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Living with Etna

The slopes below 1000 metres have many streams. They also have fertile soils which have formed on the mineral-rich lava flows. Farmers here get a great deal of produce from a very small area of land, sometimes only two hectares in size. They farm intensively. On the lowest slopes, oranges and lemons are grown as well as garden crops. Higher up, farmers grow vines, walnuts, almonds, cherries, apples, and pears.

Between 1000 and 2000 metres, oak trees grow with chestnut, pine, and beech. For another 500 metres, there is little water, so only a few juniper trees grow on the exposed mountainside. Above this, barren rock, old lava, clinker, and fine ash is covered in snow each winter.

The villages and small towns on the lower slopes are growing rapidly. About 800 people live in each square kilometre – this is a very high population density. Many tourists visit the area. The winter snow is good for skiing, and in summer visitors climb to the steaming craters and old lava flows, from where they can sometimes see the whole island. The towns and villages have hotels. More holiday villas are being built further up the slopes. The pressure of people has become so great that in 1987 the Italian government made the mountain a 50000-hectare National Park to try to protect it from further development.

List the advantages of living with Etna!