

# No plastic is allowed in this town in Guatemala

By Atlas Obscura, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.31.19

Word Count **358**

Level **400L**



Image 1. Women shopping in Guatemala. Photo by: Lola Mendez

San Pedro La Laguna is a town on Lake Atitlán. It is in Guatemala. Guatemala is in Central America. Most of the people in San Pedro La Laguna are Tz'utujil Maya. They are native to the area. Many wear traditional clothing.

San Pedro La Laguna had a problem. There was too much plastic trash. Mauricio Méndez is the mayor. In 2016 he made a big change. He made using plastic against the law. People could not use things like plastic bags.

At first, villagers were upset. They were used to plastic. Leaders went to every house. They talked to people about waste. The government gave people rubber bags for free for their plastic bags.

## Hard To Get Rid Of Plastic

Victor Tuch Gonzáles works for the city. He said it was hard getting rid of plastic. The city bought thousands of rubber baskets. The baskets can be reused. People got baskets to use instead of bags. Switching to the bags cost a lot of money.

What happens if people break the plastic law? They have to pay a fine. The fine is 300 quetzal. That is Guatemalan money. It is called GTQ for short. 300 quetzal is \$40. That is a big cost for regular Guatemalans. Companies that use plastic must pay 15,000 GTQ, or \$1,940.

The city needs help getting rid of trash. The groups Cementos Progreso and Pro Verde help. They turn the waste into fuel. Fisherman also take garbage out of Lake Atitlán. Some people turn trash into art.

Gonzáles says that the town has "returned to what was used ancestrally." People keep meat in large leaves. They use cloth to carry tortillas. Salespeople wrap items in paper.



## More Tourists

The lake is cleaner. Now, it is more beautiful. More tourists are coming to San Pedro La Laguna. Visits to the town went up by almost half in 2018. The tourists help the town make money.

Mother Earth is important to the Mayan people. Mr. Méndez and Mr. Gonzáles want other towns to help out. Together, they can save Mother Earth.