



# marooned for LOVE

Laucala Island is like something out of a dream, a private paradise for honeymooners and lovers. **Gustasp and Jerroo Irani** describe the tranquil charms of this island

PHOTOGRAPHS: GUSTASP AND JERROO IRANI



**Y**ou know that a place really cares about the well-being of its guests when an elegant tea pot is put on a porcelain burner and an hour glass is placed besides it. After three minutes, the tea is gracefully poured into one's cup so that it is brewed just so! This level of personalised care and service is routine at Laucala Island to the north-east of Viti Levu, the main island of Fiji. Here a 25-villa resort unravels lushly on a 3,000-acre private isle adrift in the crystal-clear waters of the northern Fijian Pacific archipelago. (Fiji is a cluster of 330 islands, scattered like jewels in the Koro Sea in the South Pacific.)

We arrived with a few other guests in the island's seven-seat luxurious private jet from Fiji's Nadi International Airport after a 45-minute flight. The jet soft-landed on a narrow strip which is in fact the third largest runway in the country! As we stepped on to terra firma, we were assailed by a teeming jungle of scents, balmy breezes and cries of *bula* or Fijian for "Hello" accompanied by the beats on the lalli drum. Cold towels and fresh fruit juices were then pressed into our hands, a ritual we were to become familiar with each time we returned from our ambles around the island.





PRIVATE LOUNGE IN THE HILLTOP VILLA

The ultimate luxury was our own private beach where the surf rolled and the reflection of the sun on the water scattered like mercury

#### PRIVATE POOL, PRIVATE BEACH

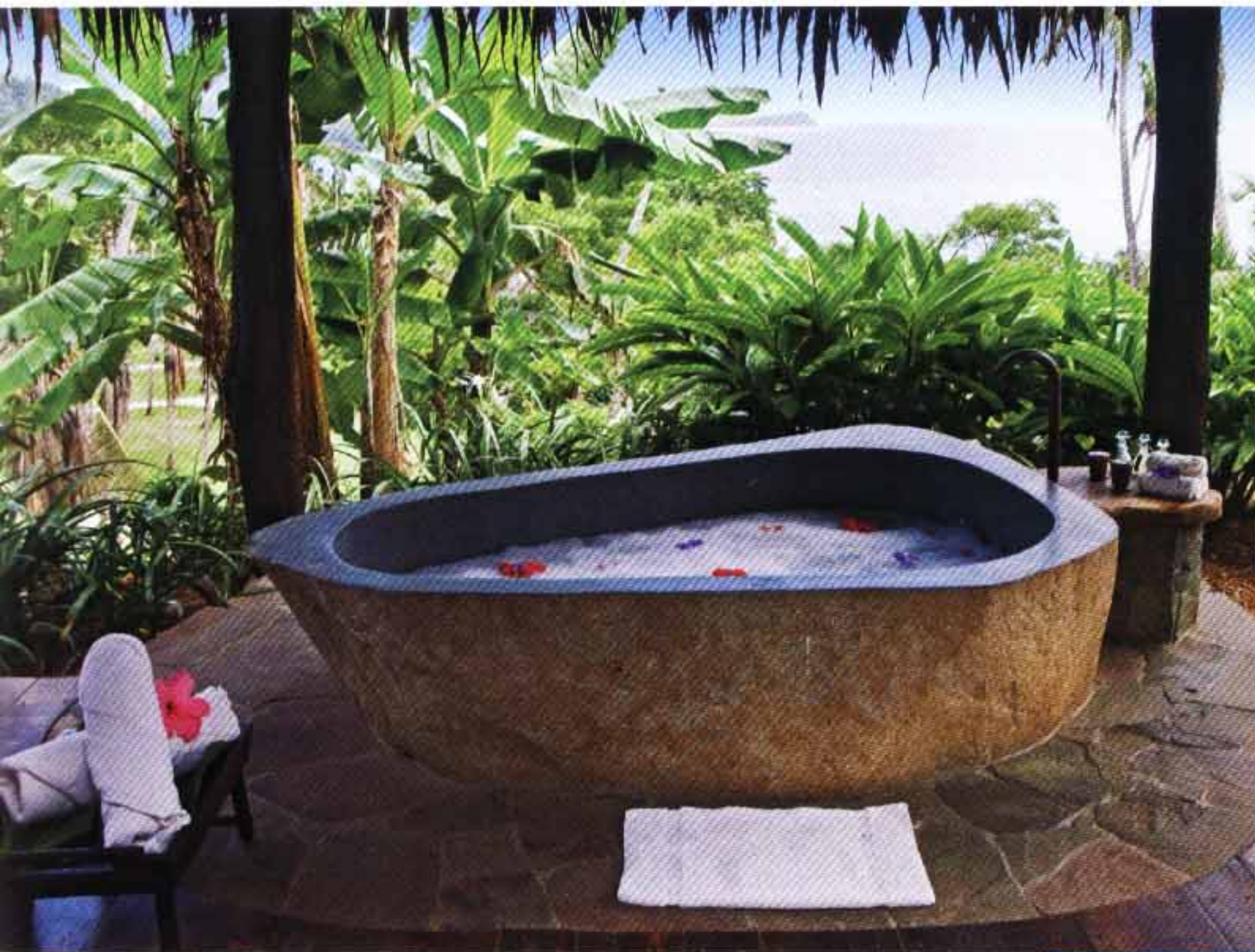
Later we rode in a buggy, careening past dense forests, waterfalls and scalloped bays to our Plantation Residence or villa. Our conical thatched-roof dwelling, done in the local bure style with upscale Fijian chic, had its own pool, outdoor/indoor showers, outsize stone or wood bath tubs plus a private spa pavilion and a lookout with day beds to lounge in. The ultimate luxury was our own private beach where the surf rolled and the reflection of the sun on the water scattered like mercury.

We dove into our private pool holding aloft glasses of wine (the in-room fridge and bar were replete with choice wines and spirits – complimentary in this all-inclusive resort. Fresh juices, canapés and snacks are replenished daily – a

welcome change from the standard bowl of fruits one is generally too lazy to peel!)

The villas are scattered across the southern shore on white sugar-sand beaches, against the backdrop of misty cliffs and buried in clouds of foliage and blossoms. The ultimate is the Hilltop Residence, located in the most isolated and the highest point of the island, which consists of three villas and two swimming pools and is priced at \$26,000 a night! London-based design-diva Lynne Hunt created the interiors of all the villas and her muse was the islands themselves. The upscale Fijian decor exudes the luxury that comes from the use of handcrafted local materials and a sense of space.





## SEVEN STAR RATING

Over the course of our four-day stay, we discovered the hilltop spa, a championship golf course, an equestrian centre, five swanky restaurants that are always open irrespective of the number of guests on the island, a fleet of boats to explore the reef and a vast man-made lagoon of terraced pools, a fine wine cellar and enough leisure options to satisfy the most hyperkinetic of travellers. Throw in a heavenly ambience and you know the place deserves the seven-star rating that it has earned from the Hideaway Hotels guide.

Laucala is not for those looking for a party-hearty scene. There are no discotheques, no shopping, no nightlife on an island steeped in silence and wrapped in primary colours. The island

**TOP: SPA WITH A VIEW BOTTOM: SIT-OUT LOUNGE IN A HILLTOP VILLA**





## II jade ROMANTIC GETAWAY



Serene mornings, sunny noons and nights of mystery and silence were followed by private picnics in the woods, horse rides along the beach, snorkelling, scuba diving, water skiing excursions

resort has the tranquillity and seclusion that lovers seek and those jaded with the psychological and physical jostling of a tumultuous world. Its back-roads pace allows you to find wonder in doing nothing. Except for a few occasions at dinner, we did not meet any other guests, so complete was our sense of seclusion.

We moved around the island in a private buggy along forested paths and explored its glistening beaches fringed by the emptiness of the ocean. Here the

**TOP: THE ROMANTIC SEA GRASS RESTAURANT  
BOTTOM: TRADITION MEETS MODERNITY AT LAUCALA ISLAND**

silence was occasionally fractured by the murmur of surf moving against sand and our whispered conversation. Serene mornings, sunny noons and nights of mystery and silence were followed by private picnics in the woods, horse rides along the beach, snorkelling, scuba diving, water skiing excursions...

### ECO FRIENDLY

For a change of pace, we arrived at the spa one morning and opted for a Fijian bombo massage. A therapist accompanied us to one of the four spa suites located in a leafy enclave with a large stone bath in the garden, hidden by thick foliage. Oil made of local ingredients was kneaded and massaged into our sun-burnt bodies by therapists who used their soft brown feet, knees, palms and even the occasional elbow! Earlier we had visited the spa garden and kitchen where lotions,

