



A Complete Guide to Sustainable and Ethical Jewelry

There are sinister aspects within the [jewelry industry](#). Join us in thoroughly exploring and revealing distressing information. It is crucial that you start supporting ethical jewelry decisions.

Jewelry serves as a means of self-expression, enhancing our outfits and boosting our self-assurance. It also holds sentimental value as a precious memento or a family heirloom. Regrettably, the inner workings of the jewelry industry reveal a disturbing reality encompassing problems like child labor, unfavorable work environments, violations of human rights, political tensions, and various other issues.

When it comes to jewelry, it is vital to select items that you genuinely adore since they will remain in your possession and be used for a long time. However, it is equally important to prioritize ethical considerations and ensure that the production process is transparent and sustainable.

In today's discussion, I will encompass various aspects regarding ethical jewelry. This includes providing a clear definition of what ethical jewelry entails, addressing the major concerns within the jewelry industry, and highlighting the top brands that prioritize ethical practices. By doing so, you will have the knowledge to confidently wear or give sustainable and ethically sourced jewelry, free from any feelings of guilt regarding its origin.

What is Ethical Jewelry?

[Ethical jewelry](#) refers to jewelry that can be traced throughout the entire supply chain, enabling you to have complete knowledge of the materials' origins and sourcing methods. This empowers you to make an educated decision.

Understanding the specific regulations surrounding the acquisition of valuable materials varies depending on location, therefore identifying the country where a precious gemstone originates from is crucial in determining if a piece of jewelry is morally sound.

In order to determine the ethical nature of the jewelry, it is crucial to have information regarding the source of the materials used, including the specific mine, as well as details on how and where the piece was created. Ethical jewelry businesses prioritize sustainability in all aspects of their operations, including fair labor practices, reducing usage and waste, and mitigating their carbon footprint.

Ethical vs. Sustainable Jewelry

It is crucial to differentiate between ethical and sustainable jewelry as these terms are frequently used interchangeably, despite having distinct definitions.

Ethical jewelry concentrates on the individuals engaged in producing a particular item. This encompasses the entire production process and the network through which it is sourced. The item can be easily tracked and does not harm the individuals involved in its production. It is not associated with any conflicts and provides support to workers through fair wages and safe working conditions.

Sustainable jewelry focuses on how the production of jewelry affects the environment. In order for jewelry to be considered sustainable, it must not harm the planet in any way.

Social and political issues regarding the jewelry industry

The primary challenges in the conventional jewelry sector revolve around social and political matters. There are more than 100 million individuals employed in this industry, predominantly residing in economically disadvantaged regions of third-world countries. These individuals heavily depend on artisanal mining, in contrast to a comparatively smaller group of 7 million who rely on industrial mining.

Artisanal mining is conducted unlawfully by individuals who engage in mineral extraction as a means to alleviate poverty. Africa serves as the primary source of artisanal mining, accounting for 22% of global gold production, and this type of mining is consistently in violation of the law.

The conventional jewelry sector is connected to forced labor, environmental harm, conflicts, and unfair treatment. You are likely familiar with the expression "blood diamonds," referring to diamonds that supported rebel armed groups in Africa during the 1990s.

However, the problem extends beyond just diamonds. The Human Rights Watch report states that the materials used in jewelry production, including minerals, metals, gems, and others, originate from numerous countries. These materials are traded, exported, processed, and ultimately transformed into jewelry in factories before reaching retailers. Due to the intricate nature of the supply chain, unethical practices can easily go undetected.

Below are several social and political concerns that arise within the jewelry sector.

Human Displacement

Transportation corridors accompany large mines, resulting in the mining company acquiring jurisdiction over extensive tracts of land.

In many cases, hundreds or even thousands of local residents are forced to leave their homes and livelihoods as a result. They must search for a new place to live and establish themselves elsewhere.

The quality of life is diminished by changes in the environment.

In most cases, even if the residents are not compelled to leave their homes, they typically find themselves employed in the mining industry and subjected to hazardous circumstances.

Mining activities result in the deterioration of soil quality, reduced diversity of living organisms, poor water conditions, and other detrimental effects. These are indispensable resources for human survival and a healthy existence, but their availability becomes compromised within a mining region.

In addition, residents are at risk of coming into contact with harmful chemicals. A notable example is cyanide, a highly poisonous substance that is frequently utilized in the jewelry trade.

Workers who are frequently exposed to mercury during gold mining experience adverse effects, resulting in disabilities and fatal outcomes.

Child Labor

It is estimated that about one million children are involved in mining activities. These children are exposed to harmful dust and particles, resulting in severe health problems. Additionally,

they are subjected to mistreatment and are frequently targeted by human traffickers.

Child labor is a major problem in Africa, particularly in countries like Ghana, Indonesia, Mali, Uganda, and others.

Dangerous Working Conditions

I discussed the utilization of mercury and cyanide in gold mines, highlighting their associated hazards. However, the dangers extend beyond these chemicals. In general, all mining occupations carry the potential risk of fatalities, and in South Africa specifically, miners face a 20% higher mortality rate compared to the rest of the population.

Underwater miners face exposure to toxic substances, inhale dust that can result in respiratory issues, and suffer from skin diseases due to unfavorable working conditions.

Dangers of Gem Cutting

The princess cut that you have been fascinated by for its brightness and glisten, has a hidden cost for the workers who handle gemstones. A majority of these workers toil without any safety measures in place. They are not provided with any protective equipment, nor is there any proper ventilation.

When a diamond undergoes the process of cutting, it creates tiny particles of dust that can potentially cause a medical condition known as Black Lung. This ailment damages the lungs and renders individuals incapable of breathing.

Conflict

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has stated that the illicit mining and trading of valuable gems and metals not only disturb peace, stability, and law enforcement, but also hinder development and the economy.

For a long time, armed groups have been closely linked with diamonds. There is proof indicating that the mining of diamonds, gold, and silver has provided funding for groups that have carried out mass killings and acts of sexual violence.

Illicit trading of diamonds is a prevalent method used to finance conflicts in nations located in central and western Africa.

What is even more alarming is that the conflicts are not just coming from individual groups, but also from government forces that misuse their authority. A disturbing instance of this is seen in Angola, where government soldiers tortured diamond workers as they desired to have control over the mines.

The Jewelry Industry has various effects on the environment.

The jewelry industry is a major cause for worry when it comes to the environment and sustainability. It poses various problems like pollution of the air and water, deforestation, soil deterioration, and more.

57 kilograms of carbon are emitted when one carat of gold is mined. To extract a single carat of diamond, 250 tons of soil are excavated. With an annual extraction of 148 million carats, just picture the immense amount of earth that is displaced in the pursuit of valuable metals.

Below are a few of the major environmental problems faced by the jewelry sector.

Deforestation

The issue of deforestation is particularly alarming, particularly in relation to the Amazon Rainforest. According to the 2016 documentary by the Amazon Aid Foundation, extracting a single gold wedding ring necessitates digging up 20 tons of soil. Over the course of a decade, from 2005 to 2015, approximately 4,500 square miles of the Amazon Rainforest were destroyed due to mineral mining, constituting 9% of the entire Amazon region.

This information is particularly alarming because reports are cautioning that Amazon is approaching a critical stage. If we want the Amazon to continue functioning as a crucial component of the global carbon cycle, we will need to restore it.

Furthermore, deforestation is not confined solely to the Amazon region. It is occurring on various other continents too. A case in point is the sapphire rush that took place in Madagascar in 2017, leading to the loss of numerous acres of forest.

Pollution

Cyanidation is the commonly employed technique for extracting gold and silver, however, it is essential to highlight the highly poisonous nature of cyanide. This substance is responsible for water pollution and has detrimental effects on both agriculture and aquatic ecosystems.

In addition, metal mines are significant contributors to the release of mercury into the atmosphere as it is used to extract metal particles from the soil. This contamination extends to water sources and poses a threat to the well-being of animals.

In summary, the process of metal mining requires vast quantities of water, leading to the pollution of groundwater and drinking water with harmful chemicals.

In the Nigerian state of Zamfara, a tragic incident of pollution occurred resulting in the poisoning of 400 children over a span of six months.

Destruction of Ecosystems

Large noise and vibrations in mining areas have detrimental effects on wildlife, leading to their decline. Additionally, erosion is a frequent occurrence in mined regions, causing the loss of vegetation. Furthermore, mining accidents result in the unfortunate deaths of numerous local plants and animals.

Vast expanses of forests and grasslands are being cleared in order to create large excavations. Enormous machines that crush ore release harmful substances into the atmosphere as they grind rocks into a watery mixture.

Waterways are also impacted by mining. When rocks are ground, slurry pollutes local water sources. Diamond mining companies alter the direction of rivers or construct dams in order to access gems beneath the riverbeds.

This has a negative impact on entire ecosystems, causing them to become unstable. Farmers heavily rely on these waterways for their livelihood and are greatly affected when they vanish, forcing them to seek alternative sources of survival.

In various African nations, water scarcity is a prevalent issue, exacerbated by the contamination of rivers following mining activities. A specific instance is found in Zimbabwe, where the local population suffered from illnesses caused by toxic water sources, leading to the death of livestock.

Soil Degradation

The most significant soil degradation occurs during open-pit mining. The rich soil that is essential for farming is removed, leaving behind only barren pits once the diamond sources are depleted.

During the rainy seasons, standing water provides an ideal environment for the growth and multiplication of viruses and parasites.

What options are available for sustainable jewelry?

It can be hard to resist the allure and attractiveness of jewelry's brightness, shimmer, and polished appearance. Thankfully, there are numerous eco-friendly alternatives available for choosing sustainable jewelry.

Ethically-Sourced Jewelry Materials

One can also consider opting for gems that are sourced ethically. The most reliable ethical jewelry brands will be transparent about the rights of their workers, discuss matters of health and safety, employ sustainable methods, and guarantee the traceability of their gems.