

# PROMOS Report



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## **Motivation**

The main motivation for this Internship was to learn about the practical part of planting trees and water conservation with limited resources. My interest lays not only on conserving and restoring forest ecosystems, but also very much on integrating and supporting local communities: the sociology of nature protection. Additionally being a student with limited budget myself, I am excited and inspired to learn about a way of working for forests and people without a background of large governmental funds or other monetary resources.

## **Preparation**

The community of Sadhana Forest was brought to my awareness by a fellow student, who had already spent one year there. I knew, that they are happily accepting students and volunteers, the application process therefore was fast and uncomplicated. Via email we agreed over the time, costs and focus of my internship and arranged all paper work. They ask me to contribute 450 Indian Rupees per day to cover costs for a wholesome and organic diet, but offered me accommodation on the site for free. Since my stay in India was going to be less than 6 months, Sadhana Forest suggested me to use a Tourist Visa instead of a Working Visa, for which i personally had to apply at the Indian embassy in Berlin, two weeks before the start of my Internship. The costs for a the Visa are around 80 Euros, the Passport with the valid Visa is then sent home via Postmail after approximately five days.

For healthcare insurance i booked the PROTRIP- WORLD<sup>1</sup> package of Dr. Walter GmbH, which is especially designed for students abroad and I paid a monthly rate of 40 Euros.

Furthermore i had to arrange my travel to India and decided to book a one-way flight ticket for about 350 Euros from Berlin to Chennai, which is the nearest international airport to Sadhana Forest. The flight back was from Mumbai and costed about the same.

### **The Host Institution**

Sadhana Forest is located on the southeast coast of India, near the former french colony Pondicherry in the federal state of Tamil Nadu and was started in 2003 by Aviram and Yorit Rozin. Their intention was to start a sustainable living project and recreate the indigenous Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF), that is found only in this part of India and fractions of Sri Lanka.

They began the water conservation works on a severely deforested and eroded area with almost no vegetation. The masses of rainwater of the annual monsoons were simply running off the sloped area, further eroding the soils and without chance to sink into the aquifer. By building large-scale bunds and ponds the immense quantities of rainwater are kept on the field and that way results in decreased soil erosion and increasing groundwater levels, which is both crucial to allow for the succession of a forest ecosystem. Furthermore the rising aquifers are beneficial for all surrounding villages and thereby serves the goal of Sadhana Forest to enhance human well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> "PROTRIP-WORLD: Dr. Walter."

<http://www.dr-walter.com/en/products/products-a-z/protrip-world.html>. Aufgerufen am 12 Mai. 2017.

Another focus of Sadhana Forest is a low impact lifestyle, including a zero waste management, strict veganism, water saving and abstaining from any stimulating substances such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or coffee.

Another underlying idea of sadhana is to include as many people in the process of reforestation and sustainable living as possible as part of environmental education.

In recent years the community is home to 50 to 150 volunteers at a time, varying with the seasons.

Sadhana Forest is based on the principles of gift economy<sup>2</sup> and works only with volunteers, they don't have paid staff. All work is supported only through donations in form of money, materials (such as trees, building material, tools) or labour.

More than 7,000 volunteers, interns, and students from India and around the world participated in Sadhana Forest so far and additionally every Friday up to 200 guests from all over the world are invited to Sadhana Forest for a free environment documentary, tour of the project, and free vegan dinner.

2010 the concept of Sadhana Forest was exported to Haiti, where the overall objective is to create a food forest with local and international volunteers, to promote food security and fight the severe malnutrition in the poorest areas. In 2013 Sadhana Forest Kenya was started, where the focus, similar to Sadhana Forest Haiti, lays on rural development and fighting poverty with the help of food producing trees.

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<sup>2</sup> "Gift Economy - Sadhana Forest." <http://sadhanaforest.org/about-us/gift-economy2/>.

## Activities Report

The daily schedule is the basic structure of every weekday and the two Sevas



of each day are the hours where all volunteers engage in the main tasks of the community. "Seva" means selfless service. Within the community is a team a team of long-term volunteers, who are responsible for managing each working sector, planning and organizing the team of rotating short-term volunteers. I was in the management team of the forest and the garden, so my task was to guide along with another forest manager a team of short-term volunteer in the first and

Fig. 1: The daily schedule <sup>3</sup>

second Seva for all forest and garden activities, such as digging holes and trenches, planting trees, watering and caring for recently planted trees, mulching, transporting compost, harvesting seeds, producing seed bombs and many other related activities.

Additional tasks of long-term volunteers, that i was engaging in, are the so called third Sevas, which take place in the afternoon. Third Sevas include for instance leading the kitchen team and preparing food for the whole community, "welcoming"-shifts, where you are responsible for introducing all guest and new volunteers and give basic explanations about Sadhana Forest, weekly long-term meetings for discussion and planning ahead of the next week and holding weekly "sign-up" meetings with all short-term volunteers, to build teams,

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<sup>3</sup> "Women Travelers in india living abroad - Pink Pangea: Travel Writing ...."  
<http://www.pinkpangea.com/category/destinations/asia/india/india-living-abroad/>.

who will take over specific tasks like cleaning the compost toilets, tree planting, cutting firewood, cooking or reparation works on the site and more.

I was primarily focusing on managing the forest team and engaging in the management of all short-term volunteers.

## **Experience and Evaluation**

My experience in Sadhana Forest was very enriching, diverse and beautiful. I was able to engage in very practical and physical work as well as the management and planning aspect of a reforestation project. I was in touch with the surrounding villagers and can say, that i was able to fulfill my goal of the internship. A personal highlight was the dialogue on humanity, that was taking place in Sadhana Forest at the end of my 20 weeks. All volunteers of Sadhana Forest were preparing this event to host another extra 200 guests for the duration of the two-day congress and I had the chance to facilitate a talk about forests with more than 100 participants, which was very challenging as well as rewarding.

Of course i was also dealing with difficulties during my internship. One problem for me was, that i was living and working in the same place. Additional to the daily schedule, i felt that even in the afternoons we kept talking and planning and thinking about work. I was sharing my hut with other volunteers and therefore not a place to myself for rest and privacy. These circumstances lead to the point, where after a few months i was feeling very exhausted and consumed by work. I dealt with this problem by sharing with my colleagues and a better personal time management.

I have taken many efforts in this internship. However, it would not have been possible without the kind support and help of many individuals and organizations. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them.

I would like to express my gratitude towards my Professor Dr. C. Majunke and the DAAD scholarship programme PROMOS for their support and encouragement which helped me to accomplish this internship.

I am highly indebted to the team of Sadhana Forest for their guidance and constant supervision as well as their continuous and astonishing service to society and environment.

I would like to express my special gratitude and thanks to Aviram Rozin for giving me such attention and time.

I will happily recommend Sadhana Forest as an host institution for future students.

### **Advice For Future Students**

My advice for future students is to do a good research about their internship host institution and when possible talk with people who have been there. If that is not the case, i strongly recommend to do a Skype interview with the possible future partners, to see if they fully understand the idea of the internship. Before applying to Sadhana i had two Skype interviews with other institutions which helped me very much to understand about them and whether their ideas and work matches with my expectations.

My second advice is to look for something that really matches their interest well and not to settle for something less. At the same time it is important to keep open minded and not have very specific ideas and expectations of how things should be, because it will always be different and unexpected when going abroad.