

Not your average TREEHOUSE

**An eco-conscious entrepreneur creates a
plush palace amid pristine nature**

By JoAnn Takasaki



DESTINATIONS

"Just don't tell too many people about this place, OK?"



That was the hopeful request of a patron of the Costa Rica Tree House Lodge, on the southeastern Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Funny he should ask. In 2005, The Guardian named this unique spot the "Best Tree House in the World."

The word, as they say, is out. And it's no wonder. The Lodge comprises four (nearly five) private luxury accommodations set in a wildlife refuge mere steps from the idyllic Punta Uva beach. It is an ideal blend of nature and nurture.

Still, despite its discovery by the likes of The Guardian and HGTV's "Extreme Homes," Costa Rica Tree House Lodge manages to maintain an unpretentious charm. Perhaps that's a reflection of owner Edsart Besier.

ECO-AMBITION

The day after Besier graduated with a degree in Economics 15 years ago, he hopped on a plane in his native Holland bound for Costa Rica. He never looked back.

He acquired the first bit of the now 10-acre property in 1999. Located in the mixed-use Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, it was nothing but a bit of swampland. He drained it and replanted it with native tropical plants.

Using only wood from fallen hardwood trees on the property, Besier spent eight months to find and haul (by ox) all the timber needed to build the Tree House, the first of the five houses. While it may have gotten its name from the birds-eye view it provides, the Tree House could just as easily have been named because of the giant, living sangrillo tree it's built around.

The Tree House accommodates six people on two levels and features all the luxuries of home, including a complete kitchen, bath and the essential hammock in the living area. One of the stand-out rooms is the bathroom, tucked between trees roots, with refined touches like an extra-wide rainfall showerhead.

Every year or two so since completing the signature Tree House, Besier has added a new house to the property. Currently, the resort comprises the Beach House, the Beach Suite, the Auratas House, and the soon-to-be-completed Breeze House. Each offers something a little different. For example, the Beach Suite features a playful, artist-conceived, 800-square-foot bathroom. In the Auratas House, guests experience a nightly firefly show from a panoramic upper deck. All the houses sleep up to six, are extremely private, and have electricity (110 volts), solar-heated running water, mosquito netting over the beds, linen/towel service, and many of the amenities found in any hotel. They even have howler monkeys as natural alarm clocks.

ECO-EXPERIENCE

Within the main Tree House complex is a nature sanctuary, part of the Iguanaverde Foundation (the Green Iguana Foundation). Besier has recreated the natural habitat of the green iguana to "give something back to nature."

For a couple of hours every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, Besier leads tours there. For those iguanas that don't "escape," he releases them back into the surrounding wilderness. A portion of all the proceeds from the Tree House Lodge goes to funding the foundation.

Seeing as it's Costa Rica, the nature isn't limited to the Lodge grounds. Patrons have access to surfing on the infamous Salsa Brava in nearby Puerto Viejo. There's also the world-class white-water rafting on the Pacuare. Being in the middle of a wildlife refuge, guests also have access to various wetlands tours. (Unlike the swampland of the Gulf Coast, the area is surprisingly bug-free. "People are always so surprised that there are almost no mosquitoes here," Besier said.)

For those who want to take in the culture, cities like Manzanillo and Puerto Viejo are just a few minutes walk from the Tree House Lodge. Visitors can shop; rent scooters, bikes or kayaks; enjoy the local Afro-Caribbean cuisine; and get online.

After arriving in Costa Rica with no plan other than to be closer to nature, Besier managed to successfully create an exclusive retreat that has a low impact on the environment, substantively gives back to the community and nature, and somehow appeals to both adventurous families and honeymooners alike. No wonder the word is spreading.

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Web: costaricatreehouse.com
Essential: costaricatreehouse.com/faq.htm
E-mail: info@costaricatreehouse.com
Cost: Double occupancy, includes tax
\$200–350/day
\$1,200–2,100/week
Vaccinations: cdc.gov
Currency: Costa Rica Colone

GET BET

Airport: San José, Costa Rica (SJO)
Airlines: Continental has three non-stop
to SJO daily from IAH
From SJO: Arrange a driver through
the hotel (\$165 for 2)
Drive time: 4 to 5 hour

