

DEPARTURES

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GLOBAL STYLE

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The ultimate in privacy:
Laucala's Peninsula villa
can only be reached via
an elevated boardwalk.

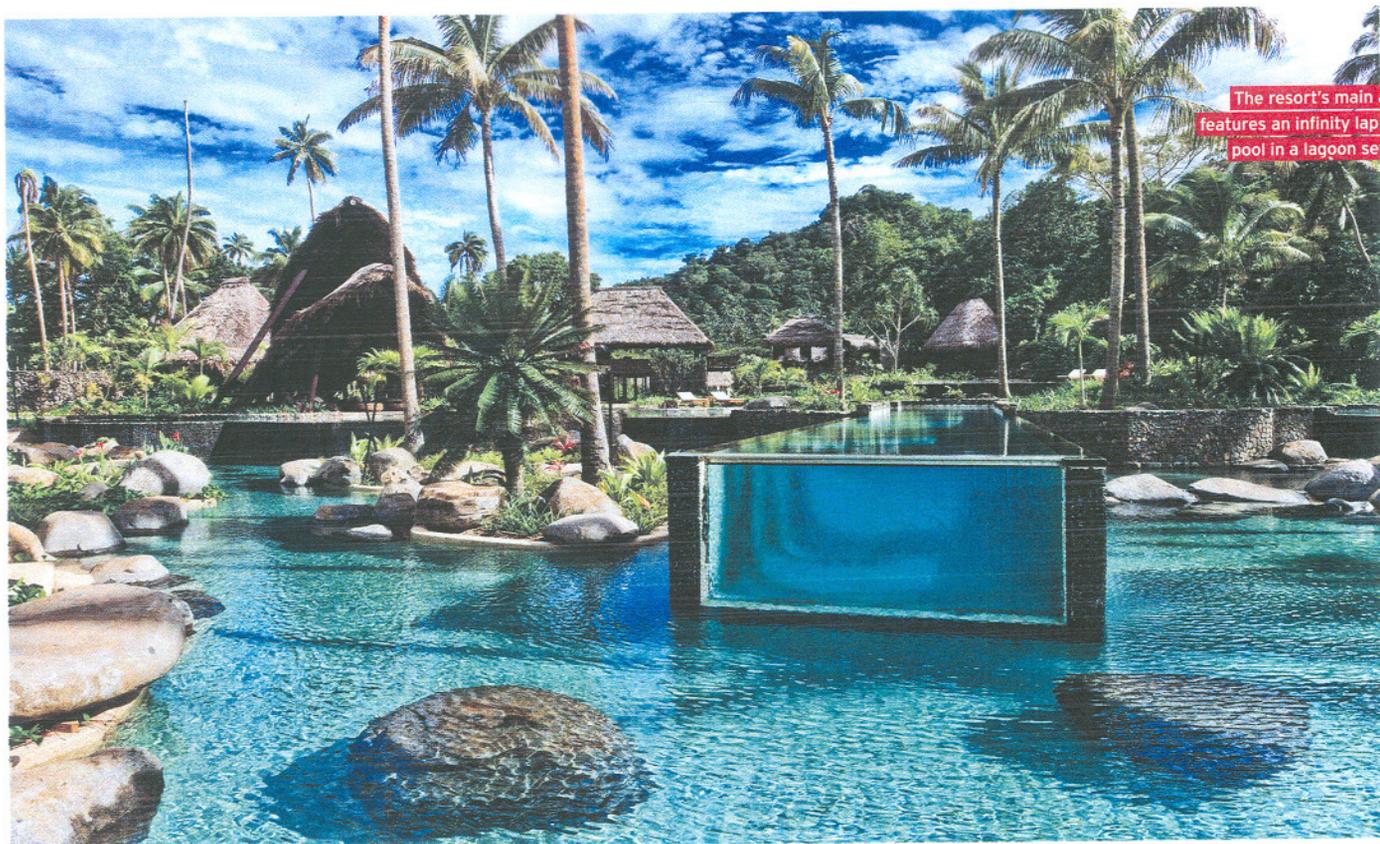


Your Own Private Laucala

The Austrian billionaire who created Red Bull—yes, Red Bull—is behind one spectacular new resort in Fiji. **BY LAUREL DELP**

Before the opening of Laucala, Fiji's newest private island resort, no one quite knew what to expect. Owner and Red Bull founder Dietrich Mateschitz wasn't talking; he hates publicity. Yet the Austrian billionaire bought the 4.7-square-mile island from the heirs of Malcolm Forbes for a reported \$10 million back in 2003 and several years later began construction so extravagant that housing had to be created on a neighboring island for 2,000 workers. Just entering the resort's website required (and still requires) registration and a password. The island certainly had nature to recommend it: mountains covered in wild tropical forest; mangroves and primeval-looking marshes; deserted white-sand beaches; and, just offshore, magnificent, perfectly preserved coral reefs. But that was it.

After two solid years of construction, Laucala opened in 2008 with 25 villas, or bures, as they're called in Fiji. Made

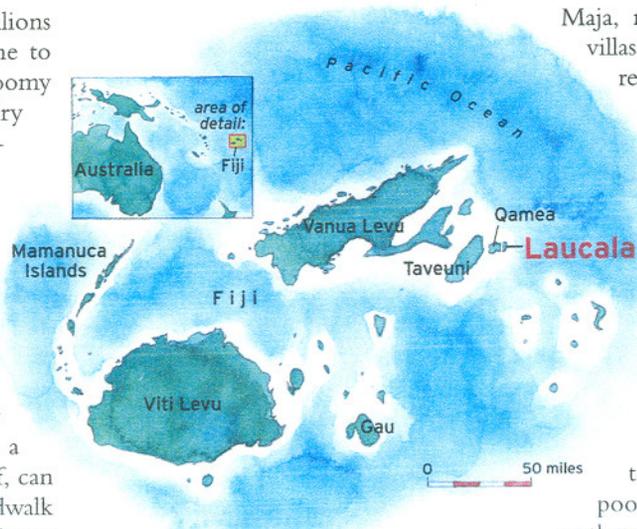


The resort's main area features an infinity lap pool in a lagoon setting.

The sprawling resort takes up only 15 percent of the island—the rest remains untouched.

up of connecting thatched-roof pavilions (some enclosed, some open) with one to three bedrooms, they dwarf any roomy burees elsewhere in the region: airy bedrooms with sitting areas, dressing rooms with vanities, full swimming pools, yoga platforms, indoor and outdoor granite tubs and rain showers. Accommodations begin at an awesome \$3,800 per night, and three stand out from the rest: A six-bedroom hilltop manse of three villas offers 360-degree views; a two-bedroom, over-the-water bungalow has its own jetty; and the Peninsula, a one-bedroom villa atop a seaside cliff, can only be reached via an elevated boardwalk through pristine jungle. A wooden staircase leads from the villa to a private beach.

The resort is on the north side of the island and takes up only 15 percent of the land. "This is it for development," says Thomas Kilgore, the German former hotelier who, together with his wife,



GETTING THERE

A direct flight from Los Angeles International Airport to Nadi International takes about 11 hours. Then it's another 45-minute flight by private jet to Laucala. Airfare starts at \$1,140 on Air Pacific, plus \$600 for the resort's King Air B 200.

Maja, manages the property. "No more villas, no more buildings." The rest will remain untouched. Even the 18-hole golf course, designed by Scotsman David McLay Kidd, was carefully laid out so as not to disturb the existing flora and fauna.

Laucala's terrain is perfect for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. An equestrian center stables Shire draft horses brought over from England and spirited Fijian horses crossed with Australian racing Thoroughbreds. There are tennis courts, a lagoon-like central pool, a library, a gym, a replica of an authentic Fijian village and a fleet of 15 boats for deep-sea fishing and sailing. The four-bungalow spa is hidden in a mountainside and has a kitchen where all the treatment products, including the resort's soaps and candles, are made from home-grown ingredients.

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THE NEXT RESORT

The jet-landing strip here is the third largest in Fiji, and Laucala is authorized to shuttle guests arriving by private plane through customs. Those who fly commercial into Nadi International Airport are whisked to Laucala's private lounge for Champagne, espresso and a shower before boarding the resort's King Air B 200 for a 45-minute flight to the island.

While other island resorts typically import most of their products, Laucala aims to be self-sufficient. An organic farm, hydroponic greenhouses and orchards produce exotic fruits and vegetables. The greenhouses harbor 120 vanilla vines and 3,500 orchids. Beehives make honey. Livestock includes sheep, cattle, pigs, chickens and quail. Austrian laying hens produce sublimely tasty eggs.

Small plates are the order here, with seven-course meals of smartly proportioned gourmet dishes. The airy, colonial-style Plantation House contains a fine-dining restaurant, a lounge and



Wild horses roam the island; a fleet of boats is available to guests, as is the resort's King Air B 200.



Laucala aims to be self-sufficient with an organic farm, greenhouses and livestock.

an impressive wine cellar. (Premium wines can be had at an additional cost, starting at \$55 and going as high as \$1,280 for a 1995 Château Mouton Rothschild Premier Cru.) At the Seagrass Lounge, the fare is Asian-fusion. The Beach Bar grills a mix of meat, seafood and vegetables; the cliff-top Rock Lounge is best for sunsets, cocktails and savory bites; and the Pool Bar offers an addictive tuna carpaccio with French-fried zucchini and wasabi dipping sauce.

Service at Fiji's better resorts has always been wholehearted, but it has also been famously slow. Not so at Laucala. With a staff of 360 and a guest count below 80, a call for coffee produces a smiling employee carrying a steaming pot in three minutes flat. One recent guest, out for an early round with New Zealand golf pro Tony Christie, came upon a perfectly set table near the fourth hole. Someone had decided they might like breakfast with their game. ■

Accommodations begin at \$3,800 for two people. For more information, call 679-888-0077 or go to laucala.com.



General managers Thomas and Maja Kilgore with their dog, Treu; the Plantation House Bar; the path leading to the Peninsula villa.

