

# For lotus eaters

Laucala Island redefines notions of seclusion and luxury. The sublime Fijian resort is so exclusive that you need to register just to access its website

Story **David Meagher**





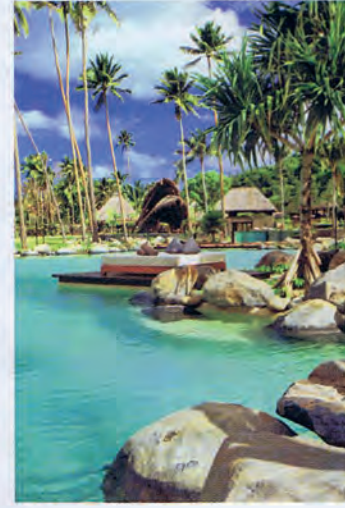
Become a beachcomber, on this beach or any of the others at your disposal on the island. Peninsula Residence, the most secluded accommodation at the resort, can be seen at the top of the picture opposite. Guests travel to and from by golf buggy.







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- 01 Plantation House Restaurant.
- 02 Laucala resort's main pool.
- 03 Golf, anyone?
- 04 Hole 12 on the 18-hole course.
- 05 A Plantation Residence.



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# Fiji

and its resorts rarely receive accolades for culinary prowess. And it reminds one of a joke by Woody Allen. In his film *Annie Hall*, Allen's

character, Alvy Singer, tells a story about two elderly women at a Catskill mountain resort. "Boy, the food at this place is really terrible," says one. The other responds: "Yeah, I know; and such small portions."

What does a joke about a holiday spot north of New York City have to do with an island resort in Fiji? Not much, except if you replace "small" with "enormous" you've pretty much summed up the state of Fiji's so-called five-star cuisine: bad food and lashings of it. For the most part, Fiji's luxury resorts have had a reputation for getting virtually every aspect of hospitality, aside from the food, right. Of course, there are exceptions with fine cuisine (see our story on page 108 for one example). And then there is Laucala Island resort.

Forty-five minutes by plane from Fiji's Nadi International Airport, Laucala Island resort has only 25 residences and is unique, not just for Fiji, but anywhere. The island is so exclusive you need to register just to access the website (previous guests, according to the resort's guestbook, include Maria Shriver and Oprah Winfrey). It's also secluded. It's possible for the resort to be full and for you to never encounter another guest. High-profile, security-conscious guests have been known to arrive at the resort with a full staff in tow, including personal security personnel, only to find there's no real need for the bodyguards here.

The 1200ha island was a coconut plantation for nearly a century before it was bought by publishing magnate Malcolm Forbes in 1972. It was sold by the Forbes heirs to Austrian billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz of Red Bull energy drink fame in 2003. Mateschitz set about

transforming Laucala into a luxurious private hideaway and in 2007 hired German couple Maja and Thomas Kilgore to bring some European efficiency and style to the ultimate island resort. The Kilgores have a background working with high-end Relais & Chateaux properties in Germany, Bali and The Philippines and have overseen every last detail of the property.

They arrived on Laucala 18 months before the resort officially opened and took a holistic approach to building, choosing to make things as sustainable as possible. The island is almost self-sufficient. Most of the resort's food is produced on the island's farm and soaps and spa products are made on site. More than a quarter of the island is still covered in coconut groves but the main focus of the resort's sustainability is 97ha of farmland for crops such as coffee, vanilla, pepper, teas, tropical fruit, vegetables and herbs. The farm also has cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry as well as a substantial hydroponic greenhouse and flower plantations.

There are five official dining venues around the island from the formal to the casual, plus the option to dine in your villa or anywhere else on Laucala for that matter. But be warned: portions here are large but the standard of

cuisine under the direction of Italian-born chef Michele Mingozzi, who joined Laucala in 2009, is incredible. His philosophy is to be "self-sufficient and first class" and his style is a blend of classic European cooking combined with Asian influences and tropical ingredients. Breakfast in the Plantation House Restaurant is more of an event than a meal and with the view over the plantation to the water it's one designed to be lingered over.

Despite having just 25 villas, the resort offers a wide array of accommodation choices. The Plantation Residences, for example, have their own beach access (as well as a pool) and are available in one or two-bedroom configurations and range in size from 300sqm to 600sqm. There's one three-bedroom residence that can accommodate six. If you'd rather have a view than direct access to the beach then a Plateau Residence, perched on the hill above the plantation, is like something out of the movie *South Pacific*. My guide, who takes me on a tour of the various villas, says some of the island's guests have been known to stay in a Plateau Residence and hire a Plantation or Seagrass Residence as well to give them a base at the beach during the day. There's a two-bedroom Overwater Residence that has 2000sqm of

**"If you're the sort of person who has a superyacht, then you can navigate directly to your villa's private jetty"**



- 01 For perfect seclusion, choose the Peninsula Residence.
- 02 Spacious bathrooms have thatched roofs and every luxury.
- 03 The one-bedroom Peninsula is favoured by honeymooners.
- 04 Laucala Island resort's leisure centre.

private space and comes with its own cook and a large private pool carved directly into the rock face.

If you're the sort of person who has a superyacht, then you can navigate directly to your villa's private jetty (the necessary customs and immigration is done in your villa, offering the ultimate in privacy.) And, when it comes to seclusion, the one-bedroom Peninsula Residence is the farthest from the rest of the resort and has its own beach. Understandably it's very popular with honeymooners.

Laucala has all the activities guests have come to expect in an island resort – various watersports, diving and snorkelling, game-fishing and horseback riding – but it also has its very own 18-hole golf course designed by David McLay Kidd. Then there's the legendary Fijian hospitality and service. If you've never been to Fiji before you'll wonder why the staff are permanently happy, warm and friendly. But then you only need to take stock of your surroundings – there are worse places to work.

Prices start at \$US3800 per night for two adults and include all meals, most beverages (including a choice of 150 wines and champagnes), laundry and a range of leisure activities as well as one spa treatment. The flight from Nadi costs \$600 per person each way and for guests with their own aircraft the island's airstrip can handle jets, such as a Gulfstream 900, as well as the necessary customs and immigration.  
[laucala.com](http://laucala.com); [traveltheworld.com.au](http://traveltheworld.com.au)



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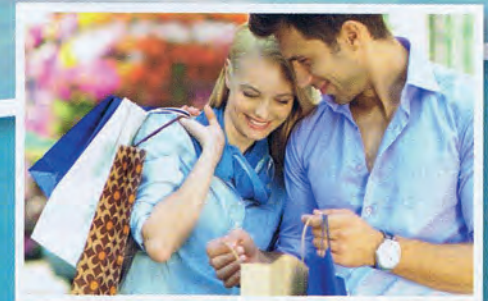
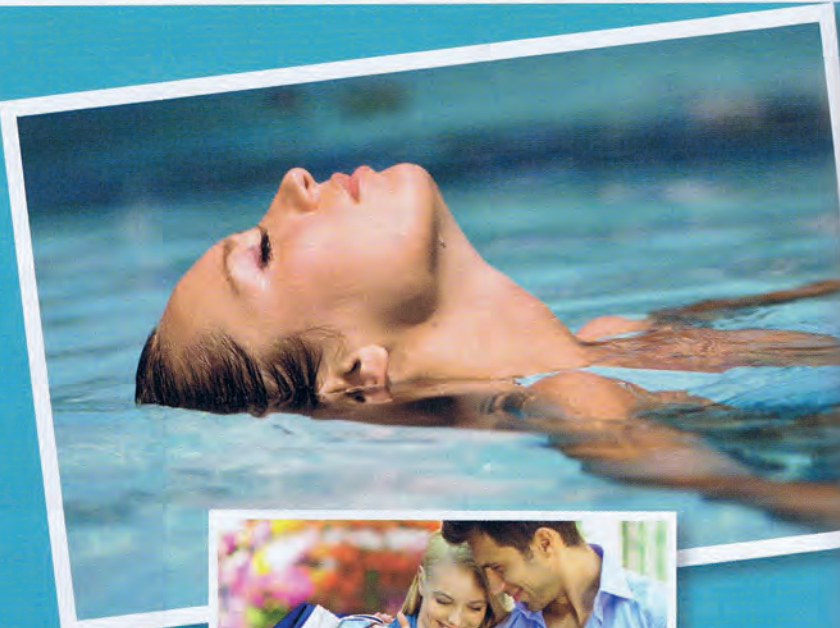
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