

# JOURNEY TO THE PLASTIC OCEAN

WORDS SARAH JORDAN

Many of us already know DB resident Tracey Read for her interest in the environment. An active member of DB Green, she organises regular beach clean-ups, and even her business has an eco-focus... Little Miss Green The Party Queen is an online store selling sustainably made or recycled party products, toys and games.



Next month Tracey will embark on the Japanese Tsunami Debris Expedition, a unique month long sailing voyage to research the Japanese Tsunami debris field and the plastic pollution in the North Pacific gyre.

The 22m sailing vessel 'Sea Dragon' will depart from Tokyo on the 30th May and arrive on the Island of Maui on the 1st of July. The expedition will involve 13 crew & volunteers from Australia, Great Britain, Brazil, Hong Kong, Switzerland and the United States. Tracey is the only person going from Hong Kong.

I recently caught up with Tracey to find out more about the trip and her reasons for getting involved.

## WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE EXPEDITION?

"The aim of the expedition is to advance research into marine plastic pollution in our oceans. We will assess the distribution, condition and type of debris from the Japanese Tsunami and survey the rate of growth of marine organisms and the presence of invasive species.

The expedition is unique as there is a known starting point, the date of the tsunami. Millions of tonnes of debris were washed into the ocean. Most of it will have sunk but the movement of some of the floating debris is being tracked by marker buoys. It is travelling towards the US and some of this debris may come ashore there next year. Our research will help scientists to better predict where the debris may end up and when, and allow US coastal organisations to be more prepared. We will also retrieve and send back to Japan any items that are of a personal nature."

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean is the gyre with its slow moving currents that has now become a collection area for millions of tonnes of plastic. Whilst there is a lot of floating surface debris the biggest problem lies within the top few metres of water where there is a soup-like mix of very small plastic pieces. Hence the term 'Plastic Soup' that is often used to describe this area. We will collect samples of plastic and marine life to research the effects of plastics in the oceanic environment, including the possible transference of toxins and their impact on human health. The effect on the food chain is still unknown; but it is known that fish are eating plastic."

## WHO IS ORGANISING THE TRIP?

"US based Algalita Marine Research Foundation and 5 Gyres are leaders in pioneering research and increasing global awareness of plastic marine pollution. Algalita's founder, Captain Charles Moore, author of 'Plastic Ocean, How a Sea Captain's Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Ocean,' is credited with discovering the Eastern Garbage Patch in the North Pacific Gyre. 5 Gyres continues to monitor plastic marine pollution in the garbage patches found in all five subtropical gyres."

## WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO GET INVOLVED?

"I have been organising beach cleanups for years and have also been talking in schools about this huge marine debris problem and how it affects us as well as marine and birdlife. My talks are given using other peoples' research and photos and I felt that it was time to see it for myself. I am looking forward to spending a month with the experts and scientists, and learning from them. I will continue to give talks to