

# Ecovolunteer in Argentina

LEARN ABOUT PERMACULTURE AT GAIA



photo Amanda L'Esperance

by **Ande Wanderer**

If you are interested in sustainable living, improving your Spanish skills at an affordable cost, and enjoying vegetarian food in the otherwise carnivorous country of Argentina, you could do no better than Gaia, an ecovillage a couple of hours outside of Buenos Aires.

Founded in 1996, the 20-hectare community is situated on the grounds of a former dairy farm. A handful of friendly full-time residents and their frequent visitors stay in comfortable eco-friendly clay houses. Three on-site windmills provide electricity (even Internet access), and food and water are heated with solar power. A laborious method of turning compost into electricity is

also in place. Fruit and vegetables practically grow themselves in the rich soil, which requires no tilling thanks to traditional sustainable agricultural practices.

In this method of living, called “permaculture”—an Australian-born 30-year old science of living in harmony with the environment—residents enjoy modern conveniences, but have no need for outside electricity, water, or gas.

As genetic engineering of crops increases worldwide, Gaia aims to serve as a storehouse of genetic information contained in organic seeds. The community guards 220 species of food and medicinal plants, including a 2,400-year-old variety of vitamin-rich quinoa.

Volunteers are required to work for a minimum of one month. They are expected to devote four hours a day, six days a week to helping plant and cultivate trees and crops, construct natural buildings, and aid in other maintenance. Another two hours a day are required for daily chores such as cooking and cleaning. A fee of \$5 dollars a day (which may be waived for volunteers from poor countries) helps to cover food costs.

Guests are welcome to stay at Gaia for \$15 daily with no volunteer responsibilities. Those passing through the area, interested in taking an educational day tour and enjoying a healthful lunch pay \$4. Additional courses in sustainable agriculture, communal living, natural construction, indigenous song and dance, and aromatherapy are also available. To learn more about Gaia, visit [www.gaia.org.ar](http://www.gaia.org.ar). ■

**Ande Wanderer** is a freelance writer and photographer who resides in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Visit his web site at [www.AndeWanderer.com](http://www.AndeWanderer.com).