

## Maintaining the Natural Beauty of Penghu

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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Penghu County, located off the southwestern coast of Taiwan, covers an archipelago that consists of 64 isles of different sizes. People call them "the Chrysanthemum Islands" or "the Wind Islands" and liken them to "a string of emerald pearls strewn on the sea" to extol their unpolluted natural beauty. White sandy beaches, blue coasts, columnar basalt formations, and fields blanketed with blooming wild daisies make the archipelago a charmingly attractive place to visit.



Salty winds from the sea blow across Penghu County all year long, stunting the growth of crops. Unable to live by agriculture, the residents make their livelihood from the sea. Since living off the sea depends on the quirks of nature, life is not easy for the Penghu people. Fortunately, the beautiful scenery of the islands has allowed tourism to flourish, bringing in money for the locals.

Tourism has helped support the local economy, but it has also changed the scenery and ecology of the islands. As sightseers throng to Penghu, the increasing amount of garbage mars the breathtaking landscape of the Chrysanthemum Islands.

Not wanting to stand by and watch their homeland being inundated by garbage, a group of locals are working to restore the beauty of Penghu. They pick up PET bottles stuck in the cracks of rocks, gather used cardboard boxes, and set up recycling bins for tourists to throw empty bottles in. They also sort out the recyclables and transport them, by truck or by boat, to collection centers.

Rolling up their sleeves, bending down, picking up one discarded bottle after another--these people are recreating a Penghu with untainted landscape and a clean, sparkling sea. In the following pages, we will report on the recycling efforts of the people (focusing on two places--Niaoyu and Magong), and see how they try to make a difference in the world with their seemingly insignificant but actually immensely important actions.

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### Tourists and Garbage in NIAOYU

When our boat sailed into a small port on one of the isles in Penghu County, we saw a bird sculpture standing on the shore looking out toward the sea. "Welcome to Niaoyu ["the island of birds"]"--a sign told us we had arrived at a little island which used to be home to countless birds but now contains a fishing village.



As soon as we stepped onshore, the smell of fish greeted us. In a large square, some fisherwomen were turning over dried fish with a rake. The scales of the fish, reflecting light from

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the sun, glistened brightly. In front of a house, a woman was picking and sorting through a basin of spiral shells. Several children were playing not far away, adding merriment to the otherwise peaceful atmosphere.

The houses in Niaoyu face the sea, and the main road of the village runs right in front of the wharf. As you stroll down the main road, you see black barrels every ten meters (33 feet) or so along the way. Turn off the main road and into the alleys, and you see even more barrels standing at the street corners. A closer inspection reveals that all the barrels are full of plastic bottles, aluminum cans, or steel containers. It's a bumper harvest!

Though inconspicuous, the barrels play an important role in the island's recycling work. They guard the environment of Niaoyu like dutiful sentinels.

### A landfill about to burst

Covering an area of more than 20 hectares (50 acres), Niaoyu has a population of 1,000. Ever since the first settlers arrived on the island, the local people have made their living from the sea. They lead a simple, regular life, going to work early in the morning and coming home after dark.



In recent years, such a simple lifestyle has begun to change. Since Niaoyu started developing its tourist industry, a large number of vacationers have visited the island, attracted by the basalt formations that form the special geographical scenery of the island. With the tourists comes the garbage. Plastic bags, soft drink cans, and glass wine bottles litter the beach. Recyclable items such as cardboard boxes are piled high in front of the local temple and by the wharf, along with other unrecyclable trash.

Three years ago, members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association came to Niaoyu to conduct a free clinic. Alarmed by the garbage problem, they encouraged residents to engage in recycling and turn the rubbish into a valuable resource. Responding to their call, Shi Long-er, who had always been civic-minded, volunteered to pitch in.

"I started by collecting used cardboard boxes," said Shi. "Then it occurred to me I should invite others to join me since the work was too much for me to do by myself, so I went to Wu Jia-xin and asked for his help." Shi and Wu, both natives of Niaoyu, lived next door to each other. Besides being a fisherman, Shi was also the chief commissioner of the local temple, and so he was very busy. Thus he asked Wu to work with him to promote recycling work on the island.

Shi also asked other villagers to help. With the amount of garbage rapidly increasing, they knew they could no longer sit back and look on nonchalantly, so most of them were willing to lend a hand. Besides, the village's landfill, which opened only 10 years ago, was almost filled to the brim. Something had to be done to help solve the problem.

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