and fauna, but there is one important point the articles missed: Litter.

Here we are advertising New Zealand as one of the most 'Clean and Green' countries in the world. But is this really true? When was the last time you stepped on a New Zealand beach as said to yourself: *This is the cleanest, most beautiful beach I've ever seen.* Our once beautiful beaches are now strewn with rubbish.

According to a survey in 2017, more than ¼ of Kiwis agree that New Zealand does not live up to its 'Clean and Green' reputation. I decided to create my own survey and found that ¾ of the participants from my survey believe that New Zealand does not live up to its 'Clean and Green' reputation.

It's not only humans that rely on a clean and sustainable environment, but animals too. Forests are home to more than 80% of all terrestrial species of animals, plants, and insects, and because of our actions, animals also have to suffer the consequences of the litter problem we have created. Runoff from litter contaminates soil which can affect plants and crops. Animals who then eat these plants, or worms living in the soil can also get affected. When plastic drifts out to sea, sea creatures such as turtles or sea-gulls may attempt to consume the plastic because it looks similar to their food. The plastic drains their nutrients and blocks their stomachs and intestines. Since animals cannot break down plastic in their digestive system, they will usually die from the blockage. Pieces of plastic such as bottle rings, can also get tangled around animals' heads or bodies and cause serious injury or even death. Jars and bottles are also a serious issue for animals. Crabs, birds and small animals may crawl into the bottles looking for food and water and become stuck and slowly die from starvation and illness.

My school, St Cuthbert's College, does a lot about the environment. Earlier in the year, we introduced a new waste system where there would no longer be rubbish bins in our classrooms. Bins would be located in the corridors outside our classrooms to really open our eyes to how much rubbish we subconsciously throw away. This new system has turned out to be a great success and has a great benefit to the environment. The junior school also partnered up with a New Zealand beeswax-wraps company and decorated beeswax-wraps to sell to the school. Beeswax-wraps are great alternatives for glad-wrap as they are made from sustainable resources, they are reusable, compostable, and customizable.

Recently, on [One News Good Sorts](#), there was a piece on Sue Britton, an aspiring lady who made a New Year's resolution to quit plastic 2 and a half years ago. To this day she has lived a plastic free life. Watching this video, I realised that it is really difficult to live without plastic purely because plastic is everywhere. She said it is one of the hardest tasks she's done in her life but I think it is worth it because the environment needs people like her who do their part and inspire others.

Some ways you can help the environment:

- Bring your own reusable containers when purchasing take-aways.
- Bring reusable coffee cups when purchasing drinks.
- Use bees-wax wraps and re-usable containers rather than glad-wrap.
- Buy fresh, loose fruits and vegetables instead of unnecessary packaged produce.
- Upgrade your phone or other electronic items less often to reduce e-waste

At the end of the day, by producing so much litter, we are not just killing off our flora and fauna, we are destroying this planet. Every 15 seconds someone around the world dumps their waste illegally and someone somewhere is paying the price. We have spent billions of dollars cleaning up our beaches and parks only for them to be smothered in the rubbish all over again. All of this money could be going to a much better cause like providing for the homeless or helping our native animals avoid extinction. Without the need for others to clean up after ourselves, we can look towards a much brighter future.

It is our responsibility to look after our planet. After all, it is our generation who will most likely live at the time most affected by pollution and litter.

We don't have long to make New Zealand beautiful again. So let's make the most of the time we do have.

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