

# My Zero Waste Month

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I was born and raised in Germany, a place where people produce a lot of waste, but no one really cares because no one can really see it. We throw our waste in the dustbin and then we stop thinking about it, because it gets taken care of. So before coming to India I never really thought much about waste. I knew about the danger of plastic in the oceans and I disliked seeing things in the supermarket being packed wastefully. But that was it. I doubt, that there is more waste produced in India than in Germany, but it's just so much more visible. So I decided to produce no waste for a month – **“My Waste Free February”**. Yes, February is the shortest of all month, but I choose it coincidentally, I swear!



I found out about this through several bloggers who live a zero waste lifestyle. They are producing no waste and are really successful in doing so: Lauren Singer for instance has a jar filled with trash – all the trash she produced in 4 years! And Bea

Johnson, the pioneer of the zero waste lifestyle, manages to live like this even though she is married with two children.

Trying to live like this only for a month is not what this concept is made for. Zero Waste is more about changing your behavior long term. Under normal circumstances people use their toothpaste until it's empty and then look for waste free alternatives. I unfortunately had enough toothpaste for more than a month and also enough shampoo. That's why I decided to put it away for the month. Throwing them away would have been the complete opposite of what this movement is about.

Most of the waste I produced before was related to my food – packaging of Maggi or bread, sometimes even a plastic bag. It turned out, that carrying bags is not that hard, but Maggi and bread I had to give up for that month. Instead I bought vegetables and fruits and I soon realized that the food I was eating now was more healthy.

But I did not always manage to not produce waste. Sometimes I simply forgot and got a plastic plate at a Pani Puri place. Once I asked to get Ice Tea without a straw and got it anyway. Many receipts are not recyclable and I couldn't figure out how to avoid them. And twice people gave me something and it felt rude not to take it. Also I neither speak Hindi nor Gujarati and that was troubling at times – I could convince people not to give me plastic bags by waving with my own bag, but with other things it was harder. The "real" Zero Waste people try to not even produce compostable waste like paper while I decided to concentrate on plastic waste, so I got herbs in paper bags.

Before I started this experiment I expected to be happy when it is over. But by focusing on waste for a whole month I realized how much plastic is around and how easy it is to avoid it. Sure, I had to give up some things. But I decided to try to avoid as much plastic as possible even after the month, not just because I think it's the right thing to do for the environment, I also felt healthier than before because I couldn't buy any crisps or chocolate. Now I don't do it as consistently, which I feel a little bit guilty about, but I will try to do it even better when I'm back in Germany, where I think it will be a little bit easier for me because I speak German. On the other hand India has a major advantage, because it is really easy to buy vegetables without plastic. Also I found a coconut oil factory, where I could go to fill up bottles. In Germany all this is

not possible as easily anymore, I don't know any oil factories and it's really hard to get vegetables without plastic. Right now zero waste shops are opening, but in India many vendors sell zero waste unconsciously anyway!



While preparing for my Zero Waste month I found out that plastic bags need 20, crisps packets 80 and plastic bottles 500 years to rot! I was shocked hearing about this – even many generations after my great-grand-children will have to deal with the plastic bottles I produced. In a TED-talk, Lauren Singer addressed this thought and I can only agree with her:

*"I want to be remembered for the things that I did when I was on this planet and not for the trash I left behind."*