Brahma Kumaris Vila Serra Serena Retreat Centre

Serra Negra, Brazil

BACKGROUND

The **Brahma Kumaris Vila Serra Serena Retreat Centre** was founded in 1999 in Serra Negra, Brazil

In 2004, it took place the idea of creating an ecovillage. The aim was to make the **Brahma Kumaris Vila Serra Serena Retreat Centre** a reference in eco-friendly practices such as: organic farming, composting, rubbish selection, water recycling, use of solar and eolian energy – together with courses about human values and lacto-vegetarian diet.

Since then, some of these practices started to be incorporated in the daily routine.

The total area is of 288.000 m2.

REFORESTATION BACKGROUND

The soil in which the retreat place was built was firstly used for coffee cultivation. Then, it was used for cattle. Later, when the Brahma Kumaris purchased the area, the soil was full of “braquiaria”, a tropical plant used as a forage plant.

5.600 saplings of native forest plants were planted by the BKs in the soil.

ONGOING PROJECTS & CURRENT PRACTICES

1. ORGANIC GARDEN

Organic garden that produces various kinds of greens, vegetables, teas (without pesticide, artificial fertilizers or poison). It only uses natural techniques, producing healthier aliments, non-harmful to the human health.

2. WATER TREATMENT

For the existing buildings there is a biologic anaerobic cesspit, which is integrated to rock filters and vegetation nourished by the drain itself. The cesspit's capacity is of 9.000 liters, enabling the system to attend up to 50 people using it simultaneously.

The entire system is constituted by what is called "black water" and "grey water". The "black water" comes from the toilet and the "grey water" comes from the sinks, shower, etc. The system separates the liquid from the solid, which represents only 1% of the flow that goes through:

a. the biologic anaerobic cesspit
b. two rock filters
c. inspection box
d. mixed cesspit constituted by a pebble filter, vegetal coal and a soil surface where there is some vegetation that requires a lot of humidity.

The vegetation absolves the water and is nourished by the drain itself, evaporating the effluent liquids through its leaves.

The project efficiency reaches over 90% of purification of the effluent.

3. COMPOSTING

It is utilized a composting process for the utilization of residues of food and organic matter, transforming it into natural fertilizer to be used to cultivate vegetables, in the garden and orchard.

4. RUBBISH RECYCLING

The rubbish is separated in other to be colleted by recycling companies.

5. LACTO-VEGETARIAN DIET

All the food prepared at the BK Retreat Centre is based on a lacto-vegetarian diet.

Weekend workshops are conducted in which vegetarian dishes are taught.

6. ECO-FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION

Two of the six buildings were built with a special brick that is not baked as the regular ones and it is not laid with cement, but with a special glue.

7. TRAIL

There is a trail in the midst of the forest allowing the visitors to have a closer contact with the nature.

8. USAGE OF NATURAL SPRING

Impounding of water into two watertanks (capacity: 50.000 liters), overlaid with tiles and with special fence to avoid the entrance of animals.

NEXT PROJECTS

- Installation of a low cost solar energy system in the main building where it is located ten bedrooms, the dining hall and an industrial kitchen.
- To build a mini “Peace Park” as a leisure area, with a playground for visitors.
- To reutilize the water from the rain.
- To install an incubator for the organic garden.
- To build a small fully eco-friendly house as a sample.
- Sprout production.
- To purchase a special machine for preparing juice from sugar cane.