

Mountains of waste across Turkey have become a big problem

During a nine-day public holiday for Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) in Turkey, many locals flocked to Aegean and Mediterranean resorts. Turkish Airlines carried over 2.4 million people to their destinations during this period, while many others used other means of travel, including their own cars.

Unfortunately, many of these hundreds of thousands of people who flocked to holiday resorts have left mountains of waste behind them. Dozens of photos showing the waste at resorts in Marmaris, Akyaka or the Salda Lake have been shared on social media by numerous users, urging people to be much more conscious about waste management. They simply say: Please, just put your waste or garbage in trashcans.

It is quite common among Turkish people to throw garbage or recyclable products, like water bottles, into the street. Turkey has the most wasteful residents in Europe, piling a mammoth 32.3 million tons of household and commercial waste straight into landfills, according to a recent study early this year by the United Kingdom-based market research company Expert Market.

Expert Market ranked the most wasteful countries by investigating the amount of waste dumped straight into landfill sites in 29 European countries. It then calculated how many times each country's waste would fill the Colosseum, as well as the predicted cost to the taxpayer by 2025.

Accordingly, Turkey is Europe's "biggest waster," sending 32.3 million tons of waste to the dump—corresponding to a landfill volume of around 58 million cubic meters—which is enough to fill the Colosseum over 44 times. Spain comes second on the list with around 23 cubic meters in volume of landfill waste, followed by France and Italy with around 18 cubic meters and 16 cubic meters respectively.

According to Expert Market, Germany is Europe's "recycling hero." Although the country generates the highest volume of total waste in Europe with around 106 million cubic meters, only a fraction of this (approximately 169,000 cubic meters) goes to the landfill.

According to a World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) report published in June, plastics account for 95 percent of the waste in the open sea, on the seabed and on beaches across the Mediterranean. This waste comes mainly from Turkey and Spain, followed by Italy, Egypt and France, read the report.

The countries that dump the most plastics into the Mediterranean Sea are Turkey (144 tons/day), Spain (126 tons/day), Italy (90 tons/day), Egypt (77 tons/day) and France (66 tons/day), it added.

Daily Hürriyet columnist and United States-based academic Selçuk Şirin noted last week that this problem could not be explained through educational or cultural reasons, but a systemic problem, calling for a campaign to clean up the country in one day in reference to a similar campaign that was applied in Slovenia a decade ago, which was quite successful.

This issue urgently requires comprehensive consciousness-building steps and regulations that will deter people from throwing away their garbage in the streets and encourage them to recycle with the participation of all actors, including citizens, non-governmental organizations and state institutions.

Otherwise, the country will remain to be one of the worst in waste management and treatment, causing further ecological degradation and costing millions of dollars every year.

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