Twelve years ago, Arne and Bibi’s first visit to Nosara, Costa Rica, planted the seeds of a dream: to create a little corner of paradise where guests could enjoy the Costa Rican sun, warm tropical breezes, and dramatic views of the Pacific, all with or without clothing as they might choose.

The “For Sale” sign on the property right next to the small hotel where they stayed lingered in their minds until they could no longer resist the temptation to try to turn their dream into reality.

Buying the empty lot was of course just the first step on a long road made more difficult by the fact that Arne was still working in the United States and Bibi was still seeing two children through school. With many long nights of sketching designs, and many long trips to Nosara to oversee the work, Bibi gradually turned their vision into a beautiful, Mediterranean-style retreat. The complex features two whitewashed buildings set in lush tropical plantings overlooking an inviting blue-tiled pool. The two buildings contain the apartment where Arne and Bibi plan to spend their retirement, and five additional apartments: one huge two-bedroom unit, one very large studio that is more akin to a one-bedroom unit, two comfortably spacious studios with full kitchens, and one small studio with kitchenette. Each unit has a wide veranda with expansive views of the Pacific coastline just a 15-minute walk away.

By 2004, Arne and Bibi were ready to receive their first guests, but only part of the dream was fulfilled. The new plantings were not yet tall enough to shield the garden from prying eyes, so at first the guest house they called Casa BandA had to receive only textiled guests. Impatiently they watched as the palms, palmettos, and banana trees sprouted skyward, and meanwhile they continued work on a high enclosure wall.

Finally, by late 2010, everything was in place except for an established reputation and a ready clothing-optional clientele. That first season, they blocked off a few weeks on the calendar and advertised the availability of their guest house (under the name COCR – Clothing Optional Costa Rica) to naturists. Some Canadian naturists were the first to bite, and they were immediately hooked. They were back for their second season in
early 2012 and talk of returning regularly. For the second season, Arne and Bibi marked off eight weeks in February, March, and April for clothing-optional guests. Currently the enterprise is in transition: Arne has retired, and both he and Bibi plan to be at Nosara full time. As demand from a clothing-optional clientele increases, more of the calendar will be given over to COCR and less to the textiled Casa Banda. (Note that due to Costa Rican law COCR can only receive guests over the age of 18.)

My wife and I along with two friends occupied Libertad, the two-bedroom apartment, for several weeks in February. Every morning we awoke to the gentle sound of the surf, the distant roar of howler monkeys, and the melodic calls of kiskadees. When our eyes opened we were treated to a dramatic view over nearby Pelada Beach. In the evening we stopped whatever we were doing to enjoy the magnificent sunsets. In between we enjoyed lounging, swimming, and chatting with the other guests, with or without clothing as we pleased. Like the pioneering Canadian naturists, we were hooked, and are already planning for a return visit in the future.

Although listed in a New York Times article as one of the “45 places to go in 2012,” Nosara is not a resort town, at least not yet. It is miles from the nearest paved road, and the bumpy dirt access roads generate enormous clouds of dust. The result is that the hordes of tour-package tourists go elsewhere. Many visitors just come to surf the off-shore break or to fish nearby seas.

Close to COCR is one of the best restaurants in town, the
Swiss-run Lagarta Lodge. Perched on a cliff overlooking the junction of the Nosara River and the beach, Lagarta Lodge is famous for its happy hour offering drinks at sunset. It is adjacent to (and owns and manages) the Nosara Biological Reserve. Guided tours of the reserve cost only $15 and last more than two hours, offering insights into the local tropical flora and fauna. Nearby, another enterprise offers early-morning boat tours on the Nosara River, with sightings of herons, egrets, crocodiles, and more. For those seeking more adrenalin, there is a zipline (aka “canopy tour”) enterprise nearby. With at least 13 stages, it claims to be one of the longest canopy tours in the world. Horseback rides, ATV rentals, and dolphin-watching tours are also available.

My favorite activity was an early-morning walk on the beach. With due caution thanks to the strong currents during rising and falling tides, you can cross the Nosara River where it joins the sea just a 10-minute walk from COCR. Beyond, there is the protected Nosara Beach with no road access. After a few hundred yards you get past the area within view of Lagarta Lodge. With any luck you’ll then have the mile-long beach entirely to yourself. (Note that public nudity is illegal everywhere in Costa Rica, and is considered unacceptable in Costa Rican culture, so I’d say that one should stay dressed whenever one might run into Costa Ricans on the beach or in the woods.)

At certain seasons you might be lucky enough to witness the spectacle of mass egg-laying by Olive Ridley turtles on the next beach to the north of Nosara, at Ostional. They arrive around the time of the new moon, and for the next few nights the scene on the beach recalls the invasion of Normandy as dozens or even hundreds of turtles arrive to dig deep holes and lay 80-120 eggs each. My wife called it one of the most moving wildlife scenes she had ever witnessed. The best time to see the mass egg-laying is July to early December, but even in February you might get lucky (as we did).

Though very remote and quiet, Nosara still offers expatriate-oriented goods and services. There is a twice-weekly farmers’ market offering ultra-fresh produce. The “Organica” mini-market sells Greek olives, feta cheese, and German-style dark breads. The main supermarket sells Aunt Jemima pancake mix from the U.S. and blueberry jam imported from Germany. Three international agencies offer rental cars, and COCR can arrange discounts. There is a shop renting DVDs and paperback books as well.

Costa Rica has a rainy season and a dry season. The latter runs from mid-November to mid-May, and is the best time to visit. There is also a mini-dry season in late July. Amazingly, during our visit in February, we found no mosquitoes. We could leave the doors to our veranda wide open at dawn and dusk with no problems. (There were biting midges for a few days, but they disappeared almost as suddenly as they appeared.)

Arne and Bibi are well on the way to realizing their dream of a clothing-optional guest house, but need more demand from naturists so they can expand the time it can be offered for clothing-optional use. Meanwhile, COCR, with its reasonably-priced apartments, is a dream come true for any naturist who is looking for quiet relaxation in an unhurried tropical paradise.

For more information, see cocr.info. Nosara is served by the international airports at Liberia (two and one-half hours away) and San Jose (about five hours away).