

Ningbo Couple Launches “Trash for Coffee” Initiative While Touring China

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People are lining up at the “trash for coffee” truck. The couple, A Wan and Qi Ma.

Nestled by the Maichai’ao Reservoir of Haishu District, an innovative sustainability initiative is brewing across the community of Ningbo in East China. The “Trash for Coffee” campaign recently saw over 80 environmentally engaged citizens of this coastal city combining hiking and litter collection using biodegradable collection bags. Participants earned grounds for celebration – each bag of collected waste became redeemable for artisanal coffee served from a specially deployed pickup truck at the mountainside.

Behind the mobile coffee stall are Wan Weizhong and Zhang Qiaoyan, both born in the 1990s and affectionately known to their friends as A Wan and Qi Ma.

“As coffee truck operators, our daily routine of brewing and selling coffee can sometimes be monotonous. During hikes, we are disheartened by the litter scattered around,” A Wan shared. “This motivated us to launch a mountain-cleaning initiative. For every cup of coffee sold, we allocate 9.9 yuan toward our ‘Trash for Coffee’ program.” Since last year, the couple has hosted a dozen charity events, each drawing dozens of participants.

1 A Fortuitous Meeting Sparks Adventure

The couple’s story began unexpectedly in 2021 at a motorcycle shop, where A Wan was overseeing renovations. Qi Ma, in search of a new motorcycle, mistook him for a shop employee. As an avid motorcycle enthusiast, A Wan then seized the opportunity to share his knowledge with her.

“We both cherish freedom and exploration, relishing the chance to travel and quietly observe the world,” A Wan reflected. Their shared passion for adventure quickly deepened their bond, as they journeyed together across Ningbo, from the lush bamboo forests of Siming Mountain to the serene fishing villages along the East China Sea.

In 2023, the couple set their sights on a grander adventure: a motorcycle tour across China.

“While motorcycle travel can be exhausting, it brings immense joy. Yet, simply taking in the scenery can gradually grow tedious. We then decided to transform our pickup truck into a mobile coffee shop, allowing us to travel, set up a stall, and fund our adventures along the way,” A Wan explained, adding that this was a long-held dream of his.

That summer marked the official debut of their mobile coffee stall, though its offerings were humble at first — freshly squeezed orange juice was the only item on the menu. In the following months, A Wan dedicated himself to mastering the art of brewing various hand-crafted coffees. The couple divided their roles: A Wan drove and made coffee, while Qi Ma handled finances and took in the sights.

2 From Mountain Ranges to Coastal Landscapes

In May 2024, the duo—joined by their dog—set off from Ningbo, embarking on a westward journey across China.

“Our coffee truck is equipped with everything we need: a coffee machine, juicer, ice maker, and even a tent with tables and chairs,” A Wan noted.

They once parked beside Erhai Lake, Yunnan, famous as “Pearl of Plateau” in Southwest China. By day, they sipped coffee while gazing at the serene lake surface, the gentle breeze adding to the idyllic charm. At night, they nestled in the rooftop tent of their pickup, listening to the gentle lapping of the water as they planned the next day’s itinerary.

In Xinjiang’s Altay region, their coffee truck found a home deep within a Kazakh pastoral village, where welcoming herders invited them into their yurt, treating them to koumiss and hand-pulled mutton.

“The herders were incredibly hospitable, allowing us to set up our stall on the grasslands. They even taught me to ride a horse. When I offered them coffee,

they were hesitant at first but soon realized that, unlike alcohol, coffee kept them awake. Eventually, they shied away from coffee altogether,” A Wan reminisced, chuckling at the memory.

They even set up shop at an altitude of 4,500 meters in Litang (in western Sichuan province), where A Wan shared, “We typically spend our mornings searching for scenic spots to sell coffee, starting around noon and going until seven or eight in the evening. Many tourists remarked that it felt like drinking coffee in the clouds.” However, he acknowledged that such high altitudes posed its challenges, as the excitement of making coffee quickly gave way to altitude sickness.

Over the five months, the couple traversed much of China, witnessing breathtaking landscapes and countless sunrises and sunsets. From the sprawling grasslands to the sacred peaks, every stop along their journey left its mark, each infused with the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

3 A Commitment to Environmental Stewardship

While traveling along National Highway G109, they encountered an alarming amount of litter, with some areas piled high.

“I connected with the head of a local nonprofit organization dedicated to environmental cleanup. They collected and bundled trash into large packages, which they placed at designated waste points for volunteers to transport out of remote areas,” A Wan recounted. Upon learning this initiative, he loaded two large bags of trash from a cleanup point in Naqu, Xizang Autonomous Region, and drove over 1,000 kilometers to dispose of it in Golmud, Qinghai province.

Throughout their travels, the couple engaged in various environmental campaigns, which deepened their appreciation for nature and its preservation.

Upon their return to Ningbo in October 2024, A Wan learned from his friend, Tang Liwei, that the city was also

plagued by litter in its mountainous areas, with visitors casually discarding water bottles and wrappers.

This sparked a collaboration to launch the “Trash for Coffee” initiative, where for every bag of trash collected, participants could exchange it for a cup of coffee. As word spread, more people joined the effort, once resulting in an impressive 320 kilograms of trash cleared by 80 volunteers.

“My wife is pregnant now, and I plan to bring our child along on future travels to continue our commitment to public service,” A Wan said with conviction. “Motorcycles brought us together, coffee connects us with nature, and our environmental efforts add a meaningful dimension to our journey.”

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