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How to Run a Private Island

If your secluded island vacation never seems quite long enough and work beckons all too soon, then Maja Kilgore should be your new role model. Ms. Kilgore is managing director of Fiji's Laucala Island, one of the world's most exclusive resorts, owned by Austrian energy-drink tycoon Dietrich Mateschitz since 2002.

Along with her husband, Thomas, Ms. Kilgore has run the 3,000-acre, 25-villa island for the past three years.



Heavens Portfolio

Laucala Island in Fiji

There are certainly challenges. A direct hit from a cyclone temporarily put the resort out of action earlier this year (It reopens at the end of this month.) and running a luxury business in such a remote spot comes with logistical obstacles. The couple has previously run resorts in the Philippines, Europe and Bali, Indonesia. But Laucala, where prices start from \$3,800 per night per residence, marks the first time they've looked after a spot with its own international airstrip, an 18-hole golf course, spring-water bottling at the source and a staff of 350.

Ms. Kilgore was recently in Hong Kong, where she told Duncan Mavin what it really takes to run a private resort island. The following interview has been edited.

WSJ: This sounds like a dream job. Is it?

Ms. Kilgore: It is if you love the hospitality industry. You cannot even say it's a job. It's a lifestyle. But you have to have great self-discipline, and you have to have joy in the little things. Some people love it, and some people can't do it at all. Some people come to work for us and say they want to get buried here, but others pack

their bags and leave. You have to fall in love with the place.

WSJ: How did you end up in Laucala?

Ms. Kilgore: We were in Germany. The owner came to us and said I need somebody who can run a resort, who can live on an island, and who can do farming. We took three days to think

about it, and then we packed our suitcases and headed to Laucala. When we arrived, we walked around the island and looked for spots where we could set up this or that.

WSJ: What are the biggest challenges of running a hospitality business in a remote location like Laucala?

Ms. Kilgore: We have 25 villas on four and a half kilometers, so logistics is the key. When someone has dinner in their room, we have to bring the restaurant to them. Another challenge is privacy. Celebrity guests don't want paparazzi taking photographs. We secured the water rights around the island, and because of our airport we control the airspace too. Attention to detail is important. And finally, thinking ahead. You cannot take the risk of running out of gas.

WSJ: You farm much of the produce for Laucala's restaurants yourself, from coffee and tea to avocados, beef and three types of chicken. Isn't this just making it harder for yourself?

Ms. Kilgore: We did it in a resort we ran in Bali 15 years ago. My husband is a cook by trade, and the only way to get the right quality produce is you have to grow it yourself. Now we're 85% self-sufficient.

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