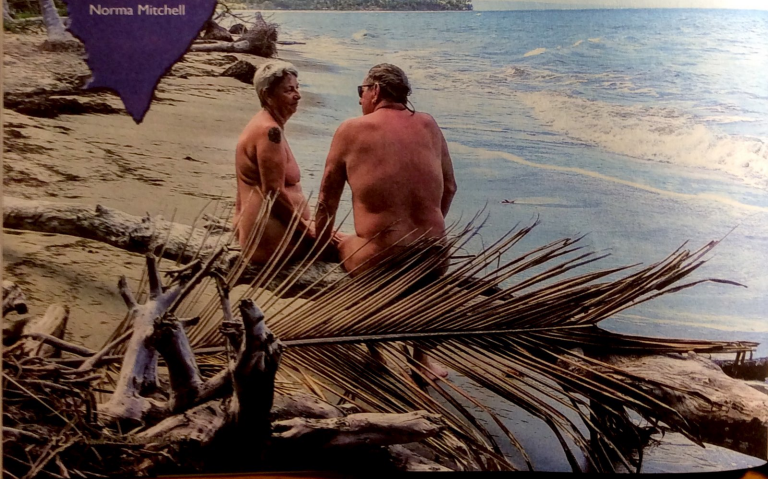


n-living

New Cambium •

The New Cambium

story and photos by
Norma Mitchell





In 2007, my husband Doug and I vacationed at clothing-optional Caliente Caribe in Dominican Republic. While there, we rented a car and toured the countryside a bit. It was great. We returned in 2009 for an amazing ten-day driving tour to many parts of the island. We fell in love with the country, especially the north central coast, and promised ourselves that someday we'd come back and spend more time.

It took us a while, but we returned to the D.R. for three months last winter. Always picking a naturist place if possible, we booked a one-bedroom house in the Cambium community from the middle of January 2019 through the middle of February. We ended up staying for 2½ months. We took a few short trips to other areas of the island, but were so content at Cambium we kept coming back. Guess where we'll be next winter?

History of Cambium

I first learned about this naturist development located on the north central coast of Dominican Republic in 2008 through The Naturist Society. It caught my interest as any new naturist business does (can't have enough of 'em), so Doug and I attended a presentation at Cypress Cove given by Francois Harley, the British developer. His sincerity touched us and philosophically we were on the same page. At the time, we weren't in the market for a home outside the United States.

Francois's concept of a naturist haven where you could "live, work, and play naked all year round" at Cambium drew some special people who believed in and supported the project. While searching for the perfect property, he marketed his project to investors through the normal channels of international naturism (France, U.S., U.K., and Canada) through advertising and personal visits to some of the largest nudist/naturist facilities.

We were excited for Francois when he purchased a 175-acre property in mid-2010, and moved on site to get the basics ready, which included a gatehouse and drivable roads, as well as planning the development of home sites and recreation facilities. Lots were sold and the first home was built in 2010. At one point, when I had a real estate license in Fort Lauderdale, I spent a bit of time in sales and marketing in southeast Florida. Cambium was finally a reality and began to flourish.

Cambium's Development

The layout of Cambium consists of small neighborhoods, each with a different view and a variety of abodes nestled between green mountains sprinkled with tropical colors. The whole place is lush with flowers, huge Saman trees, cocoa bushes, bougainvillea, hibiscus, palms, and on and on. It is not what you'd call manicured, but rather in a controlled natural state. The grounds crew keeps the brush back and the roads clear.

The lots are spacious, too, so there's elbow room and plenty of space for a landscaped yard, as well as plenty of open area. It does not have the usual density of nudist recreational parks since this is a residential community. Cambium's website shows the plot plan of the community, which is tailored to the natural topography of the land. Cambium will have to approve any new home plan, with the owner responsible for the new home's construction.

Through 2014, Cambium established roads, water supply, and septic systems. The Palm Gardens neighborhood, a central area with a pool, was developed to some extent. Things looked extremely promising while we were there this year, with many lot owners building homes. Twenty-six houses have been built, with approximately 35 lots still available for sale.

A Change in Management

From 2014 to 2017, due to ongoing litigation brought by a group of owners claiming mismanagement, Cambium languished. Home owners continued to enjoy their established homes, since the gatehouse was still being hosted and the manager, Diogene, and some staff stayed on. But with an uncertain future hanging over the project, there was little incentive to encourage new investment.

Planned home building was put on hold, as well as maintenance on some homes already constructed. Property holders were waiting to see how the project



G.A. built this as his temporary home while building his main house.



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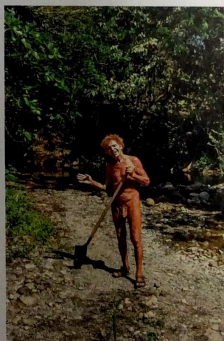
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fares when the dust settled. Disgruntled home owners stopped paying maintenance fees, so revenue slowed to a trickle. The viability of Cambium's existence was in question. In the meantime, a group of about 30 homeowners banded together to keep the place going.

In June of 2018, a group of home owners negotiated the purchase of Cambium. They created a Dominican registered company, Vive Libre, which purchased the property from Francois. They renamed it New Cambium. A Board of Directors is now administering the property. David Poole (U.S.) is president. The secretary, Tim Curl (U.K.), helped me put together the history of Cambium. Board Members are Deb Brooker and Bob Huxter of the United Kingdom, and Jim Baker of the United States. They have breathed new life into what was a floundering project.

Since that time, they've been busy catching up on the deferred maintenance of roads, establishing rental homes for guests, and generally sprucing up the place. There were two new hiking trails blazed while we were there and the badminton/volleyball court is coming right along. They



G.A. Tracy of Miami working on the road.

are advertising in *N* magazine and marketing in Britain, Canada, United States, and Germany. New homes are being built and others are in the planning stage.

Their focus is on further development of Palm Gardens, the central neighborhood with a pool. There are one-, two-, and three-bedroom homes already built, some of which are rentals and a couple for sale. Lots in this area are still available. They have a comprehensive website (newcambium.com) where you can see the rental rates and sales prices. They also have a free monthly newsletter to which you can subscribe.

Get Familiar with the Locals

Villa Magante is the nearest village, and you have to drive through it to get to Cambium. It's a typical Dominican village with a main grocery store, a couple municipal buildings, churches, schools, an art gallery, a bar, and a few other small neighborhood stores. Dona Fefá's, a tiny breakfast/lunch spot with four tables, is a favorite for those looking for authentic Dominican food.

The folks are nice, but you need to be able to speak rudimentary Spanish. If you don't *habla español*, Google

Translator is handy to communicate with the locals, and they are more than happy to speak into the phone. It's fun and really helps you connect with your neighbors. But try speaking Spanish. It amuses the locals. We purchased an Internet hot spot from the local provider that we took with us everywhere.

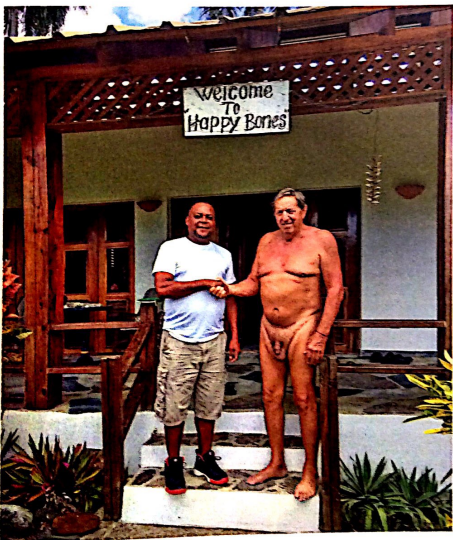
There are kids of all ages in the village. Children in school uniforms walk to and from school, as bare-assed toddlers play in the yards under mama's watchful eye. Most homes have doors and windows open, and the family sits outside visiting with neighbors and friends. An after-school basketball game in the street leading to Cambium is a standard sight. It's not unusual to see cowboys on their horses, friendly dogs roaming around (not leashed), and an occasional cow or two (or three).

There are two beaches in Villa Magante, both with food and beer. They are enjoyed by the locals and are quite busy on the weekends. Delicious food is served from vendors' huts on the beach, and the prices are what the locals pay. The water is clear and warm, the fish is, of course, fresh daily, and there is shade for those who aren't used to the tropical sun.

The nude beach for skinny-dipping is an easy 15-minute walk down the shore from Playa Magante. We joined the folks from Cambium our first time to the beach. The beach is not sanctioned by any organization or patrolled by police. There are no close neighbors, so the place is perfect. Bring mosquito repellent in case the no-see-ums wake up and decide they're hungry.

Staying at Cambium

Living in a third world country is different than going to an all-inclusive resort. We planned on staying in the D.R. at least three months, and felt pretty confident that we could adjust to living in a third world culture in an off-the-grid home. Diogene, Cambium's manager, made all



Doug thanking Diogene, the manager, for all his help.

the difference. With his help we learned where to shop, get Internet, go to a doctor, rent a car, and generally learn the ropes of everyday living at Cambium.

We had a fully equipped kitchen, so grocery shopping went to the top of the priority list. We went to the local stores to check out their merchandise and found that we would have to drive between 30 and 45 minutes to be able to shop at a supermarket similar to what we are used to in the States. The towns of Cabarete and Sosua have a large international expat/tourist community, so there are stores catering to first world tastes. We could get almost everything we wanted, but the round trip drive was daunting to say the least.

We rented a car for our entire stay because Cambium is located in the countryside. You could walk to the village and catch a *guagua* (local public transportation), and some people do, but it's quite a walk through uneven streets and a hill that needs a low gear to make it to the top. We didn't even try to do it. We're just not in good enough shape, so we drove.

Motorbikes are the most popular vehicle, although we saw everything from horses and bicycles to fully loaded semis all sharing the two-lane roads. There are a few traffic lights in the towns, but you can't count on them working. Speed bumps (some of them wicked) handle speed control. The general rules of the road apply to all vehicles except motorbikes, which drive any damn way they want. And if anything happens, it's your fault because you're not a Dominican. "Slow and Low" is the name of the highway game in D.R. Also, driving is limited to the daylight hours, since locals drive after dark with no working headlights or taillights. We were always home by nightfall.

Having never lived outside the country, we were unaware of what it means to live in a third world country in an off-the-grid community, like New Cambium. It took us a bit to adjust. We didn't realize how spoiled we were, taking many things for granted, like drinking water out of the tap and unlimited electricity.

Cambium houses all rely on solar power, so unless the sun shines, batteries won't be replenished. You learn to be very aware of electric usage. Lights aren't left on and we even unplugged the refrigerator for a while during the night so we'd be sure to have electricity in the morning. The weather was cool enough at night, so fans made it comfortable for sleeping. Forget about air conditioning, but you can run a washing machine.

Water is piped to Cambium from a source in the nearby mountains. It's used to flush the toilets, wash clothes, dishes and floors, and take showers, but because they do not have a purifying process, drinking water must be purchased. This is true for the entire island of Hispaniola. Many homes and businesses use cisterns to collect rain water. Drinking water is purchased in town in five-gallon containers.

There is 24-hour security at the gatehouse, and the property is patrolled at night by a guard on horseback with his dog on a



A one-bedroom home by the pool we stayed in for a few weeks.



A two-bedroom home we also stayed in.



Cat and Diarmid's "hut."

long rope. In case of emergency, Diogene is available by phone and can be there to help quickly, as he lives in Villa Magante.

The Denizens of New Cambium

Having been naturists for so many years, it wasn't surprising that the folks we met at New Cambium were open, warm, and welcoming. We enjoyed the diversity of the group, being from Germany, England, Wales, Canada as well as the United States. Once word got around that we were staying for a while, they stopped by, introduced themselves, and offered their help if needed.

Even the guests we met were delightful. For instance, Marion and Phil Hunter of Oxfordshire, England, found a naturist rental at Cambium on Airbnb while enjoying a driving adventure through the D.R. They ended up as our neighbors for a couple nights. What

a lovely couple, and they had so much fun at New Cambium. They spend their summer in France at Montalivet.

A real plus for New Cambium is Diogene Martinez, the manager. Whatever issue we had during our stay, Diogene had a solution. He is Dominican, raised in Villa Magante and nearby Rio San Juan. He serves as a bridge between the management and community of New Cambium and the local folks in the area. He knows everybody and is savvy about all things Dominican. He's a nice guy, too.

It's hard to convey the peaceful nature of New Cambium. Because it is in the countryside, we enjoyed the quiet and the experience of being surrounded by the natural world. To be able to do it naked was the very thick icing on the cake.

When we left, we said *Ve con Dios* and *Hasta luego* ("Go with God" and "See you later"). We're looking forward to returning. **N**



More new friends stopping to say hi.



José the security man.

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