

THE INITIATIVE

By Lauren Mowery



Helpful Holidays

Save the planet one vacation at a time with Ecosystem Restoration Camps

Climate change and its related crises have many travelers wondering if it's possible to improve the situations in the far-flung destinations we visit. At Ecosystem Restoration Camps, the answer is a resounding yes. The global nonprofit, which partners with local groups to set up, support, and market eco-focused projects, debuted its first camp in Spain in 2017 and has since expanded to 44 camps across six continents, with some 15,000 campers improving the environment and living conditions for local residents on more than 13,000 acres of land. Codirector Pieter van der Gaag says that the camps empower "ordinary, everyday people to take action in restoring the earth, rather than sitting back, feeling helpless, and waiting for someone else to solve the world's problems." Want to do your part? Here are four sites to consider.



Camp Via Organica

Mexico

Located on a ranch in the highlands of Guanajuato, outside the charming *pueblo mágico* of San Miguel de Allende, this outfit works to restore fertility to the soil in the area's degraded farm and pastureland. Campers plant trees, help with seed saving and composting, and tend the garden, which supplies produce for Via Organica's restaurant, farmers market, and grocery in town. \$350, July 4-9, September 5-11.

Camp Virsoleil

France

Two hours northeast of Bordeaux by car or train, Camp Virsoleil is on a farm with a 300-plus-year-old stone house and barn, where participants plant



Clockwise: gardening at Camp Via Organica; planting trees at Camp Greenpop; a fireside chat at Camp Embercombe; the communal table at Camp Virsoleil

gardens, restore walls, and learn about black truffle cultivation, regenerative farming, natural beekeeping, and more. Perks include swimming in the natural pond, local wine around the communal table at night, and access to nearby medieval cities and markets. Suggested donation \$320-\$912, April 9-16, October 8-15, customized dates also available.

Camp Embercombe

United Kingdom

This 50-acre site in southwestern England is home to an education center that has spent 20 years on rewilding efforts. Ecosystem Restoration Campers take part in four-day experiences during which they assist with practical regeneration of the land and attend workshops on increasing biodiversity, restoring soils, reintroducing native species, and more. Accommodations are



in yurt villages, and visitors will want to set aside some time to hike through the surrounding moorland. \$348-\$621, June 24-29, October 14-17.

Camp Greenpop

South Africa



This camp hosts two annual eco-focused events, the Reforest Fest and the Eden Festival of Action. Activities include reforestation efforts and the development of an ecological corridor between the Platbos Forest Reserve and the Grootbos Private Nature Reserve. Celebrate making the world a better place with a trip to the beach in nearby Hermanus. Reforest Fest, from \$39 (not including food), April 1-3; Eden Festival of Action, \$320, September 25-October 9.

Camp prices typically include lodging and three meals per day, although the experiences vary based on the accommodations and food provided. For more information, visit ecosystemrestorationcamps.org.

Joel Caldwell (Camp Via Organica); courtesy of Ecosystem Restoration Camps (Camp Virsoleil); Juliette Bisset (Camp Greenpop); Harrison Wood (Camp Embercombe)