



Secrets in the hills of Modiin

What might a group of twenty-four middle class Australian 18 and 19 year olds know about about agriculture and an eco farm? Not much at all as we soon discovered.

Will there be WiFi? Are there toilets? Can I borrow your bugspray? Do you have a silk sleeping bag liner because I hear there are bed bugs? Are we really going vegan for a week? For some of us the thought of spending a whole week at Adam and Havah Ecological Farm was harder than others. Some look excited and ready to get their hands dirty whilst others looked on from afar suspiciously at the weird contraption known as a compost toilet.

We are here as a part of our gap year. The "Feel the land" program of the Hava & Adam Eco-educational farm, provides us the opportunity to be involved with many aspects of Israeli society, to work, learn and befriend the locals.

And so we found ourselves surrounded by hills on the outskirts of Modiin prepared for whatever was required of us. There were a couple of assumptions that we had to overcome first before we could



feel settled. The first was that our 'dome' (big tent) was not infested with bugs, check. The second was overcoming the reality of using what's called in Australia a 'dunny' (drop toilet) for a whole week. I think many of us, even those who didn't bat an eyelid were incredibly surprised and pleased by the fresh smelling and beautiful compost toilet. We learnt that after doing your business you simply put three scoops of mulch down the toilet to help with the composting effort. The third pleasant surprise and perhaps the biggest was the showers. To illustrate their quality, several people showered twice in the space of a night, doubling their shower count over the past month. The showers are constructed out of the rocks of the mountain and bamboo around the sides, the gaps between the large rocks acts as a draining system which we thought was a brilliant design. The pressure was good, the heat was good and the experience was good. Even the doubters began to reconsider their assumptions.

It was very clear from the beginning of the week just how friendly the people living here are. They all came and said hi and introduced themselves and invited us to join their activities which included stretches, yoga and a trip to the water hole in which our group was accompanied by the resident donkey. Perhaps the most endearing aspect of our experience with the people that live here was their ability to remember our names from the beginning, created a sense of friendship and an environment where we felt important.

But the more we focused on the physical parts of the farm, the more we realized how unimportant the exterior "add-ons" are in our life. The farm began to teach us to appreciate the necessities, the people and the nature. The importance of eating and living well. The importance of connecting to the people and nature around you. Soon the highlight of the day became the smell of food wafting from under the central big tree after a hard morning of mulching, weeding and agricultural work. Before we ate, we remained silent for a moment in order to appreciate the food we were about to eat and understand how much work is needed in order to sustain ourselves. The day was governed by the sun. We woke up with the sun, and despite our best efforts to stay up late, most of us were melting into our mattresses by 9 or 10. Time was measured through the positioning of the solar panels, as they rotated to face the sun, we worked, sweated and tired. Through our work with the



locals, we began to feel at home; we ate with them, we joked with them and took sneaky watermelon breaks in the middle of the morning shifts.

As we worked in the herbal center, in the fields, building shelters, weeding, planting and cooking we immersed within the culture here, despite our poor stamina and inability to work at the same pace as the locals, we tried our best. When work was over, we lay in the sun and relaxed, at peace and proud of our tired muscles and minds.

Being here for less than a week doesn't really allow us to properly understand the farm nor allow the farm to understand us. But this week is certainly the catalyst to a more nuanced way of thinking; problem solving, living more simply, connecting with people and nurturing nature. We have been a part of small projects of which we were able to see the products, as well as some more long term ones which those that follow us will continue to work and watch flourish. We built a bench and planted seedlings, the first project to improve the quality of life here in the moment, and the second to improve the future. That's the most important thing we have learnt this week, the ideas underpinning this farm; the present and the future. We are the Now and it is our responsibility to change our small part of the world for the better. Not in a quick fix way that will not last the test of time, but in a meaningful way that those who follow us can enjoy and improve upon. It is a perpetual cycle of improvement and Tikkun Olam, something that we strive towards. We have been introduced to this way of thinking and have been given some of the tools to start this cycle in our part of the world.

On behalf of the entire kvutzah, I would like thank everyone here for being so welcoming and kind. Simply being here has taught us a lot about ourselves and about nature. Hopefully some of us will return in the near future to learn more and discover some more of the secrets hidden in the hills of Modiin.

David, Australia, 2015