

How Countries Around the World are Successfully Transitioning Away from Single-use Plastics

Olivia Guthrie

Summary

Florida's biggest rivals for beach tourism, Bahamas, Jamaica, California, and Hawaii, have enacted strict legislation to restrict distribution of single-use plastic bags and food containers. In fact, two thirds of the world's nations have enacted or are developing legislation to restrict single-use plastics. Our Caribbean neighbors, the Bahamas and Jamaica, as well as domestic tourism rivals Hawaii and California, are set to realize an economic boost to tourism from these restrictions, providing Florida with tested models for how we can protect and boost our vital tourism economy.

Single-use plastics bans within the U.S.

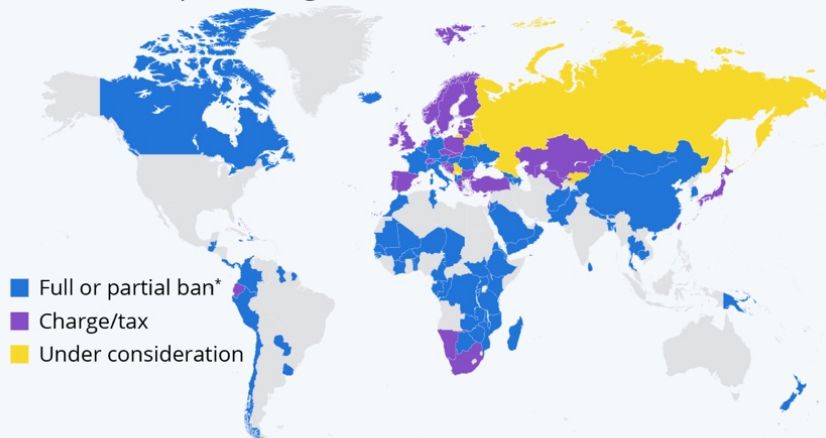
- Within the U.S. cities, counties, and states are implementing their own limitations on plastic usage. A 2018 survey found 347 political entities coast to coast have implemented plastics restrictions, including those in politically conservative, business-friendly coastal states that compete with Florida, such as Texas, Alabama, and South Carolina.¹
- Florida's biggest domestic competitor for beach tourism is California. Since 2016, California has banned the distribution of single-use plastic bags. Consumers bring their own reusable bags to the store or are charged a fee to receive a paper bag.²
- Hawaii, another tropical tourism competitor for Florida, has a de-facto ban on all non-biodegradable plastic bags and paper bags with less than 40% recycled materials. New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Oregon, and Vermont also have implemented statewide bans on single-use plastics.³

Most nations are implementing single-use plastics bans

- The UN reported that two thirds of nations around the world (127 of the 192 countries reviewed) are implementing bans on single-use plastic bags.⁴ This legislation includes restrictions on the manufacture, distribution, use, and trade of plastic bags, as well as taxation and levies. These countries vary in levels of income and development, but all realize the importance of finding alternatives to single-use plastics and eliminating or restricting plastics consumption.
- Within the Caribbean, the Caribbean Ministries has declared waste management to be a major issue, in particular the disposal of plastics. Twelve Caribbean nations have introduced measures to reduce plastic pollution to improve economic growth. These countries all compete with South Florida for beach tourism, including the two biggest vacation spots, the Bahamas and Jamaica.

The Countries Banning Plastic Bags

National-level regulation to ban/limit the use of plastic bags (2021)



* Can also include charges. Some bans not in effect yet
Sources: United Nations, media reports



statista

- To reverse the economic harm being caused by coastal plastics pollution, the Bahamas enacted a ban on all single-use plastic bags and foodware.⁵ Legislation was signed in 2019, began in January 2020 and came into full effect July 1st, 2020. Starting January 1st, importation of single-use plastic bags became illegal, but vendors were still allowed to distribute any of the bags in their inventory as of June 30th. At the same time, a fee became associated with receipt of a plastic bag, ranging from 25 cents to a dollar. For the two years prior to the ban, the government had been giving out reusable bags, so all items banned had readily available alternatives.⁶
- Many of the countries in the Caribbean are impoverished, going to show money from the transition to a non-plastic country does not have to be hindering. The investment within the country's future is well worth it as tourism and fishing numbers go up.
- Outside of the Caribbean, countries from the UK to Kenya (the country with the strictest plastic ban and large fines attached to their use) many countries are recognizing the wisdom of eliminating single-use plastics.⁷
- As of July 2nd, 2021, the EU has put a directive ban on all single-use plastics for which an alternative exists. For products that don't easily have an alternative (such as bottled drinks) each country has to create regulations measuring and reducing consumption of such goods. The directive also serves out "producer responsibility" making all producers cover the costs of "waste management clean up, data gathering, and awareness-raising for certain products". The EU consists of 27 countries, a large mass of Europe, making this new legislation far-reaching. The general goals are to be achieved at different year intervals for all EU members.⁸

Jamaica: case study in eliminating single-use plastics

- Prior to the ban, Jamaica had one of the highest per capita consumptions of single-use plastic bags in the world, 500 bags per year per person.⁹ Fifteen percent of residential waste was estimated to be plastics (120,000 tons/year).¹⁰ About 75% of this plastic was disposed of in waste sites, with the rest ending up in drains, rivers, gullies, beaches, and ultimately the ocean. With the two major industries in Jamaica being tourism and fisheries, plastic waste was damaging the marine environment as well as diminishing its appeal to international visitors. The top ten items collected from beaches and coastal areas on a national cleanup day were single-use plastics or styrofoam waste.¹¹
- Jamaica's ban on single-use plastic bags began on January 1st, 2019, in a series of six phases, the final phase implemented January 1st, 2021.
- The ban covers the manufacture, importation, and distribution of plastic bags. Garbage bags as well as plastic bags from primary food packaging (such as the bag a loaf of bread might come in) are still allowed.
- This change was made possible by many factors, knowledge of which can help Florida's efforts to clean our marine environment and remain competitive for tourism. These include the hard push by Senator Matthew Samuda, and full backing of the Prime Minister. Both sides of parliament saw the benefits, so no political fighting erupted over the issue. A single-use plastics ban was publicly backed by major business and environmental groups in Jamaica. The Hotel and Tourism Association spoke out in support. Sandals, a major hotel and resort chain, extended this policy to all their hotels in the Caribbean.
- Jamaica has emphasized that public support is instrumental, fostered by educating the public on the importance of reducing plastic use and waste.

ⁱ Here's a List of Every City in the US to Ban Plastic Bags, Will Your City Be Next? Forbes <https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2018/09/20/heres-a-list-of-every-city-in-the-us-to-ban-plastic-bags-will-your-city-be-next/?sh=7d8453d33243>

² Single-Use Carryout Bag Ban (SB 270). Cal Recycle <https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/plastics/carryoutbags>

³ State Plastic Bag Legislation. National Conference of State Legislators <https://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx>

⁴ The Future of the Caribbean is Single-use Plastic-Free. UN Jamaica <https://jamaica.un.org/index.php/en/13731-future-caribbean-single-use-plastic-free>

⁵ Bahamas Select Plastics Laws. ELAW https://www.elaw.org/plastic/BS_PlasticLaws

⁶ Plastics ban on track for July 1. EyeWitness News <https://ewnews.com/plastics-ban-on-track-for-july-1>

⁷ 16 Times Countries and Cities Have Banned Single-Use Plastics. Global Citizen. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/plastic-bans-around-the-world/?template=next>

⁸ European Union: Ban on Single-Use Plastics Takes Effect. U.S. Library of Congress
<https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2021-07-18/european-union-ban-on-single-use-plastics-takes-effect/>

⁹ Banning Plastic: How Jamaica Moved to Save Its Environment. Forbes
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesellsmoor/2019/02/15/banning-plastic-how-jamaica-moved-to-save-its-environment/amp/>

¹⁰ Jamaica: plastics ban creates new opportunities. UN Environment Program
<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/jamaica-plastics-ban-creates-new-opportunities>

¹¹ Coastal Cleanup Day Jamaica, Report 2019. Jamaica Environment Trust.
<https://www.jamentrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/International-Coastal-Cleanup-Day-2019-JAMAICA-National-Report-min.pdf>