

Get a feel of sustainable living in this village

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With sustainable living and lifestyle being the current watchwords for being woke and eco-conscious, there's a village, only three-and-a-half hours drive away from Chennai, where you can actually walk this sustainable talk and check out for yourselves if this lifestyle statement will work for you in the long run. Spread across 70 acres of land, Sadhana Forest, near the Morattandi toll gate is a full-fledged project in sustainable living. Here, people are vegans, they live in huts, and they don't use fans and air conditioners. There are no concrete roads, and rainwater is allowed to soak the soil and flow down and get collected in the pond-sized pits.

On our visit, one of the volunteers, Noa, welcomed us and detailed the dos and don'ts to be followed on the campus. After the registrations, we were given a bedsheet, blanket, pillow cover and an organic soap bar, and we were taken to one of the huts. The two-storey huts are made of bamboo and tree waste, and to sleep, there is charpoy with mattress and mosquito nets. Interestingly, there are no walls and only the pillars support the hut structure.

Founders of the forest, Yorit and Aviram Rozin from Israel tell us about their passion to revive the lands, bring back forests and practise sustainable living. "We have a strong love for nature and decided to devote our lives for creating forest on a barren land. 'Sadhana' is a Sanskrit word that means 'a spiritual practice/discipline for self-realisation'. Our spiritual practice is centred on compassion and we strive to embody compassion in every action that we do," says Yorit.



Started in 2003, this forest in Auroville is the first project the couple started. “Since then, we have established a project in Haiti in 2010 and in Kenya in 2014. This land in Auroville belonged to the Auroville Foundation for many years and was offered to us in 2003,” says Aviram.



Aviram (L) and a volunteer planting a sapling

They say that in the first year itself, they understood that planting trees is not enough. Aviram says, “The main factor in the creation of forest here is water. We started digging on contour swales and bunds, and earth dams for water conservation.” Aviram says that this work has made a huge difference in both the water table and the growth of the trees. They also plan to extend the project to the south of Tamil Nadu and to North-East India.



Mary Ann McGarry, Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Policy Department, at Plymouth State University Center for the Environment, New Hampshire had flown down to learn about sustainable living and reforestation. She says that the tree planting process here is quite different from the forestry practices followed in her country. “I was impressed by their procedure. I participated in digging the uphill trench to collect water, collecting rich topsoil from different species to provide a variety of micro organisms, collecting acacia

leaves for mulch, mixing the topsoil with compost (humanure that has digested for a year) and urine on charcoal, then adding this around the tree with the acacia leaves on top so that the latter will hold in moisture and cool the new saplings until the leaves are devoured by termites, providing more nutrients. Another step is inserting a plastic water bottle with a wick next to the tree. The wick releases water at a rate that can be sent in a controlled way to the top of the roots of the new tree. Opening the cap controls the flow of moisture to the tree's roots. It's been a learning experience."



Waste generated on the campus is primarily sorted at their on-site recycling centre. Volunteers collect labelled bins and segregate the trash into categories of plastic, glass, paper, organic waste, metal, sanitary waste, and mixed items. These are then divided into smaller sub-categories to see which materials can be reused and repurposed.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/get-a-feel-of-sustainable-living-in-this-village/articleshow/74209794.cms>