

Hong Kong's geographical features make it perfect for enjoying recreational seaside activities, but this is being undermined by the common sight of coastal litter. Julian Hwang meets Institute members who have taken it upon themselves to help clean up Hong Kong's beaches

Photography by Anthony Tung

**H**ong Kong's mountainous environment and long stretches of coastlines are home to a number of bays and beaches that are ideal for swimming and water sports. However, with the rampant problem of pollution, people are finding their favourite seaside destinations covered in litter. For many like Tracy Shum, it's difficult to stand by idly while the beaches and the surrounding ecosystems suffer, so they try their hand at doing something about it.

Shum, Associate Director of Advisory and Management Consulting at KPMG, has been doing volunteer work since school, and was no stranger to beach clean-ups. So when her firm was organizing a team-building beach clean-up event in May 2017, she didn't hesitate to sign up.

"I live in Heng Fa Chuen and can remember the things washed up near my home because of the recent typhoon. I can only imagine what people were finding at the beaches," says Shum. She notes that when tidelines are



Tracy Shum  
at Deep Water  
Bay Beach



polluted, it could eventually lead to negative consequences for those living nearby, both humans and animals. “Not to mention, people who go to beaches for water sports or to have fun can also contract illnesses,” adds Shum.

In her experience, plastics made up the majority of the litter collected by her team. “The problem with plastics is that they’re mostly single-use items,” says Shum. While plastic is the go-to for packaging and on-the-go cutlery, it is almost always thrown out after one use. “If it’s disposed of properly, plastic ends up in dumps,” says Shum. “If not, it goes into the ocean.”

For today’s busy professionals in Hong Kong, eating takeaway meals regularly is inevitable. Shum points out that despite ordering takeaway, she always asks herself whether plastic cutlery is necessary, and will opt to use her own cutlery and utensils like a reusable metal straw. “It’s not much from the grand scale, but every little helps in my opinion. My family has cultivated this habit, so if everyone else does it, it can really make a difference.”

**“The clean-ups can get quite gritty sometimes, but it’s an opportunity to get out of Hong Kong’s commercial areas and for colleagues to bond without traditional work hierarchies.”**

Shum was assigned the role of event coordinator, where she had to organize the teams’ locations and arranging the tools needed, such as heavy duty bags and work gloves. “We didn’t provide bottled water because we didn’t want to add to the waste,” says Shum. When sorting the litter, each collected piece is photographed for data collection before being placed into recycling bins or properly disposed of.

For Shum, the clean-ups benefit more than just the environment. It is also a way for her to get to know a different side of the people she regularly works with. “The clean-ups can get quite gritty sometimes, but it’s an opportunity to get out of Hong Kong’s commercial areas and for colleagues to bond without traditional work hierarchies,” she says.

### Collective efforts

Sandy Go, Senior Manager of Tax and Business Advisory Services at Deloitte, saw how polluted some of Hong Kong’s beaches truly were and decided that it was time to do her part to help the environment.”

Feeling inspired, Go joined the Deloitte Foundation to participate in various corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. In November 2017, the foundation organized a visit to Shek O as part of their IMPACT Day campaign – a year-long initiative, contrary to its name, dedicated to helping the community through hospital visits, mentoring school students, recycling and donating initiatives and beach clean-ups as well. “Beyond Shek O’s main beach, there are several back beaches that are not managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD),” says Go. “Because these beaches

**“Simply bringing our own reusable bottles and cutlery sets can make a difference.”**

are the most at risk of pollution, the foundation targets these locations.”

Go also takes part in clean-up events organized by the Institute, the most recent one being at Lung Kwu Tan beach in Tuen Mun. “Both the Deloitte Foundation and the Institute collaborate with non-governmental organizations to educate participants on a variety of things like how to sort and classify the types of litter collected,” says Go.

One common misconception is that driftwood is waste, says Go, when in fact it is a naturally occurring material and should be left alone. “Provided that it doesn’t have nails or other man-made bits sticking out of it of course,” she adds.

“There’s more and more companies taking up CSR activities these days, and people’s efforts are not going unnoticed,” says Go. A refreshment vendor by a beach had told her that he has seen several groups come by the beach to do clean-ups within a short period. However, as Go notes, there are more effective ways to reduce of the flow of litter into the oceans. “Cut down on plastic bags, bottled drinks, takeaway cutlery and styrofoam packaging,” she stresses. “Simply bringing our own reusable bottles and cutlery sets can make a difference.”

For future clean-ups, Go suggests adding long-poled scooping nets to their equipment list. “Although we generally stay along the coastline during clean-ups, we sometimes

Sandy Go at  
Deep Water  
Bay Beach



## **“No one wants to see litter. If everyone who uses the beach pitches in, then everyone can enjoy a clean environment.”**

see stuff floating just out of our reach,” says Go.

After participating in several beach clean-ups, Go believes that the continued efforts of the Institute and the Deloitte Foundation is making a difference – but only if the activities are done continuously. “These activities are a positive way for companies to show that they care about the environment, and through the posts that we make on social media, we can help raise more awareness about keeping Hong Kong’s beaches clean.”



According to Hong Kong’s Environmental Protection Department, 15,439 tonnes of marine refuse were collected from Hong Kong waters last year, down from 16,485 tonnes in 2016, the highest litter haul recorded in a decade of annually recorded collections.

### **Keen on cleaning**

From a young age, the words “never litter” have been instilled in Gilles-Alexandre Salansy, Director of Outsourcing Services at Mazars. “I’ve always been taught to carry my own litter until finding a bin,” says Salansy.

Salansy moved to Hong Kong from Paris in 2004. The beaches and country parks have since become regular weekend destinations for him and his family, while living on Lamma Island also offers plenty of outdoor activities for them to do around the home. The island’s community, he says, stick to a secret rule – pick up whatever litter you see along the beaches and dispose of it properly.

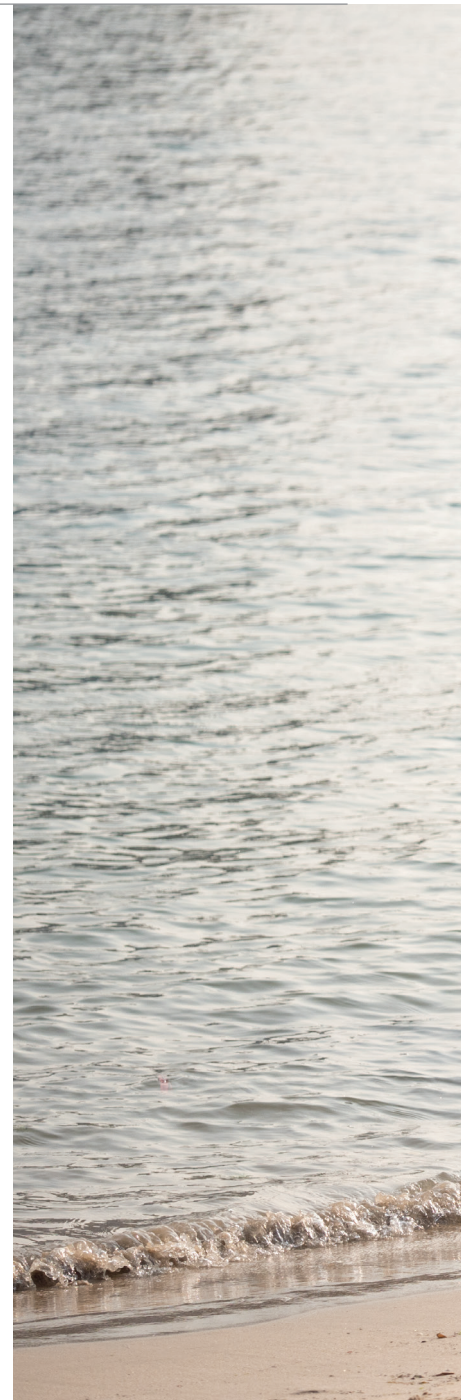
The Salansy family often go to the Power Station Beach, which is not under the LCSD’s

management. “This beach is perfect for kayaking, swimming, children’s birthday parties and gatherings,” says Salansy, “and because it doesn’t have cleaners from the LCSD looking after it, it’s important that we do if we want to continue enjoying our time there.”

Visible litter is collected and then disposed of, with the exception of metal, which Salansy and his family leaves beside the litter bins for scrap metal collectors to pick up.

While the efforts of Lamma Island’s community make a difference to their own beaches, Salansy believes other communities can benefit too if they adopt a similar philosophy. “When you go to a beach, no one wants to see litter,” says Salansy. “If everyone who uses the beach pitches in, then everyone can enjoy a clean environment.”

When comparing beaches and country parks, no matter how well-maintained the two are, litter tends to end up on the beaches more often than not, he expresses. “Most litter that ends up in country parks are brought there by inconsiderate people, but for the ocean, the currents can bring litter from anywhere, like down from the Pearl River Delta or from overflowing dumps by the sea,” says Salansy. “I think it’ll keep being like this until we and our neighbouring countries develop better waste management policies.”



Gilles-Alexandre  
Salansy at  
Lamma Power  
Station Beach



For change to happen, Salansy believes Hong Kong's government needs to place litter sorting bins in more locations. "Apart from seeing them in very busy areas, these bins are generally nowhere to be seen," says Salansy. "If people had the option to organize their litter into the correct paper, metal or plastic bins beforehand, there would be less that ends up in the

dumps." However, this brings up another issue of whether or not these collected materials can actually be recycled or not, he notes.

Salansy also points to the overabundance of plastic packaging as a problem that needs to be addressed. "In France, a pack of biscuits is only wrapped in one layer of plastic before being placed

onto shelves. Here, it seems everything is individually wrapped and wrapped again," says Salansy.

"I believe businesses continue to package like this is because they believe consumers want it, so unless we change our buying behaviour, biscuit wrappers will just continue to pile up." Or wash up on our beaches. 