

Star profile: Salma Hayek

Old, Green Soul

Growing up in the torrid Gulf Coast port of Coatzacoalcos gave the Mexican actress Salma Hayek her first taste of environmental destruction – and this, in turn, helped to decide her career. Now 38, the petite beauty is at the heart of rapidly growing green activism among some of Hollywood's most sought-after stars.

Coatzacoalcos was, and still is, a petrol refining centre and Hayek's Lebanese-born father worked in the oil business. Chemical spills were routine, and local beaches were often closed because they were polluted by tar – so she and her friends went to the cinema instead, which nurtured her love of films.

It also bred scepticism about political leadership. "I'm proud to be Mexican, but we've been lied to a bit too often by Government", she says.

Always a rebel (she was expelled from a Catholic school for stunts like setting all the nuns' clocks back), she became a soap-opera superstar in Mexico, but gave it up to try to make it in Hollywood. It was tough at first. She struggled to learn English – a task made harder by her dyslexia – and suffered prejudice. "People would see my name and picture and want to meet me, and then they would realise that I was Mexican and want to send me away", she recalls.

She finally got her break opposite Antonio Banderas in the 1995 film, *Desperado*. More big parts followed and, at the same time, her interest in the environment deepened – partly through a relationship with the star and green activist, Edward Norton. They parted in 2003, but her environmental commitment continues.

This commitment and her celebrity climaxed at this year's Oscar ceremonies, where she arrived in an environmentally-friendly Toyota Prius, rather than the traditional gas-guzzling limo. Stepping out of the hybrid car, wearing a low-cut Prada dress made her the star of the ceremony, even though she didn't even have a nomination.

"I personally own and drive a hybrid car, and I love it", she adds. "With global warming threatening us all, driving a fuel-efficient car like a hybrid is something that everyone can do to protect our planet."

Not long afterwards, on Earth Day (22 April), she joined Jake Gyllenhaal – star of the global warming movie, *The Day after Tomorrow* – at Iqaluit in the Arctic in a protest backed by

Global Green USA, the US affiliate of Green Cross International, founded and led by Mikhail Gorbachev.

With other US celebrities, businessmen, politicians and environmentalists they stood with 700 Inuit on the ice spell out the words "Arctic Warning" in English, and "Listen" in Inuktitut. "The place itself literally illustrates what's going on", she says recalling how the ice is melting, threatening the Inuit's food supply and culture.

"They are facing a problem with suicide, because it's hard to adjust to that evolution", she adds. "And I think this is exactly what we are doing; we are committing, in our civilisation, suicide and self-destruction."

Hayek carries her commitment to combating global warming into support for the BP Solar Neighbours Programme, which aims to get solar photovoltaic panels into poor homes in Los Angeles. Under the Programme, BP donates a complete system to a low-income family every time a celebrity buys one for his or her house.

She has also worked as a volunteer at a sanctuary rehabilitating beached dolphins, helped present the US Live 8 concert in Philadelphia and has campaigned against smoking and domestic violence.

Scriptwriter Robert Towne, who has written the screenplay for her upcoming film *Ask the Dust*, says: "She's a wise person. A very old soul" and says she is like a "grandmother, though certainly not physically, of course." **G.L.**



Images courtesy of Global Green USA