

ROOM WITH A VIEW



CAST OFF ALL CARES

TALK about paradise for rich listers. Not only does Red Bull founder Austrian billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz own Fiji's secluded 1214-hectare Laucala Island, but he bought it in 2003, for a reported \$US10 million, from the family of the late publishing magnate Malcolm Forbes.

Forbes is buried on the island under the epitaph: "When alive, he lived."

While Forbes kept Laucala as an undeveloped getaway, Mateschitz spent five years meticulously turning into reality his vision of what luxury should be.

"It's amazing what you can do with sticks," Stephen Albert, senior design architect for Mateschitz's project, wrote.

In 2008 Laucala opened its doors as a very private luxury resort. What was once a sprawling coconut plantation now offers a world-class 18-hole golf course, top-notch horse facilities including a mini dressage arena and hothouse-grown micro herbs and orchids.

Sensitive to the impact of development, Mateschitz insisted on being consulted on the removal of any trees and kept the coconuts. He also oversaw the design of the 25 lavish residences each with a private beach strip, pool, outdoor bath and a golf buggy for mobility.

In this self-sufficient wonderland, virtually everything plated up in the restaurants – Plantation House, Seagrass and Beach Bar – is produced on the island, from the papaya to the organic bacon.

Even the resort's soaps, lotions and lemongrass scented oils are handmade at the day spa.

Oprah Winfrey, Elle Macpherson and Maria Shriver have all voted with their passports, along with Mateschitz's mate and fellow Austrian, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Laucala's sealed airstrip accommodates international private jets, helping A-listers fly under the radar.

Perhaps it's the neatly stacked cans of Red Bull in every (complimentary) bar

fridge or the mountain bikes parked at each residence, but Mateschitz has stamped his identity on the resort to such an extent you can't help wondering about the self-made man with a wallet as big as his dreams.

"We see him a few times a year and he and his family stay up to three weeks at a time," one of Laucala's 350 staff members says. "He's a humble, friendly man. The first time I met him, I didn't realise he was the owner for two days. He likes to hike around the island each morning to take in the scenery. And he never makes a fuss."

It seems that Mateschitz is also the ideal guest.

FIONA CARRUTHERS

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Laucala Island; standard suite featuring silk jellyfish chandelier by Lynne Hunt of London; the resort's open-air Rock Lounge at dusk.



The writer stayed as a guest of Laucala Island where villas start from \$US4,200 a night for two adults (meals, beverages and activities included). See *Leading Hotels of the World* (lhw.com), 02 9377 8444. She flew with Air Pacific, which will soon rebrand as Fiji Airways (fijialways.com).

