

Q&A
The Simple Environmentalist
Taylor Houston

Environmental activist, Youtuber, and Zero waste blogger, Emma Dendler has done more than just travel the world with her backpack, piece of paper and pen in her hand. With her online persona as the ‘The simple Environmentalist’ she has accumulated over 10,000 followers in the last 5 years she has been online. But despite thousands of people wanting to make changes in their lifestyles, it takes education to change the world and make a positive legacy, Dendler says. People all around the world need to know the little things that they are doing on a daily basis to either help or hinder the wildlife around them. In this interview Dendler talks about discovering her passion for nature, makes recommendations about eco-friendly products, and talks about where she sees the environment going.

Taylor Houston: Have you always been passionate about the environment or was there a life changing moment that entirely changed your perspective?

Emma Dendler: I'm from a really small town of 2000 people just north of Dayton. While living in the small town growing up I never saw the physical waste and the invisible waste, it was not until I moved to Texas after highschool to a town of 200,000 people that I realized the impact we as people have on the Environment. That move helped change my perspective. I always had an appreciation for the world around me, but it wasn't until changing my location that I realized how important it is to take care of our world. Texas started my passion, and ultimately started the journey that I am still on today.

TH: At the Start of your Environmentally Positive journey, did you start 100% zero waste or did you begin with little habits in your everyday life?

ED: It was definitely the small stuff and habits at first. Like reusable water bottles. I did start a reusable recycling program for the dorm that I was staying in. That recycling program was one of the bigger steps that I took. It was not until I moved to Japan that I started making bigger actions and started to take bigger steps.

TH: What specific actions did you take in Japan? Was living a more eco-friendly lifestyle easier in Japan than it was here in the States?

ED: I would say leading and living an environmentally friendly lifestyle in Japan vs In the United States is about the same. The issues over there vs the issues here are very similar. They are not perfect over there just like we are not perfect here. The one thing that really pushed my natural lifestyle more was the fact that I lived on an island. Because of the island experience I saw first hand the waste that would wash up on the shore that I only ever read about, so actually getting to see that for myself really pushed me to think, ‘I really need to do something about

this.' That island is what made me want to make the decision of going 100% zero waste, and what pushed me to be a voice for this planet.

TH: Did you start your zero waste living while still on the island and if so was it hard finding products that were 100% zero waste and cruelty free?

ED: finding products is a lot of work anywhere but especially in Japan. I had to self-teach myself how to read the labels and then research brands to find out which ones were good and which ones were not good. Especially in Japan, trying to find stuff at local stores was hard because I can not read Japanese, so that was a real struggle for me. And then what I did not realize at the time was that a lot of brands do not ship to Japan so that imposed a real challenge. Even food wise Japan is very plastic obsessed because they lead a very clean hygienic culture and their belief is that plastic keeps germs off of things. Because of the cultural belief grocery shopping in itself was difficult to find anything that was plastic free.

TH: From your research of brands in Japan, I can imagine you are very knowledgeable about brands in general. What are some of your favorite brands on the market or do you still find yourself testing new brands everyday?

ED: I try to test out different brands often, mostly just because of my online audience. I like to try out a product first before I recommend them to my viewers or readers, but some favorites include modibodi period underwear, who gives a crap toilet paper, and Tushi bidet.

Speaking of your online audience, has Youtube always been a part of your life or did you just start for the purpose of advocacy?

ED: Growing up I always wanted to do vlog style videos, but it is always so nerve wracking posting that content on the internet. So, I started with a blog. I have always liked writing as well but then I realized I liked doing more of the speaking stuff. I find the speaking aspect to be more candid and I felt as though I could be more creative with it so that's what led me to start doing videos as well.

TH: When it comes to your advocacy, do you present information differently on your Youtube channel vs your blog?

ED: The information on my blog is the same information that is on my Youtube channel. At this point in time I use my blog as a transcript for my youtube videos for people that may have a disability, because I believe that this important information should not just be limited to one audience or group. But I mostly like to focus my blog on brand reviews and then give guides. Youtube I find to be one topic focused while my blog I can have a bunch of information compiled into one place.

TH: what is something that you learned from yourself about leading this lifestyle that you didn't know about yourself before?

ED: I am more outgoing than I thought, I am still reserved when I first meet people but my Youtube platform has really helped me become a better public speaker. When it comes to the environment I learned that it is not that hard to make small changes whether that is remembering to turn off the lights or reusing containers.

TH: What would be your best advice to someone who wants to start leading a more environmentally friendly or sustainable lifestyle?

ED: Definitely start small and know that you do not have to change your whole lifestyle habits, people think that they have to throw away everything and start from brand new whether that's metal and glass as well as they feel that they have to go vegan and they can't use any plastic. But it is not really about that, it is about making small changes everyday and ultimately those small changes come together to make the biggest impact.

TH: What do you believe to be the hardest thing about leading an environmentally friendly or sustainable lifestyle?

ED: Groceries are definitely the most difficult. In general a lot of people do not have bulk stores and even then if you try to buy produce a lot of it still comes in plastic, going along with that comes mindset. A lot of people at first believe that they have to avoid all plastic and because of that it takes the fun out of living. Finding that balance is hard for a lot of people and can take time, but once you find that balance leading this type of lifestyle is not as hard as it seems.

TH: Where do you see the world going if we neglect change?

ED: We are already in a global crisis now, humans have already done irreversible damage. All we can do now is preserve the world we are left with and help maintain the wildlife and land. We can do that in our little habits and day to day activities. If we do not change we will not have the land because of forest fires and quality air because of pollution, species will die off and the human population will be wiped centuries before it was supposed to. Many people do not realize we need different species just like they need us. No one of us is better than the other.

TH: How can we encourage other people to get on board?

ED: Being a positive example is definitely a big one along with not pushing people. If you go and demand someone 'you need to stop using plastic water bottles' they are not going to do it out of spite. Humans I believe are naturally spiteful, because of this positive encouragement, being a good example, and then also just education will encourage others to change their negative habits.

This article was edited for length and clarity

