

Beach bums

Britain's first naturist package holiday to Croatia offers a chance to try the continental tradition of going *au naturel*.
Tristan Rutherford grins and bares it all

I dropped a squishy tomato on my thigh earlier. No matter. Last night my wife splashed red wine down her front. Again, not a problem. Indeed, this holiday we haven't had to worry about dressing up, dressing down, or even washing a pair of socks in the sink. That's because we haven't worn a stitch of clothing all week.

It was with some trepidation that we signed up for Britain's first mainstream all-naked package tour to Croatia. But this Adriatic nation's 3,500-mile coastline was the birthplace of naturism, so it offers an assured entrance for nudist camp novices like ourselves.

Yes, there are a lot of naked Germans. Yes, it's a bit weird at first. And yes, I've got a lot of explaining to do when I see my mother-in-law next week. But after seven days in Istria's two leading naturist retreats, I feel like Adam in the Garden of Eden, not Kenneth Williams in *Carry on Camping*.

Our first morning at Naturist Resort Solaris is like a regular holiday-camp experience. Sun-tanned

guests sport tennis visors, golf gloves or jelly shoes, depending on their day's activities. Yet it seems as though they've simply forgotten to put on any clothes.

We stroll beachward fully dressed, which is permissible under resort

rules. Around us, nude dog-walkers wish us *guten morgen*, as nude families chat at the waterside café. Our T-shirts and Zara skirts suddenly seem cumbersome, not cool.

We strip off at Solaris' two-mile Blue Flag coastline. Only 600 early-season guests are present, out of a summer high of 4,000, making it a shade easier to grin and bare all. We're in and out of the sea all day. There's no wet swimwear to worry about, just a lot of Factor 30. The gentle sweep of water over our naked bodies seems, well, natural.

Truly, the term "naturist" rather than "nudist" seems apt here. A lack of clothes induces an aura of calm – leave your ego in your hotel room, along with your Bermuda shorts. There's young and old, and quite possibly rich and poor, as Solaris is

as nakedly egalitarian as your local swimming-bath's changing rooms. The wildlife seems unafraid of us natural-state humans. It's Shangri-la, not sangria, on these Adriatic shores.

We're staying half-board in a south-facing room, its private sun terrace choked with flowering jasmine. There are larger self-catering apartments, too. Plus pricey beachside pitches for caravans, and pastoral tent pitches on the perimeter of this 120-acre resort, from just €9 per person, per night. Dinner is a delight. Dalmatian fish soup, prosciutto-wrapped pork and sea bass grilled to order. And you can pour your own complimentary beer and wine.

You can swim nude, go on a naked bike ride, then drink as many alcoholic beverages as you like, all for as little as €21 per person per day. Who could possibly have a problem with that?

Yet many Britons do. According to Nives Matic, marketing specialist at Naturist Resort Solaris's parent campsite company Valamar, we British "are just a small percentage" of



holidaymakers at her firm's three naturist resorts. She thinks we should give it a go. "You could fly to Pula or Trieste (both a 60-minute drive away) with only the clothes you're wearing," she laughs. "It wouldn't even matter if Ryanair lost your luggage!"

She wonders why more Brits don't come. "Germans, Slovenes and Austrians don't wear clothes at the beach on a hot summer day," explains Matic, so why should we?

Well, I'm going to stand naked and proud for Britain. We drive 30 minutes south through vineyards ("Buy Vino Here") and farms ("Taste Sample Chees") to Naturist Park Koversada. Inaugurated in 1961, and hosting up to 8,000 guests over 300 acres, it's Croatia's oldest and largest all-nude retreat. It's more permanent in every way. Aleppo pines and holm oaks tower over long-term pitches. Some German caravans have been here for decades. Their proprietors preside over a naked domain of fairy lights, sun loungers and garden gnomes. As in Britain, it's Europe's retirees who apparently have the time and money to travel. These guys chase down the sun with a bottle of supermarket chardonnay for three months at a time.

My wife and I spend our days on a wooded island offshore which is joined to Koversada by a causeway. It's a naked utopia where one can snorkel off the rocks, doze on the beach, or sip beer in a simple waterside bar. Our fellow sunbathers are less sexually alluring than they would be wearing skimpy swimsuits; it's just naked families and retirees.

Each evening we wander into the nearby village of Vrsar for a £10 platter of mussels, clams and langoustine with a jug of iced Malvasia wine. We pass a fully-clothed campsite en-route. Even prudes can enjoy this bargain bucolia too.

I shouldn't mock, as it's taken me seven days to pluck up the courage for my first naked massage. I'm cool with it, I tell myself. Chillaxed. Would she be naked too? Would things get "awkward"? This conundrum is solved when a man escorts me into

the massage studio and tells me to lie on my back.

I may be a quinoa-eating, Birkenstock-wearing, 21st-century kinda guy. But it's still a *bit* weird. The deep-tissue massage is, however, the best I've ever had. I sigh as several months' worth of toxins spill from my liver (which he gently massages) and joints. Then I stumble across to the island for a kip under an olive tree. I wake up with yellow butterflies fluttering above me, as a family of lime-green lizards parades slowly past my towel. I feel like a new man. Not to mention a very naked man.

As converted naturists, would we return? You bet. We'll probably go alone, though. After all, eating oysters stark naked with my in-laws may be taking it too far. But I have another Ryanair return to Istria planned. There won't be a problem with my hand luggage allowance: all I need bring is my birthday suit.

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Getting there

Tristan Rutherford travelled as a guest of Prestige Holidays (01425 480 400; prestigeholidays.co.uk) and the Istria Tourist Office (istra.hr). A week's stay including three nights B&B at Koversada in an apartment and four nights B&B in a Pavilion room at Solaris Resort costs from £545 pp, with flights from Stansted to Pula with Ryanair and seven days' car hire. Naturist Resort Solaris (valamar.com) and Naturist Park Koversada (maistra.com) are each 60 minutes from Trieste and Pula airports.



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**Act natural:
(from main)
clothing-free
visitors at Naturist
Resort Solaris; the
resort itself; the
apartments**