

# Samakanda

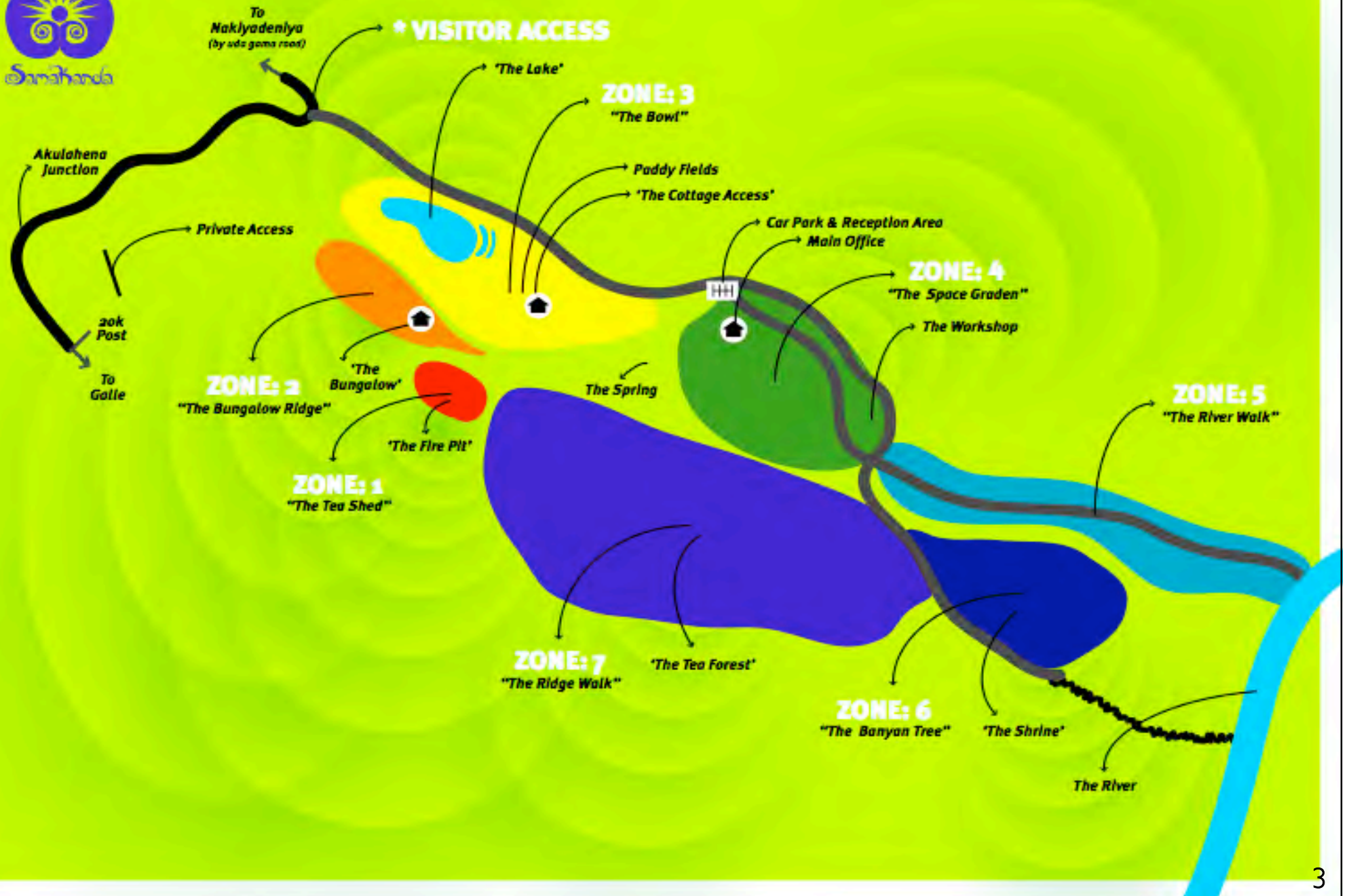


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# Samakanda – The Vision



Samakanda (SK) (*sama* = peace, *kanda* = hill) is an agro-tourism project that has evolved over the last seven years on 57 acres of abandoned tea estate near the city of Galle in south Sri Lanka.

The project currently integrates eco-tourism and ecological education with organic tea production and tropical 'forest garden' principles for maximizing food production within an 'edible landscape'.

The next phase at SK will see the further development of all these activities, with expanded tourist accommodation and a 'natural swimming pool', 'single estate' organic tea processed on site, the further planting of commercial crops, plus the facilities for ayurvedic healing, yoga and similar retreats.



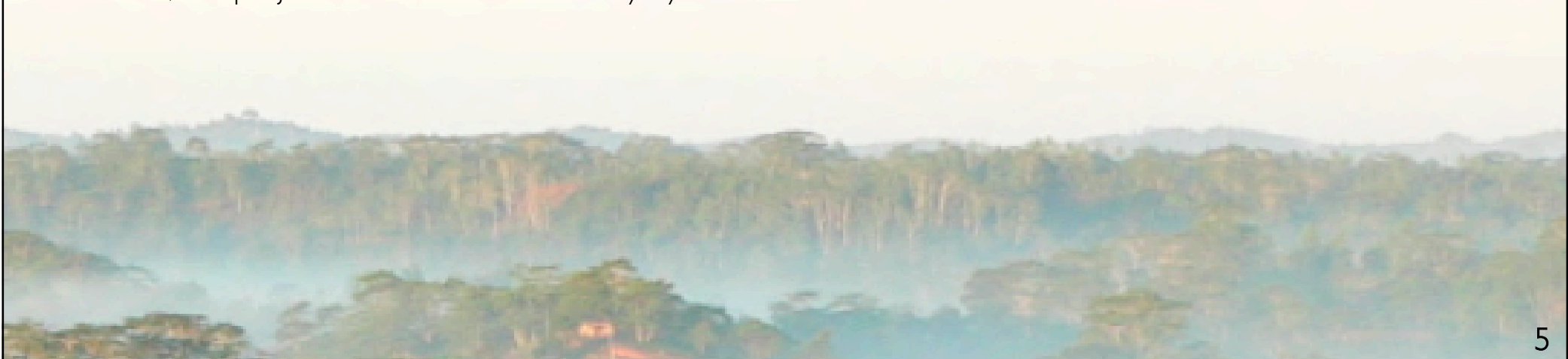
# The Web of Hope Lanka



Samakanda is owned by The Web of Hope Lanka (Pvt) Ltd, a company approved by the Sri Lankan government's Board of Overseas Investment (BOI) and which gives Sri Lankan residency to the two British national Directors, Rory and Yvette Spowers, who both own 50% shares in the company.

The company also owns the remaining three-year lease on Inland Hills, a large colonial house on the outskirts of Galle.

To date, the project has been funded entirely by the Directors.



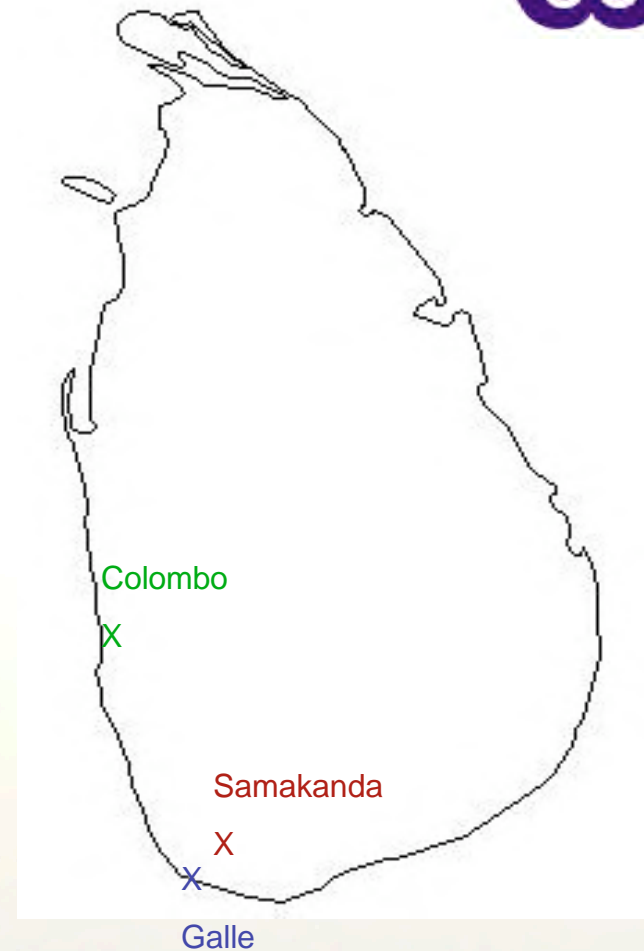
## Why Sri Lanka?

One of the most bio-diverse places on the planet, south-west Sri Lanka is not only blessed with spectacular scenery but idyllic conditions for productive agricultural systems – reliable rainfall, fertile soils and abundant vegetation.

Since the conclusion of the conflict in the north east during 2009, Sri Lanka's economic prospects have been steadily improving, the property and tourism sectors now booming.

With projected economic growth of 8% in 2011, the Sri Lankan stock market is currently one of the best performing in the world.

Tourism has increased by 20% in the last year and the country recently listed as the world's top tourist destination by the New York Times.



# Why Samakanda?



Samakanda is situated just 20 km, or 30 minutes inland from the coast.

The Galle area is rapidly becoming the centre for tourism development in Sri Lanka. Galle Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the nearby beaches are some of the most popular in the country.

The Galle exit for the new Colombo-Matara highway, due to open in 2012, will be at Pinnaduwa, about 15-20 minutes drive south of Samakanda on the quiet and scenic Udugama Road. The projected journey time from Colombo is 90 minutes, in contrast to the current three and a half hours.

As a tourist attraction, Samakanda offers a tea estate and rainforest experience, just 30 minutes from a coastline offering great opportunities for swimming, surfing, diving and whale watching. The options provided by two good access roads would allow for the property to be easily and neatly divided into two or three different projects. Few properties of this size still exist in this part of the country in their entirety, most of them having already been divided up.



# Samakanda History

## Pre-2004



Previously known as *Thometotam* (Tamil for Thome Estate, named after the Dutch 'burgher' family who were the original owners), then *Thomiya Hena* (the Sinhalese equivalent), Samakanda was a working estate throughout the 20th century, combining tea and rubber production.



In the early 1990s, the estate was abandoned and allowed to fall into neglect. The last owner's husband had died and the son who inherited the estate moved to work in Colombo.



# Samakanda

## History

Phase One: 2004-2010





## Samakanda History - 2004-2010 (Phase One)

Samakanda was purchased by The Web of Hope Lanka (Pvt) Ltd in May 2004. The two Directors, Rory and Yvette Spowers, had moved to Sri Lanka two months earlier from the UK, with their two young sons, Sholto (now 9) and Xan (now 7). Originally trained as a chef at London's River Café, Rory also has a background as an ecological writer, consultant, campaigner and broadcaster. Yvette shares a background in the hospitality industry, from villa management in Barbados to restaurants in London and Los Angeles. She is now an accomplished ceramic artist and landscape designer.

Although most of the land had reverted to impenetrable jungle, the couple were attracted by the combination of unusual topography, combining spectacular views from the highest ridge in the area with river frontage, a five acre natural amphitheatre ('The Bowl') with fertile soils and numerous wells, plus landscape features such as miles of stone terracing that cover the entire estate.

2004



2005



## Samakanda History - 2004-2010 (Phase One)



**2004** Land purchased in May and some work started clearing paths and bringing small areas of tea back into production in The Bowl. New access road built along northern boundary and the small lake dug out.

**2005** Work was inconsistent in the months following the Indian Ocean tsunami but then resumed with the first phase of 'forest garden' planting, about 15,000 tea bushes and 1500 fruit trees planted in The Bowl (<http://www.samakanda.org/zone3.html>).



**2006** Both existing bungalows were renovated to a high modern standard for guests and volunteers. Daytime visits started and the first version of the website launched. Further clearing continued, opening up The Ridge, The River and the Banyan Tree zones. (<http://www.samakanda.org/zone5.html> <http://www.samakanda.org/zone6.html> <http://www.samakanda.org/zone7.html> )





## Samakanda History - 2004-2010 (Phase One)



**2007** Samakanda officially launched in conjunction with the first Galle Literary Festival in January and attended by Rose Gray and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

**2008-9** Escalating conflict in the north of the island effectively shuts down tourism and operations are scaled down accordingly with minimal further capital investment.

**2010** Tourists return and Phase One brought to completion – bungalows, office, clay pizza ovens, outdoor cooking and dining areas, ambalamas (pavilions) – plus maintenance of existing tea, fruit, vegetable, herb and spice production.





## Eco-tourism

Accommodation currently consists of the two renovated bungalows and will soon be joined by a third for up to six volunteers.

The original Planter's Bungalow consists of two doubles with attached bathrooms, a twin room and mezzanine space suitable for children. It can sleep up to six adults in comfort. The building is on mains power, solar hot water and has a modern kitchen.

The Bowl Bungalow consists of a double and a single but a further bed can be added when required to sleep up to four adults in comfort. It is equipped with solar PVs for lighting, solar hot water and a modern kitchen.





## Eco-tourism

Guest activities range from hiking the trails up the Ridge, into the rainforest habitat of the Banyan Tree zone, or down to the River; from mountain biking down to the coast to rice and curry cooking lessons and pizza making in wood-fired clay ovens; from tea plucking and processing your own tea, to visits to the local tea factory, waterfalls and rainforest reservations.

Rates vary from US\$50-100 per adult per night full board, according to the season, which bungalow, size of booking and length of stay. <http://www.samakanda.org/accommodations.html>



# Organic Tea



Although some ten acres of tea exists, approximately seven acres consists of sparse old bushes and thus produces relatively small yields, the equivalent of approx two acres of productive tea. New productive tea planted in 2005 now covers about three acres.

Top total yields approach 1,000kg/month from the entire ten acres but would be at least double that if all ten acres were replanted. The average monthly income from tea in the last three years has been approx US\$500.





## The Bio-versity Concept

Working alongside The Web of Hope in the UK ( [www.thewebofhope.com](http://www.thewebofhope.com) ), the environmental education charity and consultancy service he co-founded in 2002, Rory integrated his concept for a 'Bio-versity' (a term he coined to describe an 'ecological learning centre') within the original vision for Samakanda. Guests are encouraged to learn about, or participate in, any of the ecological activities, from earth building to composting, organic vegetable growing and tea plucking.

<http://www.samakanda.org/bioiversity.html>

A number of school visits, from the Galle area and Colombo, have brought groups of up to 30 children (aged from 6 to 13) for educational programmes of up to three days at a time. These large groups are accommodated on proper bedding with mosquito nets in the communal Tea Shed space (11m x 11m) in Zone I.

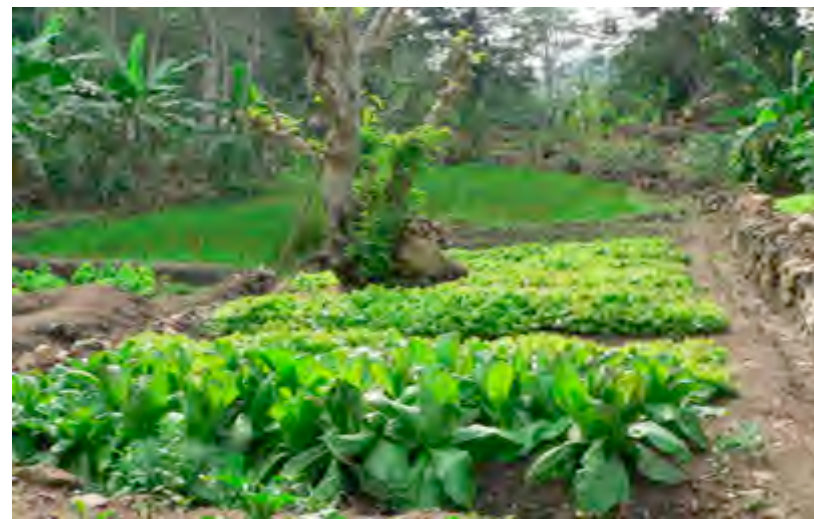
<http://www.samakanda.org/zoneI.html>





## The Forest Garden / Analog Forestry

Analog Forestry is the technical term for the 'forest garden' concept, first used by Sri Lankan biologist, environmentalist and rainforest expert Dr Ranil Senanyake. The basic principle is to maximize bio-productive space and yields while minimizing inputs through intelligent inter-cropping and three-dimensional farming, encouraging synergistic processes between species to resist pests, prevent the spread of diseases and preserve soil fertility.



The features of a biodiverse polyculture (low inputs and good immunity) contrast with the high inputs (chemical fertilizers and pesticides) required by modern monocultures.





## The Forest Garden / Analog Forestry



In addition to the tea, SK has commercially produced a variety of exotic salad leaves and herbs for local hotels and restaurants (basil, rocket, tatsoi, mustard greens), along with small quantities of local vegetables (kankun water spinach, snake gourd, wing bean), as well as rare 'heritage' strains of organic red rice, cinnamon, black pepper, lemongrass, ginger, turmeric and coffee.

Many of the fruits planted in 2005 are now bearing (star fruit, lime, rambutan, banana, papaya, guava, pineapple, passion fruit, soursop) and others will follow soon (mango, mangosteen, avocado). A number of ornamental flowers have also been planted for potential sale (various heliconias, ginger lilies etc).



## Flora and Fauna



An ecological study was undertaken by Rainforest Rescue International (RRI) in 2004, before any work was started. This identified over 40 species of bird, many of them endemic, as well as the rare and endangered pangolin, giant squirrels, monkeys, porcupines, wild boar, plus many species of reptile, dragonflies, butterflies and other insects. Much of their habitat has been preserved as a Biodiversity Sanctuary. The property also contains numerous mature trees, including many tropical hardwoods, as well as various rainforest species which are increasingly under threat. The recommended planting of specific rainforest trees was then implemented, to help preserve and create further habitat for these critical and complex ecosystems.



The Future  
Phase Two: 2011-2012

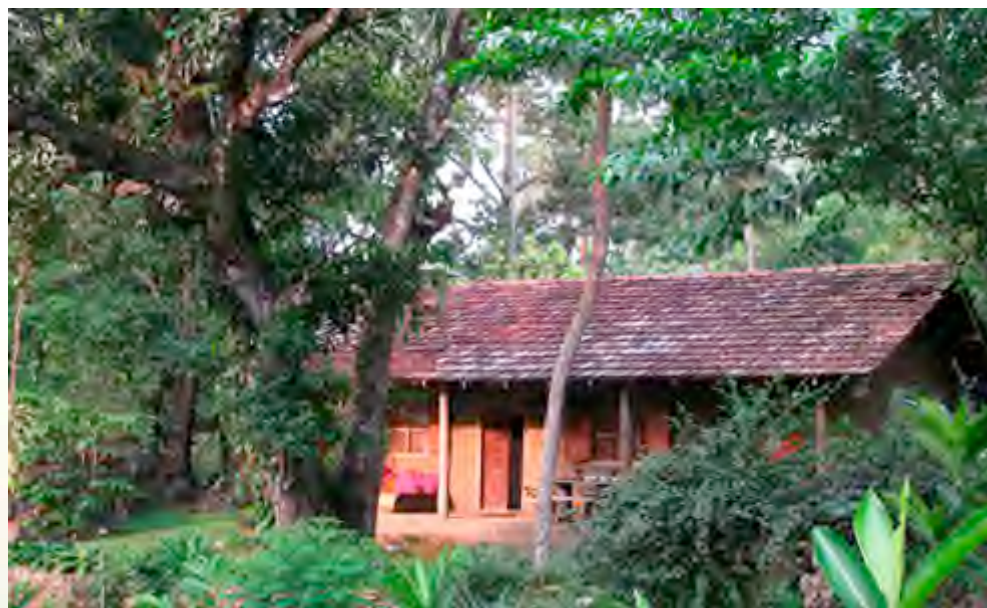




## Eco-tourism

Several sites have been identified in Zones 1, 2 and 3 and cleared for expanding the accommodation with low-impact mud buildings using Compressed Earth Blocks (CEBs). Phase Two would at least double the accommodation available with at least three units comprised of one or two doubles with attached bathrooms.

The approximate projected cost for a building similar to the one pictured here, with two doubles, two bathrooms and a small kitchen is US\$20,000.



# Eco-tourism



Through an existing relationship with a leading 'natural swimming pool' company in the UK, the next phase will see the construction of a 15m infinity edge pool in a dramatic location for approx US\$25,000.

[www.clear-water-revival.com](http://www.clear-water-revival.com)

To ensure a reliable water supply for the future, low-impact methods will be implemented for harvesting rainwater from abundant exposed rock surfaces on the upper contours of the Ridge.





## Organic Tea

Phase Two will also see a dramatic increase in the land devoted to tea, aiming to bring up to 30 acres into productive yields within three years, mostly along the lower contours of the south-facing ridge of Zone 7.

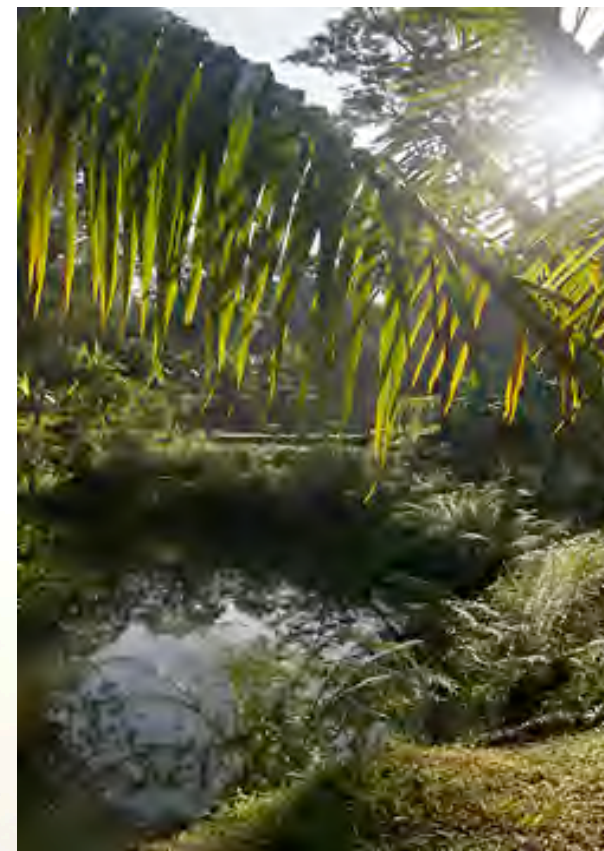
The tea will then be processed on site to produce a single estate green tea with Forest Garden Certification (FGC). Projected costs for clearing the land, repairing terraces and replanting tea are approx US\$2,000 per acre, although it is hoped that a good proportion of this will be offset by selling the cleared timber.





## Retreat Centre

With the expanded infrastructure, SK will be in a position to accommodate groups of 12-20 people for yoga and meditation retreats, supplemented with an ayurvedic healing zone in the Banyan Tree area, using preparations with medicinal plants grown on site. These groups would be charged in the region of US\$100 per person per day for one or two week retreats.





## Staff

The current workforce consists of 20 (10 men, 10 women), all of whom live around the boundary of SK and have mostly been with the project since inception. Combined skills include basic construction, stone masonry, carpentry, plumbing and electrical work, as well as organic composting, tea and vegetable production. The team has been efficiently managed since 2006 by Mr Pitchamurtu, who has 30 years previous experience as a Field Officer on tea estates around the country.





## Summary Accounts

Summary accounts are available upon request.

At present, the average monthly running costs are approx US\$2,000 and the combination of the income from tea and the increase in tourism are generating a small profit each month during the high season months.





## What Next?

The Directors are considering three potential scenarios for the future of SK:

- **Scenario 1:** An outright sale of the property/the company, currently valued at US\$20k/acre and on the market for US\$1.2million.
- **Scenario 2:** Selling two thirds of the land (Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7), or 38 acres, to a project with synergistic aims (organic tea/eco-tourism), for US\$750,00.
- **Scenario 3:** Seeking US\$750,000 investment for the whole project, which would fund the next phase of development and the purchase of shares from the directors.

Scenarios 2 and 3 would release Yvette's 50% share in the company.

In Scenario 2, Rory would continue to run the developed 19 acres of SK (Zones 1, 2 and 3) according to the original vision, existing alongside another project(s).

In Scenario 3, Rory would work with new investors/partners to realize the full potential for all seven Zones of the existing project.

## Further Information

Rory chronicled the Samakanda story in his last book, *A Year in Green Tea and Tuk Tuks*, published in 2007 by Harper Element.

<http://www.samakanda.org/shop.html>



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