
SOLO WOMAN WALK-BATAPADY BEACH TO KANYAKUMARI-850+ KM-OCTOBER 5TH 2019 TO DECEMBER 6TH 2019-K2K THE COASTAL WALK

Solid Waste Across the Coastline of Kerala

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On October 5th, 2019, Janet Orlene set out on a solo coastline walk from Batapady beach near the border of Kerala to Kanyakumari. Backed by a team of 2, Pradeep Rajendran and Meghana Basavaraju, Janet covered the entire strip of coast meeting the unique terrains, people and solid waste patterns of Kerala.

**This report has not been formally edited.* | 4th July 2020 | Authored by Janet Orlene
Report on Solid Waste along the coastline of Kerala - Thiruvananthapuram*

Introduction

What I expected to see was completely different from what I saw. I expected to find a lot more sanitary napkins, thin plastic bags, more obvious chemical pollution and other textbook things that I've learnt all my life. Instead, the largest quantities of solid waste turned out to be in the form of slippers and shoes, plastic water bottles, diapers, medical waste and household waste. The chemicals I saw polluting the ocean were in the form of thin oily surfaces (often near ferries and the shipbreaking yards), mining wastes, sewage, etc.

This journey through all of the most beautiful coastal landscapes Kerala had to offer was an eyeopener in terms of human activity caused destruction. The coastline is one of the most powerful indicators of the human-caused environmental crisis.

What this report aims to show are the observations I made during the walk down the coastline of Kerala.

Note:

**Although not mentioned otherwise, one of the largest polluters across Kerala shore are diapers.*

**Slippers, Shoes, Medical Waste are the other surprising but largely occurring pollutants.*

**Household wastes, Plastic bottles and other forms of plastic pollutants are mainly found in areas with a higher density of population.*

**Several areas showed biosphere damage with symptoms such as washing up of several species, jellyfish bloom, invasive flora and oft-spoken about, unseasonal weather changes and damage to the fish population.*

Intent and purposes

This report intends to look at the visual observation of solid waste made while walking continuously down the coastline of Kerala over 2 months as a district basis as well as one area that stood out in terms of the intensity of solid waste on the coastline or effort to curb the same in each.

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Thiruvananthapuram

The last district before I crossed over was Thiruvananthapuram. The stretch beyond Varkala to Anchuthengu was fairly clean. Anchuthengu however, was badly hit by erosion and several families we saw were living in homes whose roofs had almost given away. The walk down to Thiruvananthapuram city was dotted heavily by plots of land used as local garbage spots including larger ones near harbours. 4 places stood out heavily:

Kovalam - The beautiful beaches were littered with plastics and microplastics generated by tourism catering shops and stalls next to the beach.

Thiruvananthapuram - The rubble and plastics laid about the entire stretch of beach. These consisted of household wastes, fish wastes, plastics, hyacinth and so on. The villages around Muttathara had no access to solid waste management. To the point where they had started large pits near the sea to dispose of the waste. With each wave, the rubbish got carried into the sea and back into the land.

Vizhinjam - The old harbour and the construction of the new seaport

Poovar- A large Jellyfish bloom that littered the coastline in thousands while rendering the fisherfolk fishless.

Vizhinjam

At Vizhinjam, I crossed several minor water bodies that smelt like sewage and were covered with old plastic bags. I met several fisherfolks near the seaport who informed me that their water quality had turned more acidic. The areas where they stayed in and near the old harbour were full of plastic wastes. The areas covered with nets and other ware to prevent anyone from walking through.

The areas around the new Vizhinjam port have faced acute erosion down to Poovar which is facing continuous Jellyfish blooms

DATA OF VISUALLY NOTED SOLID WASTE THROUGH THE COASTLINE OF THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Visual Data based Key:

1 - almost nil/nil

2 - Scattered

3 - Scattered with points of rubbish heaps

4 - Heavily distributed / stepping in it often

5 - unable to avoid waste without stepping on it

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Thiruvananthapuram

Name of Village / City	Chemical Pollutants (Oils/ Industrial pollutants)	Household Waste (Plastic/Paper/ Packaging/ diapers/ slippers)	Biological (Flora and Fauna parts or Whole)	Medical Waste (Tablets / Bottles / Syringes)	Tourism industry based (Plastic or Paper based solid waste)	Sewage
Edava	1	2	1	1	2	1
Kurakkanni	1	1	1	1	1	1
Varkala	1	1	1	1	2	1
Vettoor	1	2	1	2	2	1
Vakkom	1	2	1	2	3	1
Anchuthengu	1	3	1	3	2	1
Anathalavattom	1	2	1	2	2	1
Poothura	1	2	1	3	2	1
Kadacom	1	2	1	2	2	1
Madanvila	1	2	1	2	2	1
Anapara	1	2	1	2	2	1
Padinjattumukku	1	2	1	3	2	1
Thumba	1	2	1	2	2	1
Kochuveli	1	2	1	2	2	1
Kannathura	1	3	1	1	2	1
Thiruvananthapuram	1	5	1	3	4	5
Vallakkadavu	1	5	1	3	4	1
Beemapally	1	5	1	3	4	1
Pachalloor	1	2	1	2	2	1

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Kovalam	1	2	1	1	2	1
Vizhinjam	2	3	1	1	2	3
Kazhivoor	1	2	1	1	1	1
Poovar	1	2	1	1	1	1
South Kollemcode	1	2	4 (Jellyfish bloom)	1	1	1

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SUGGESTIONS FOR THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:

1. The areas around the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram that have been affected from Anchuthenu to Beemapally require better **solid waste management and sanitation programs**. There is a lack of sanitation across these areas.
2. There are several areas which are fighting the issue of solid waste as a community. Modelling around these villages could make a significant impact on the dwindling energy of those constantly working towards change as well as inspire those who are impacted but struggling with effective initiatives. Education programs and training can be run through them as well - **Environment Preservation based Model Villages**.
3. The areas most dependent on coastal tourism often seem to have larger quantities of solid waste, sewage and other issues that impact both the tourists as well as the locals. Cleanups, while ongoing, often are hindered by the sheer volume of waste generated by people. **Resorts / stays close to the coastline taking responsibility for the cleanliness of the area nearest to them has worked in several areas that I crossed with minimum effort**.
4. Most villages and cities showed a deep connect through stories and mythology with the ocean. Some places were far more transactional where the ocean was a job and a place to sell. These had far more solid waste issues, callousness, industrial damage and so on than the areas with the stories. As Kadalamma holds reverence across religions and the protection of Sacred Groves have been successful across Kerala, **Sacred Coastal Zones** would help set up biodiversity protection programs for the ocean.
5. The fisherfolk of Kerala are open to **training and clean up based programs**. They collect quite a bit of plastic in their nets while fishing every day. This is often dumped on the shore. If it isn't picked up by the sanitation workers, it gets washed back into the ocean.
6. **Diapers need to be incinerated as medical waste**. Often they litter the ocean and spill out non-biodegradable contents as they break down. This also contributes to microplastic waste and general solid waste issues across the coast.

Conclusion

Solid waste is one of the largest factors in the dip in the number of fishes over the years. People are knowledgeable about the impacts of solid waste dumping. The largest issues in coastal waste dumping include:

- Medical waste
- Slippers
- Diapers
- Household Waste
- Bottles (glass and plastic)
- Fishing industry waste - nets, fishing lines, thermocol

There seem to be two major forms of solid waste dumping on the coastline in accordance to the conversations we had:

- 1) Despite solid waste management programs- Where one finds it easier to dump solid waste due to lack of education about the negative impacts of pollution, lack of concern, a belief that plastic “melts” in the ocean and degrades, cheaper (in terms of medical waste dumping or another industrial dumping), or apathy.
- 2) Lack of solid waste management programs - Good examples of these are Anchuthengu and South Thiruvananthapuram (The Valiathope, Vallakadavu, Valiyathura, Beemapally cluster) who have had no choice but to turn their homes into a large dumping ground. It is also much harder for the solid waste programs to be practised as easily as other areas due to the maze-like paths and roads, perhaps, this discourages implementation.

But, there is still hope. The coastal community is impacted deeply by environmental crises regularly whether it comes to their livelihood, their futures or their very existence. They are aware of erosion, overfishing, solid waste issues and how it ties back to the activities of people. They are also aware of how their household wastes, bottles do not allow effective breeding or movement of fish in their areas. There are often local people making an active effort in their villages to make an impact in any way and are welcome to both change and help.