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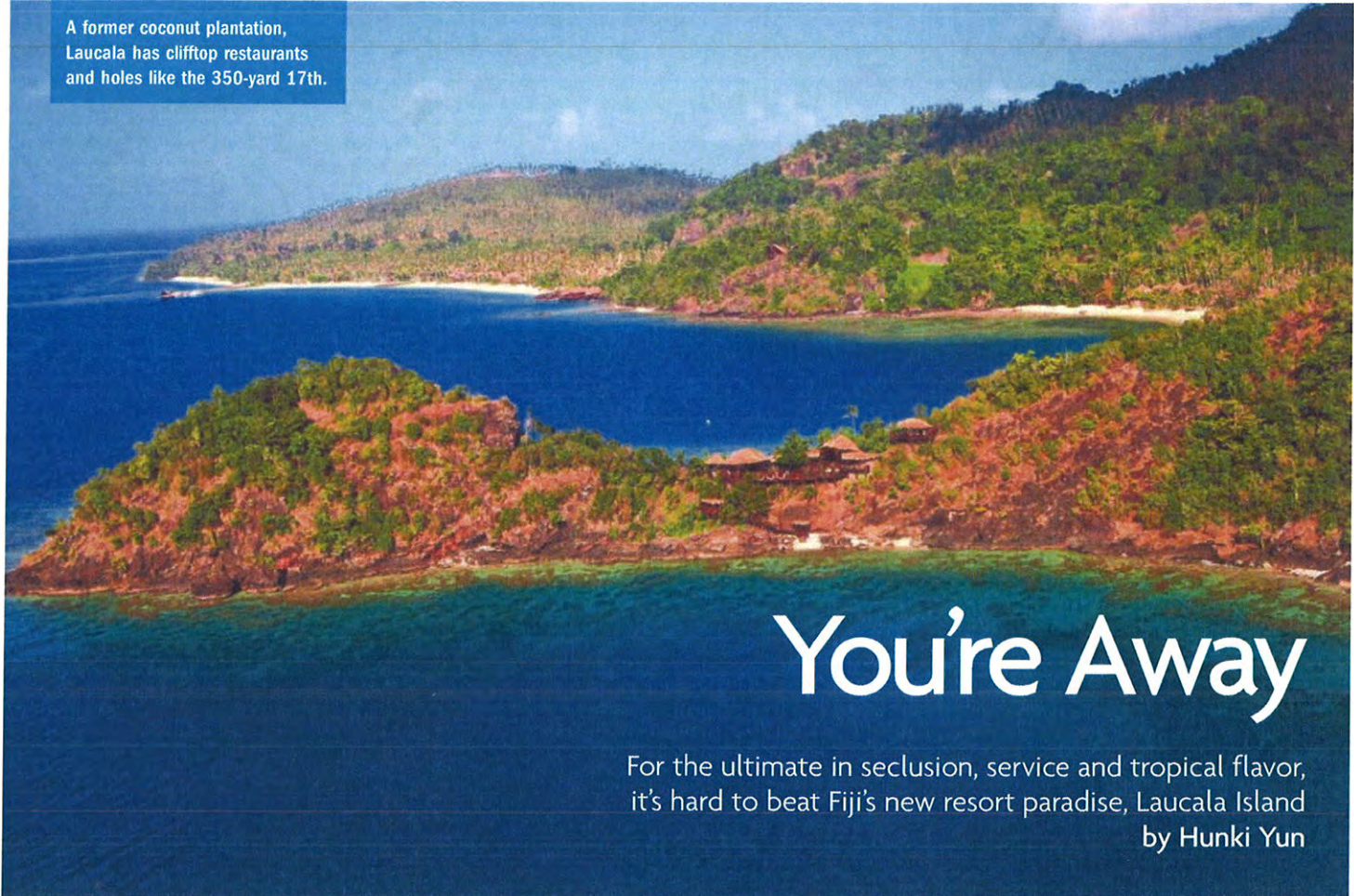
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The 8th hole at Fiji's
Laucala Island

On the cover: Arnold Palmer
at Royal Birkdale Golf Club,
site of his first British Open
victory in 1961

A former coconut plantation, Laucala has cliff-top restaurants and holes like the 350-yard 17th.



You're Away

For the ultimate in seclusion, service and tropical flavor, it's hard to beat Fiji's new resort paradise, Laucala Island
by Hunki Yun

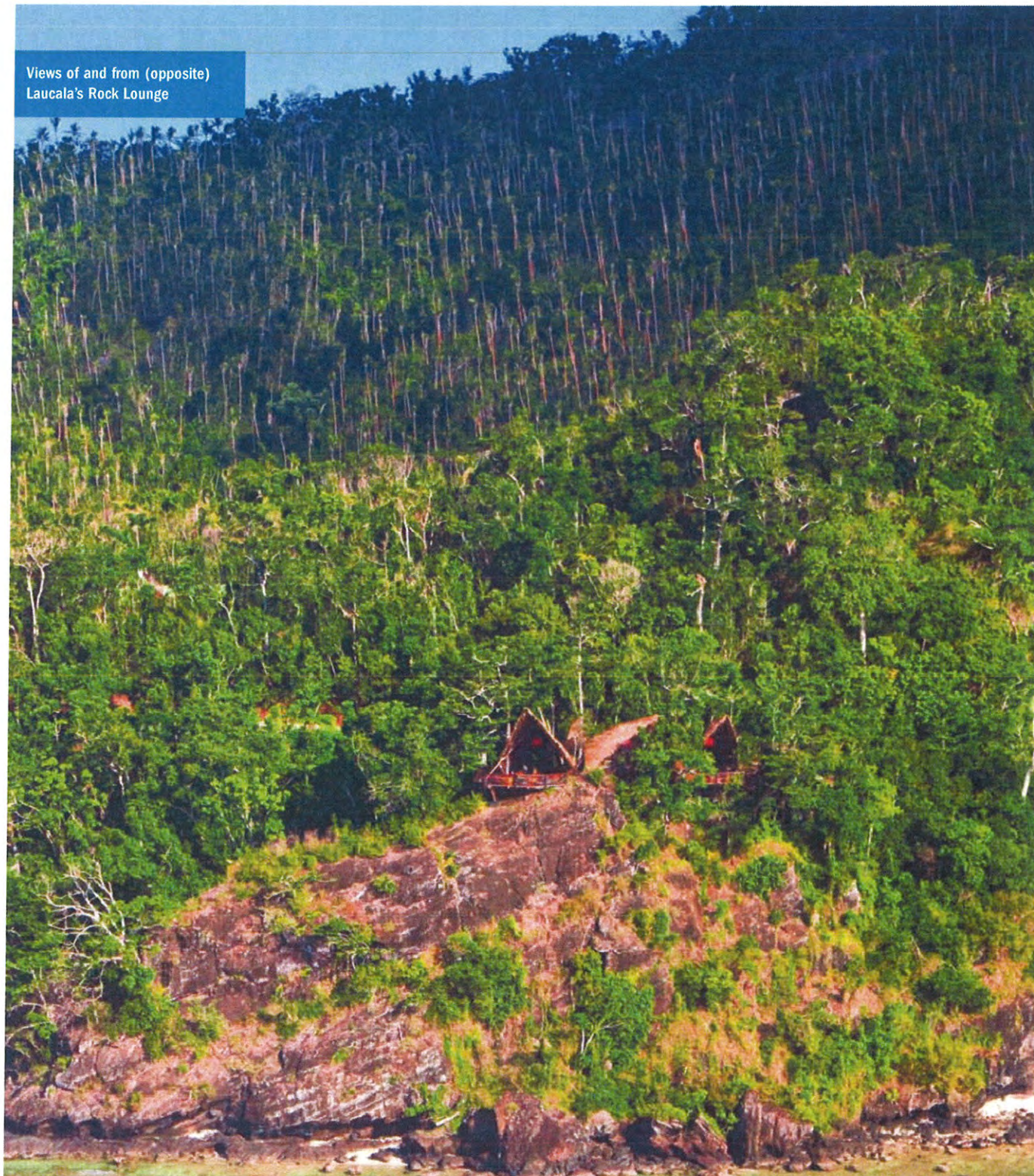


ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECTS of traveling is adjusting to different time zones, especially after a 20-hour voyage across the International Date Line. But no matter where I am in the world, I can keep up with the local clock thanks to my reliable internal regulator: my stomach.

About midway through my first full day on the ultraprivate Laucala Island, the easternmost landmass of the archipelago nation of Fiji in the Pacific Ocean, my stomach sent me a signal. I had no idea how long it had been since breakfast, a multi-course repast of fresh fruit, just-squeezed juice, pastries, breads with homemade jams and honey, a selection of cheeses, and smoked fish—all preceding my actual order, an omelet.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY L.C. LANDBRECHT

Views of and from (opposite)
Laucala's Rock Lounge



Laucala Island has a full-time staff
of 329 employees — and there were
eight guests on the property that day.

After breakfast, I traded in my personal golf cart for a mountain bike to explore the 3,000-acre island that once had belonged to Malcolm Forbes. The terrain is very hilly, and apparently I had burned a lot of calories climbing the slopes while exploring both the South Pacific vistas and the island's substantial farming operation: Aiming for 90-percent self-sufficiency, the resort grows its own cattle, pigs, poultry, vegetables, fruit, herbs and plants, not just for food but also for soaps, shampoos and spa products.

So when my stomach told me it was lunchtime, I rode over to the Beach Bar, which sits on the sand that forms an isthmus between the ocean and the large freeform lagoon pool, which also has a lap pool rising out of it.

"Bula," said the bartender, handing me a shot of juice and a damp towel to wash my hands. "What would you like?"

As I looked over the menu, he picked up the phone behind the bar and said a few

words in Fijian. Within minutes, no fewer than six members of the staff had descended onto the beach—servers, chefs, possibly even the members of the grounds crew who had been raking the sand outside my beachfront *bure* that morning.



It was as if they had just been waiting around all morning for me to make my lunch choice from among the five restaurants, an entirely plausible theory considering Laucala Island employs a full-time staff

of 329 and there were just eight guests on the property that day. (The maximum capacity is 80 guests and the only way the resort would ever allow that many is if a single party booked the entire island—for \$150,000 a night, four-night minimum.)

Opened in late 2009, Laucala Island (in Fijian, the "c" is pronounced "th") is owned by Dietrich Mateschitz, the co-founder of Red Bull. Although the primary marketing vehicles for the caffeinated energy drink revolve around action sports like auto racing, snowboarding and aerobatics, Laucala is all about enjoying luxury—at whatever pace you want.

You can spend all day partaking of the island's myriad activities: fishing, biking, golf, horseback riding, water-skiing, jetskiing, sailing, Scuba diving, snorkeling. Or you can lounge around your residential compound.

I was feeling pretty good about my *bure*, one of 25 on the property built in a tradi-

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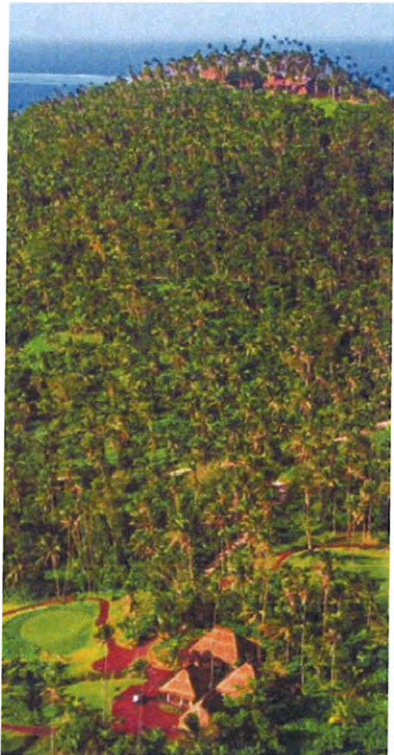
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LAUCALA ISLAND



tional Polynesian style with thatched roofs and large wooded beams tied together with elaborate patterns of ropes. Named *Bebe* (butterfly), my villa had a large bedroom with sitting area, lounge, dressing room and massive bathroom, not to mention a private pool, outdoor seating areas and an outdoor bathroom, with a deep tub and shower. Every seat, including the tub, offers a view of the South Pacific. I would imagine the battle-hardened warriors who once inhabited these islands would simply shake their heads over how plush and soft the living is.

My opinion of my digs changed after taking a tour of some of the other residences, the most luxurious of which sit on cliffs and hang over private sheltered coves, with access to the turquoise water below. When I returned to my own "shack," I decried its injustices: having to share a mile-long beach with seven other people and a view of the water partially blocked by tropical vegetation and palm trees.

Then there is the hilltop compound that offers 360-degree views of the island and its surroundings from its 500-foot elevation. This is Mateschitz's residence, and it is possible to stay here for up to \$35,000 a night. (The rates for one-bedroom residences start at \$3,800.)

For those prices, the Red Bulls in the mini-fridge are complimentary, as are the other amenities at Laucala, including spa treat-

Private pools, exquisite service, flora, oceanfront villas, rugged landscapes, Pacific views and great golf mark the island life.



LAUCALA ISLAND

David Kidd carved holes like the 570-yard 3rd from the thick jungle.



ments, meals and golf at the David McLay Kidd-designed course.

Kidd had to overcome several challenges in building the 6,830-yard layout, the most formidable of which was the dense jungle. Then there was the directive from Mateschitz, a non-golfer who didn't want to see any of the course from his hilltop residence, not to mention the torrential rains that kept washing away the nascent turf from the slopes.

Wielding instinct, creativity, dogged persistence and a trusty machete, Kidd completed a scenic layout that gambols around the island, starting upland and heading to the ocean before plunging back into the jungle at the finish. Moving up, down and around the foot of foreboding mountains, the first several holes look as though they belong on Skull Island, the fictional home of King Kong.

The course turns for the ocean midway through the front nine, reaching it on a headland that houses the green of the 493-yard 8th and the entire 144-yard 9th, which crosses the 8th fairway. But given the island's dearth of golfers at any given time, the routing presents few problems.

After we safely negotiated the intersection, our hosts, Maja and Thomas Kilgore, experienced hoteliers who have run properties throughout the world, greeted us with

a selection of mid-round snacks normally not found on beverage carts: Champagne, grilled lamb, sushi and ice-cream lollipops. After a 45-minute break, we tackled the most scenic stretch on the course.

The driveable 297-yard 10th runs along the water, tempting big hitters to have a go at the green. At the 516-yard 12th, the bunker

meet a prince of a man with whom I had a single degree of separation who was also a pretty prominent player.

I also played with Kidd, a smart, funny Scot with a lash of a swing. He regaled us with stories about the building of the course and the resort: inadvertently stepping into a snake-filled marsh while hacking through

the jungle, traveling for 40 hours from his Oregon base—flying into Nadi, Fiji's main airport, boarding an island-hopping plane that made numerous stops before reaching its final destination, from which Kidd finished his journey to Laucala by both bus and boat.

Now, the resort can pick up guests (for a fee) at Nadi for the 45-minute flight to Laucala on its own plane, a King Air B 200. As we taxied to a stop after landing on the island's 4,000-foot runway, a dozen employees were waiting, singing a traditional Fijian greet-

ing while we deplaned. After we took some time to take in this gorgeous entrance and acclimate to the tropical surroundings, a convoy of SUVs pulled up in formation, ready to whisk us to our island adventure.

The moment, marked by richness of sights, sounds and atmosphere, resembled the opening scene of a movie, and the team at Laucala Island couldn't have scripted it any better.

Discovering Laucala

Golf: 18 holes (6,830 yards, par 72)

Lodging: 25 one, two and three-bedroom residences

Dining: Plantation House, Seagrass Restaurant, Rock Lounge, Pool Bar, Beach Bar

Activities and amenities: Sailing, watersports, kayaking, spa, pools, fitness center, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, tennis, farm tours, Fijian cultural center, Kids' Club, plane service from Nadi International Airport

Contact: laucala.com



surrounding the green is an extension of the beach, a unique feature.

One of my playing partners was Laucala's pro, Tony Christie, a New Zealand native who played for many years on the Asian and Australasian tours. One of the guys he ran with was Arjun Atwal, against whom I had played junior golf and is now a PGA Tour winner. Such is the beauty of golf that I could travel to the other side of the world and