

THE PLOT AGAINST PHIL FALCONE • TOM FRESTON'S REVENGE

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The Dream Island

In Fiji, an ultimate tropical fantasy.

BY FINN-OLAF JONES

"WHEN ALIVE, HE LIVED," reads the memorial to FORBES' late editor-in-chief, Malcolm Forbes, on a palm-shaded lawn overlooking his beloved, green-as-money Laucala Island, a 3,000-acre shoe-shaped Valhalla in the eastern Fijian islands. Since 2003 Austrian tycoon Dietrich Mateschitz, who owns the wildly profitable energy drink Red Bull, has lorded over this isolated paradise, and now he's opened it up to people who want a taste of billionaire life.

Mateschitz built 25 sprawling guest villas in traditional Fijian style, with timber beams tied together to support sea grass roofs. Their connected pavilions—bedroom, bathroom and living room—encircle private pools facing the beach. I kept my sliding doors open to let the sea lull me to sleep, though civilization was close at hand with Wi-Fi and satellite TV. A light switch turned on a dozen tiki lamps, converting the place into a one-man luau.

You could easily hole up in your compound and have everything brought to you, and you might not encounter anyone even if you went out for a swim. The island has a dozen beaches and 38 pools that blend into the tropical surroundings while delivering distinctive wow factors. My fa-

vorite was a clear glass cube discreetly jutting above the beachfront like an aerial aquatic sculpture.

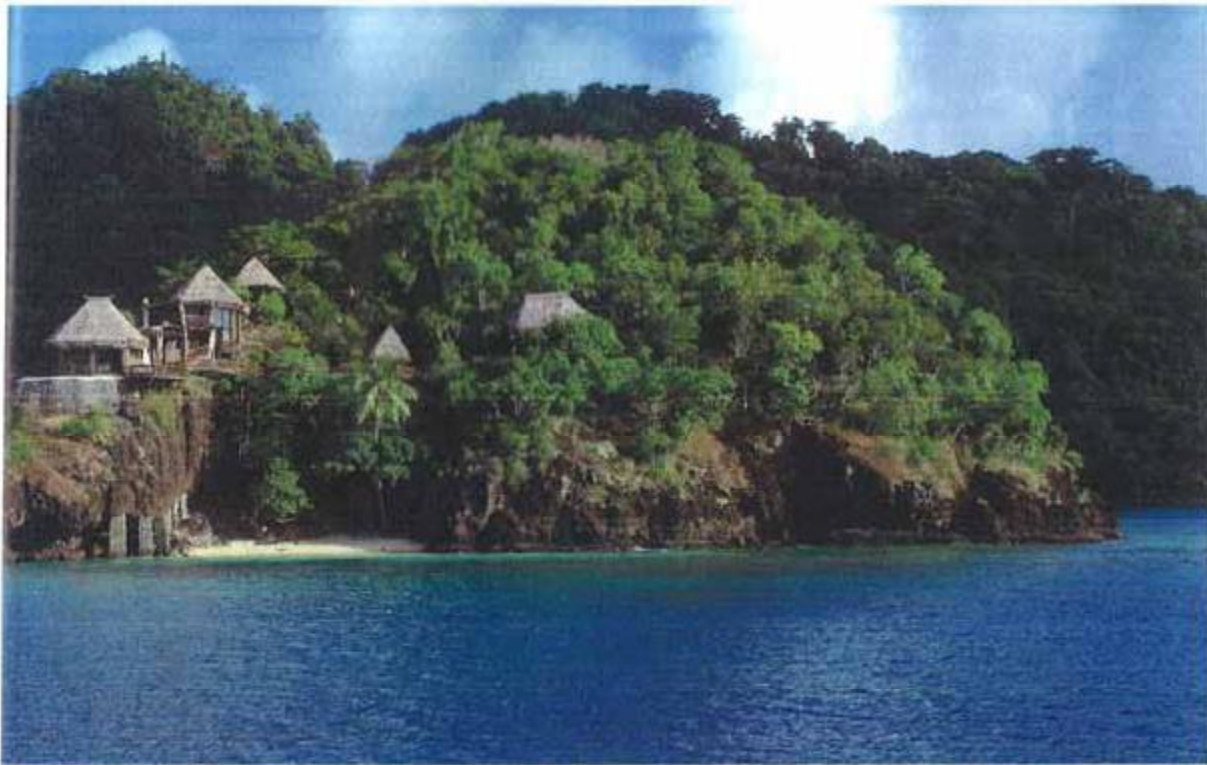
Serving the privileged few—this must be the world's highest staff-to-guest ratio—are an astounding 350 uniformed attendants with an arsenal of high-powered toys from Jet Skis to shotguns. There's a fully stocked golf pro shop on the edge of David McLay Kidd's immaculate 18-hole Scottish carpet carved through Laucala's dense jungles.

"This bewilderment of choices on such a small island—it's like the Swiss Army Knife of vacation spots," a guest told manager Maja Kilgore, who, with her husband, Thomas, runs the place with a panache that makes *Fantasy Island's* Mr. Roarke seem like a slacker. "Then we must make sure to make good use of the corkscrew," she responded, opening the umpteenth bottle from the island's bountiful cellar to serve with yet another feast in one of its five restaurants.

At 6 a.m. the day after we'd arrived, a jet-lagged friend and I decided to circumnavigate Laucala on the brand-new mountain bikes parked outside our villas. We pulled up to the gleaming white, formal Plantation House restaurant and knocked gingerly, wondering



if anyone would be up at this hour. We were whisked inside like long-lost relatives, white tablecloths were laid, and a gorgeous array of local fruit appeared, along with—gasp!—just-baked croissants whose crispness I'd have trouble matching in Paris. "We have two bakers from Germany who get up early every morning in case someone drops by," our waitress explained.



Take traditional Fijian architecture (timber beams supporting sea grass roofs); sprinkle with 38 pools and a dozen beaches, and add magnificent South Pacific views. The result: luxe, Laucala-style.

That breakfast encapsulates Laucala's greatest luxury: spontaneity. Like tropical genies, the staff stays mostly invisible until you give voice to your whims. Then things happen very quickly and very well. On a single day I managed to ride a horse, grab a round

of golf with resident PGA-circuit pro Tony Christie, get reinvigorated with a better-than-in-Thailand Thai massage, and water-ski around the island—with just a few minutes' notice between adventures. By the time I'd toweled down for a late-afternoon scuba dive (thank

God for the Red Bull in the minibar), magic hands had already equipped the dive boat with gear in my size and sushi to eat when I bubbled back up from the Technicolor reefs. 🍣

\$3,800-\$35,000 per day, includes all food, drinks and activities. 011-679-888-0077, laucala.com.