



Trashmagination Podcast #48 – Green Vacations and Staycations

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Here in North America, this is the last month of school and gearing up for summer vacations. The other day, I was talking with my friend Emily & she asked, "If you could travel anywhere, where would you like to go?" Most years, my family's biggest trip is to see our family members in Canada. So when Emily asked me that question, I really thought about what I would do if I travelled more than usual, and I realized that the places I wanted to visit the most were places where people do next-level creative reuse projects!

But hold on – before I tell you the places on the top of my creative reuse travel wish list, let's talk about the purpose of this podcast episode. I have been planning vacations around creative reuse awesomeness for my whole life. In this episode, I'll share my ten-step process for how I found inspiring creative reuse places to visit in a far-away place. You could apply the same research methods to your own vacations – no matter where you were planning to visit. You could use this same process to plan a fabulous green staycation. I'll share the stories of some of my favorite places I saw on these tours. At the end of the episode, I'll share my current creative reuse travel wish list.

Researching Creative Reuse Innovators for Your Vacations

I learned how to find creative reuse innovators through my role as a facilitator with a program called Family Nature Summits. This is like a summer camp for families that meets in a different beautiful place each summer within the United States and Canada. At this camp, the kids do stuff with other kids during the day, and the adults are free to go do stuff with other adults. In the evenings, there are programs for the families all together.

In July 2009, I offered my first green tour as part of the Family Nature Summit. One benefit of doing this tour as part of a larger program is that I used to think that if I ask to visit green innovators as an individual, I might come across as a stranger who they might not want to meet. But when I asked to bring a whole group of adults on a green tour, people seemed to understand that motivation and they were happy to meet us. However, I have since reached out to people as an individual and most green innovators are happy to meet me.

The green tours I offered as part of the Family Nature Summit were located in:

- 2009 – Glen Falls, New York (about an hour north of Albany)
- 2010 – Lake Tahoe, Nevada
- 2012 – Boulder, Colorado
- 2013 – near Acadia National Park in Maine

I planned all those tours without visiting those locations in advance. Everything was done through online research and phone calls. So here's the 10 step process that I refined over those four years and have used many years since.

Step 1 - I made a spreadsheet with a list of all the little place names within 45 minutes of a starting point. This could be your home, a hotel, a family member's home etc. The reason why I start with these little place names is because if you only search for items within the largest town or city in an area, you usually miss out on the best stuff. Also, green

innovators assume that only local people are going to look for them, so they don't tend to optimize their websites for people who are unfamiliar with local place names. I note on the spreadsheet how far away each place is from my starting point, and add a column to show where they are directionally (north, south, east, west) so I can group destinations economically when I head out.

Step 2 - I make a list of keywords that describe what I'd love to see. In my case, that would include recycling, creative reuse, fiber artists, strawbale homes, farm-to-table etc. Then I Google for those terms place the place names. You can see this can take a while to cross-reference these two lists – but it works fabulously.

Step 3 - I search for any green or solar home tours or festivals that have already taken place in those place names. Sometimes these tours or festivals are taking place exactly at the time of your vacation! But even if they are not, you can often reach out to participants in those tours or festivals to visit them on another day.

Step 4 - I look for the Chamber of Commerce websites for those place names. I scan the list of businesses for anything that sounds green.

Step 5 - I look at Green America's National Green Pages website [<https://www.greenamerica.org/green-business-index>]. This is a directory of green businesses mostly in the United States.

Step 6 - You will need to eat during this vacation, so I recommend step 6 which is to check Local Harvest's website [<https://www.localharvest.org/>] for farmers who are doing organic farming, as well as farmer's markets, restaurants and food co-ops.

Step 7 - Through this process, I will gather a long list of potential green innovators who I can visit. When I was planning green tours, I tried to mix it up so the participants would see places related to buildings, food, crafts and recycling. So step 7 involves emailing or calling my favorite places and seeing if I can come visit – either on my own or with a tour group! I am looking for people who love telling their story and seem excited for me to visit. I confirm what times work best for me to visit within the window of my trip.

Step 8 is to put the locations in a schedule. I place them all on a map and look for a reasonable route that minimizes travel time. I use Google Maps to find out how long it would likely take to drive or walk between locations. I make sure we have a plan for meals – whether that means eating at a great restaurant who sources local ingredients, or picking up items at a farmer's market to have a picnic.

Step 9 is to send the schedule to the tour locations and adjust as necessary.

Step 10 is to prepare a thank you gift for each tour location. People are taking time out of their day to talk with me or my tour participants. The gift I gave most often was a People Towel which is a reusable towel you can hang from your backpack to avoid using disposable paper towels [<https://www.peopletowels.com/>]. They have wonderful messages on them. I just checked their website and they only sell them in bulk – with a minimum order of 100 towels now. So you might need to find an alternative idea. I also gave out organic chocolate bars.

Amazing People I Met on my Green Innovator Tours

Now I want to tell you about some of the people I visited on past tours. Hopefully this inspires you to come up with great keywords for your own green vacation. I won't share every single tour location because that would be super-long.

Almost every tour included a visit to someone's home. The homeowners would lovingly show us all the details. I loved seeing their composting toilets! And every tour included lunch at a place where the chef or baker focused on locally-sourced ingredients. So now I'll mention my favorite stops other than people's homes and restaurants.

My first green tours were located in New York north of Albany. My favorite stops were:

- A strawbale home that had just been built and the plaster was still wet – It was owner's birthday so we had birthday cupcake from a bakery where we ate lunch who specialized in locally-grown grains.

- **Crazy as a Loom** – a weaver who used recycled fibers [<https://trashmagination.com/crazy-as-a-loom-weaving-studio/>]. The owner is Hilary Cooper-Kenny and she is still weaving.

The following year, I tour my tours to the Lake Tahoe area. My favorite stop was a Montessori school where the classroom was always outdoors. The kids made their own smoothies with a blender hooked up to a bicycle, and they baked cookies in a solar oven.

My third green tours were in Boulder, Colorado. My favorite stops was **CHARM or the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials**, where they are always inventing new ways to creatively reuse.

My fourth green tour was near Acadia National Park in Maine, mostly in the Blue Hill area. My favorite stops was to **Weaving a Life** [<http://www.weavingalife.com/>]. Susan Barrett Merrill put up her Story Loom outside a local art gallery and all the tour participants wove with recycled materials [<https://trashmagination.com/weaving-a-life/>]. I loved the experience so much that I later worked with Susan to become a Certified Weaving a Life facilitator.

Facilitating these tours for four years taught me that people love to share their stories. Nothing beats going to see someone working in their studio, school, home or business to get inspired. I think it is an important part of our creative reuse journeys to make a list of people who inspire us, and see if we might be able to visit them. I can kick off a lifelong friendship, or at the least, it can help you take amorphous ideas and make them easier to articulate.

Since I ran these tours, I continue to visit places that involve creative reuse with my family. My favorites so far were:

- **Philadelphia's Magic Gardens** [<https://trashmagination.com/philadelphias-magic-gardens/>] – An artist in Philadelphia builds incredible mosaics from trash. He covered his entire home and a neighboring lot with mosaics made from recycled materials.
- Many creative reuse centers – These are like craft stores where everything is secondhand. We the **Pittsburgh Center for Creative Reuse** [<https://trashmagination.com/pittsburgh-center-for-creative-reuse/>] and my local creative reuse center called **Upcycle Creative Reuse Center** [<https://trashmagination.com/upcycle-creative-reuse-center/>].

So to finish this episode, I'll share:

My Current Travel Wish List of Projects Related to Creative Reuse

- **Thomas Dambo's creative reuse sculptures** [<http://thomasdambo.com/>] – There are many in his home country of Denmark. He recently built some in Chicago and South Korea. I talked about Thomas Dambo in episode 21 about scrap wood [<https://trashmagination.com/21-scrap-wood-reuse/>].
- **ReTuna Återbruksgalleria** – This is a shopping mall where all the stores featured recycled materials located in Sweden [<https://www.retuna.se/>]. I talked about it in episode 17 [<https://trashmagination.com/creative-reuse-business-district/>].
- **Recology Artist in Residence program** – Recology is an employee-owned business in San Francisco that provides recycling services [<https://www.recology.com>]. They have a program where artists spend a few months at their facilities, making art from what is thrown away there. There is a gallery and a three-acre sculpture garden showing work by past artists.
- **The town of Kamikatsu, Japan** – This is known as a zero-waste town because the community implemented an amazing reuse and recycling program.

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/eym10GGidQU" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>

- **Hornby Island, British Columbia** – This was the place that I first visited as a teenager in 1990 and learned about a garbage-free community. I would love to go back to see it because my memories are getting hazy and I didn't own a camera to take any photos at the time.

I would love to hear about places you have visited in the past or would like to visit with a theme of creative reuse. I have a page on my website where I keep track of places I would like to visit or people I would like to meet in case I have the opportunity to visit those places. I call it my World Tour Plan [<https://trashmagination.com/my-world-tour-plan/>]. Please help me add more items to my list all around the world!

Trashmagination Featured at Broadlands Nature Center until June 30, 2018

Before we finish today, I want to let you know some great news, which is that one of my woven plastic bag pieces is featured at a nature center near my home as part of an exhibit called All Things Fly. The piece represents two trees. They are decorated with some of my color sewn medallions made from recycled t-shirts. Here's what I wrote about it:

- Trees represent a launching pad and a safe place to land for many creatures which fly.
- When I look at trees in a forest, it reminds me of people working together to make a strong community.
- When you have a great idea, sometimes all you need is one other person who believes in you - thus the two trees.
- The medallions represent the ideas, which are diverse and beautiful.
- To build a strong community, we need to be able to feel supported as our ideas take flight.

If you live near Washington DC, you could come see the exhibit! Or check out the photos on Instagram and Facebook.

If you receive my e-newsletter, you likely got an email from this week. Due to changes in European laws pertaining to email, I need to confirm whether you live in Europe and if so, I need you to sign up to get the email again with my new form. Otherwise, I will be deleting the emails on Thursday of anyone who hasn't confirmed their location, in order to comply with that law.

Until next time – I hope you can find a way to include creative reuse inspiration in your summer plans! Thanks for listening!