

Costa cleanup founder to join all-female crew on a round-the-world plastics mission



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EARTH MATTERS

Ann Jenkins will be participating in the first leg of a round-the-world sailing expedition to research and educate on the dangers of plastics

LA HERRADURA. Ann Jenkins, the woman behind the Costa Tropical's Playa Patrol beach cleanup organisation, is about to embark on the first leg of an all-female round-the-world sailing expedition to look at the impact of plastic and toxics in seas and oceans around the world. eXXpedition Round the World 2019-2021 is a series of 30 voyages that will see 300 women sail around the globe, feeding back their findings to the universities of Plymouth in the UK and Georgia in the USA. The women have been selected from 10,000 applicants and include scientists, sailors, filmmakers, artists, product designers and teachers, among others, according to expedition organisers.

Following Greta

In total, the various teams will sail 38,000 nautical miles, with different women joining and leaving the boat at different places around the globe. Ann will be joining leg one of the trip, travelling for two weeks from Plymouth to the Azores from (weather permitting) 8 to 21 October. She will be joined by 12 other women, from UK, Germany, USA, Croatia, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Once they get to the Azores, they will also be involved in a local beach

cleanup, an activity which is programmed to happen at each destination along the way. "We'll be leaving from the same port as Greta Thunberg did when she sailed to the USA, so it's a real environmentalist's departure point," Ann told SUR in English.

Expedition organisers say the initiative has various aims: to contribute to world-class scientific studies that are "urgently needed" to find solutions to plastics dumped on land; to educate, so that people can better understand the real problem of micro-plastics; and to create a community of change-makers and global ambassadors to tackle plastic pollution back on dry land.

All-female crew

According to expedition organisers, "Women are still underrepresented in sailing and STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths] careers and eXXpedition is passionate about providing female role models in these fields."

They go on to say, "The plastic and toxics we find in the marine environment have also been shown to impact women in different ways from how they impact men. Some of these toxics are hormone inhibitors and endocrine disruptors, which can impact fertility and cause diseases like cancer."

Mission Director Emily Penn who co-founded eXXpedition in 2014, said: "The plastic pollution challenge our oceans face is a global one and it will take an inspired army of passionate, skilled and experienced people to tackle it."

Collecting plastic

The yacht used for the expedition is kitted out with a "manta trawler", explained Ann. This allows it to collect plastics from the surface and up to 10 metres underwater as well as to collect sediment from the bottom of the sea in shallower waters.

There are five gyres - the scientific name for the giant rubbish



Ann learned to sail while in France last year. :: ANN JENKINS

"The plastic pollution challenge our oceans face is a global one," - Emily Penn

patches in oceans around the world. Ann expects they will skim the edge of one on her leg of the journey but has learned that they move, depending on weather patterns, so there is no guarantee she will actually see it.

Ann has spoken to her fellow crew members via conference call, but not met any of them face-to-face. They have shared tips and in particular, Ann said, advice on seasickness. "We've been told that however experienced we are, everyone will get seasick."

They will be heading west on the Atlantic in October, so need to be prepared for strong winds and rough conditions. She confessed that while she was brought up

"I want to act as an ambassador and spread knowledge about what I have seen," - Ann Jenkins

"with a respect for the water" after an uncle died in a boating accident as a young boy, she is not a strong swimmer. The environmentalist added, however, that being able to swim was not a requirement of the application process.

No plastics on deck

Each team member is encouraged to take items of food and drink to share and the crew will be eating entirely vegetarian food for the duration of the trip.

Another thing they have to think about is clothing. "The most obvious thing to keep warm would be a fleece, but they're made from plastic, so we can't pack anything like that. There can't be any plastic on

deck and clothes with plastics in them could lose fibres which could end up in the plastic samples we collect and interfere with the data," Ann explained.

Everyone on board is expected to participate in everything, she said, from cooking and cleaning to helping out with the sailing and research. While there is team of experienced sailors on board, the rest of the crew help out.

Funding the trip is not cheap and so far Ann has paid the costs out of her own pocket. She has had donations of items such as a toiletries kit from Malaga-based firm Ecopassion and her clothes are on loan from sailing friends from La Herradura, Ken and Diana Green. UK silicone company Kuppo will be providing her with cups, but no financial sponsors have come forward as yet.

In terms of personal goals, Ann said that she is "looking forward to learning about plastic we don't have here on the Costa Tropical". By this she means that the problems further out in the ocean will be very different from those she is used to here, caused by plastics left on the beach such as bottles, cups and fishing equipment.

"You get used to images of huge amounts of plastic in the oceans but actually seeing it will be a very different story. We don't see that much plastic relatively speaking on the Costa Tropical," she said.

When Ann gets back, her aim is to keep in touch with the eXXpedition team and their research and to "act as an ambassador to spread the knowledge" about what she has seen and learned to raise more awareness about the enormous problem caused by plastics.

This will be done through the concept of citizen science, which, according to the website www.citizen-science.org, is "the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists".

Further information: www.expedition.com

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