



News

Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort and UWC Thailand International School Team Up for Sustainability

January 31, 2019 Admin Team Up for Sustainability

Phuket, Thailand: Through a new student-led initiative the Grade 6 classes at UWC Thailand International School (UWCT) and Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort have teamed up to provide elegant and economical ways for Phuketians and visitors to make sustainable choices.

Inspired by their school's mission is to use education as a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future; the Grade 6 classes at UWCT have sourced and designed a range of sustainable products branded under the moniker Plastic Free UWC.

“The project developed during the students' Experiential Learning class, where they actively seek out practical solutions to local and global problems. Using their own creativity and critical thinking, they are challenged to create change that improves the quality of their lives, their community, and the lives of future generations,” explained UWCT Experiential Learning teacher, Kru Heidi Oxley-Whitnell.

In previous years, UWCT's students have developed recycling and food waste recycling projects; however, this year the Grade 6s were focussed on the world's ever-increasing plastic waste crisis. Approximately 8.4 million tourists come to Phuket each year and the majority of them stay in hotels and eat in local restaurants where they are given disposable plastic straws and toothbrushes that end up as waste.

Grade 6 student Skye explains how the idea came about: “First we looked at all the everyday items that end up as plastic waste. Then we researched which ones we could easily make from alternative sources, like bamboo. The next step was to find local places to make them and brand them with the logo we designed. We ended up with bamboo and stainless steel straws, bamboo toothbrushes with holders, bamboo cutlery and bamboo cups. We started selling them at our school's Christmas Fair and hoped to also sell them to hotels around the island and to the other 16 UWC schools around the world.”

The first external outlet to agree to carry the student's sustainable products was Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort in Karon. Jayne MacDougall, Director of Risk Management for Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort, also leads the Phuket Hotel Association's Environmental Working Group, which is how she heard about the school's project.

“When I found out what the student's were doing, I reached out to see if we could stock the Plastic Free UWC items in our hotel's boutique,” Jayne explained. “We believe that hotels everywhere have the capacity to do more about eliminating single-use plastics, so these products are exactly what we were looking for, and we plan

to expand on this concept. It was a wonderful opportunity to make a sustainable choice that supports our hotel goals and also support these young environmentalists as well.”

Grade 6 student Wei Wei and his class were extremely excited to hear about Le Meridien’s interest in their project, “We wanted to work with the hotels to provide bamboo toothbrushes and cutlery as an alternative to plastic because when we learned about all the ways bamboo is more sustainable, we were really amazed and excited. We couldn’t believe it when our teacher told us Le Meridien was going to carry our products. When we went down to deliver them, we got to meet Khun Jayne and the hotel manager Khun Somphop Prattranasanti. It other hotels help—even if just 10 hotels work with us—then we could help thousands of people see how changing a small, daily habit can help the planet.”

Thanyapura Health & Sports Resort has also become a Plastic Free UWC partner now and will be selling the items in their Sports Shop as well.

To purchase Plastic Free UWC products, visit La Boutique at Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort or The Sports Shop at Thanyapura. To get involved in Plastic Free UWC as a retail outlet or volunteer, please email the student’s Staff Advisor Kru Heidi Oxley-Whitnell at heidi.oxley-whitnell@uwcthailand.ac.th

Fun Facts about Sustainable Bamboo:

It is grown without pesticides or chemical fertilisers

It requires no irrigation

It rarely needs replanting

It grows rapidly and can be harvested in 3-5 years

It produces 35% more oxygen than an equivalent stand of trees

It sequesters carbon dioxide and is carbon neutral

It is a critical element in the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

It is an excellent soil erosion inhibitor

It grows in a wide range of environments

Its production into fibres has lower environmental impact than other forms of fibre, especially synthetic ones.