

# Hong Kong Goes Green

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## Find out How You Can Save the Planet

"The earth is not disposable," says Catherine Touzard, author of *Going Green in Hong Kong*. "We can't consider that what we do doesn't have an impact. Maybe some people just want to keep going like this, saying that they don't feel responsible for their actions, for the future or the planet itself. I'm not an activist. I'm not going to fight anyone. But for the other ones, who think that they have kind of a responsibility for the environment (the environment is not something outside of us, that's you, me, the table, everything...) for those people who want to be connected, the big shift is that we have to rethink all this consumerism. We have been taught that everything was so easily produced and that there's no trash. But that isn't true."

Touzard's celebrated self-published book with green tips and useful information was launched in 2007, but it is still creating an ongoing buzz through its burning topicality and also its latest version in Chinese. Touzard who is a former environmental journalist states that she just wanted to help people around her and that one thing just lead to another. "I had so many people asking me where to find things," she says. "And most of the people get signals about things that may be dangerous. But they don't have the full picture. So I was really just trying to pass on whatever I had researched."



What started as a small project quickly grew and attracted not only countless individuals who want to do something for the planet also major corporations, such as Megaman and Aigle, who distributed the book to VIPs or customers, or others like HSBC, who had copies for their arriving overseas staff, offering them another way to discover Hong Kong. "We started with 200 copies and after a month we had nothing left," she says. "So we had to republish it with 2000 copies. Now we produced 11,000 copies. We just adjust to the needs. We don't do crazy marketing, we don't have the time. But it's also not my policy. You can't force children to eat, if they don't want to. So we're just offering it to whoever wants it. For me it's not a fashion, we are at a turning point. I'm really convinced that this is a major sign in the industry. People need to make a shift. It won't be profitable anymore to get parts of your toy done in China and the rest somewhere else. People will have to innovate and find new ways."

Many authors philosophize about a new consciousness and a shift, but Touzard takes action and really puts her money where her mouth is. She does carbon audits at schools, which gives schools an exact calculation of their footprint. Touzard has made *Going Green* educational, and many teachers have followed to use the book in their classes, even if it is just to teach English. "It should be common sense for everyone to understand the background of things," says Touzard. "For example nappies, it would be terrible to raise a child without it. On the other hand the average consumption per child comes us to 5,000 - 6,000 nappies, and conventional ones are not biodegradable. So they lie there in the landfill for 500 years. You can have very cheap sustainable solutions with biodegradable liners that you can throw away. Likewise, some people say they don't have time for public transport. But if you come up with a research that driving in traffic jams over a long period of time will give you a much bigger exposure to pollution... think about it."

Touzard started doing research on carbon emissions a few years ago. In 2003 she worked on a project in Sichuan (China), introducing renewable energy through biogas linked to gas stoves to avoid wood consumption, which also enhanced sanitation and hygiene. But Touzard is not a missionary. She doesn't want to frighten or depress people with the environmental situation. "We have a challenge, and we have solutions," she says instead. "So what do you want to start with?"

"You need to rethink the approach for every activity," she stresses. "If we shift, we'll end up using renewable, long lasting and non-polluting. That's all we need to do basically. And then we go back to a more philosophical lifestyle and probably we'll save more time, instead of running after things and changing things. A lot of people think that with recycling they do their share, but recycling is not the ultimate goal. The biggest problem now is global warming, followed by the loss of biodiversity (the loss of resources) because of overconsumption and toxicity."

Touzard is all for planting trees. "But it will merely cure part of the disaster," she claims. "We have to shift from fossil fuel to non-carbon emitting energy. It does exist. It may take nuclear or hydro, wind is very small and it will always be, but solar offers a big opportunity. The mainland is investing a lot. Going vegan is definitely a very good idea. But on a more governmental scale, decisions are needed to stop using fossil fuel, because it's killing us. It's the main source of pollution. It's not just the oil in the car, but the exploration of this oil. You have to burn gas to extract it. The good thing is we won't have much oil left anyway. Either we think, "Oh there's a big storm ahead, let's do something about it now", or we think, "Oh let's just wait until the storm is here." It's like a person who's critically ill, and he would say that he can't do without his coffee and his sweets everyday. It's all in your mind. You can do without. It's just a matter of decision. And some countries have decided against carbon lifestyle."

Touzard states the urgency of this because of our dependency on fossil fuel.

"Especially in countries such as the US, people are paralysed without oil, unable to shop for instance. Likewise, the buildings we still build around here are making us so dependant on fossil fuels, needing so much energy. This is a big shift, but you have to prepare for it. This is like adolescence. This is just a period when it will hurt a bit. But after that we will be fine."

Touzard has already been asked to produce "green" books for other countries, and one man in Brazil loved her book so much that he is writing *Going Green in Brazil*. "I would love to have that kind of network, because you have to go local," Touzard says. "What is applicable here might not be applicable somewhere else."

***Vivienne Tang***

**Catherine Touzard's 4 Top Tips to reduce your impact on the environment:**

- 1. Get a water filter and use a metal flask.**
- 2. Get a big bag you like and avoid the plastic bags.**
- 3. Eat less meat.**
- 4. Recharge your batteries and stop the disposable batteries. (They can contaminate about 1 cubic metre of soil for 50 years, and all the water that is drained through this soil is about 60,000 litres.)**

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