



# Island Living

Set in the midst of the South Pacific, Laucala Island is an über-luxurious getaway. Wellness expert **Mala Barua** comes away thoroughly charmed.



I wasn't expecting a private plane to whisk me off to Laucala Island, when I arrived in Nadi International Airport, Fiji. Neither was I expecting a three-room villa overlooking the Pacific Ocean with a private pool, a fridge stocked with champagne with the Laucala Islands private label, an outdoor and indoor bathroom and three outdoor decks to dine and lounge in. All this nestled amidst the whispering coconut palms overlooking a bright blue ocean, laid out just for me!

I had just landed in paradise!

The joint general managers David Stepitic and his charming wife Risako received me in the island's airport, with a local serenade to put me in the mood for island life. I was handed a key to a golf buggy to explore the island for the next one month. I wasn't sure if I was dreaming.

Laucala Island is the kind of luxury that doesn't expect you to take out your wallet while you are here. All champagne, restaurants and activities are included in the price of the rooms. The island is set amidst coconut plantations, sandy beaches, turquoise lagoons, rich green

## WELLNESS



Clockwise from left: The stunning pool at Laucala Island, Fiji; a kingfisher surveys the island; inside the Peninsula Villa; herb garden signage. Opposite: The Overwater Villa's bathroom offers sensational views; sailing around the island.



mountains and breathtaking natural beauty. It was a private island until 2008 when it opened its doors to the public. The island is untouched and natural. In the 3,500 acres of land there are only 25 villas all concentrated on one side of the island. The rest is used for agriculture, farming and leisure activities such as an 18-hole golf course, horse riding and loads of water sports from coral reef diving to jet skiing and kite boarding. Much of the interior of the island still remains in its original coconut plantation avatar.

With hibiscus in their hair, the Fijian staff greet you with big smiles at every corner. They all knew my name before I arrived, so "Bula Mala!" was a standard echo that followed me around the island. I was visiting to consult on the wellness aspects of the resort.

Teaching Inner Silence Meditation (*mystic-asia.in*) in the private decks at the villas at sunrise and doing Tai Chi barefoot on the beach was a regular activity that I didn't complain about. The spacious premium spa suites were more than luxurious. We implemented two interesting Fijian Spa Journeys, the



Coconut Au Naturel and Hibiscus Hiatus using local homemade ingredients. We grated coconuts, smoked the coconut oil for enhanced flavour, made hibiscus tea and laid our hot stones out in the moonlight to capture the moon's energy. Their elaborate hydroponics garden provided all the herbs like peppermint and basil for the holistic spa treatments.





Clockwise from top: Peninsula Villa's lounge area; a gourmet offering at the Plantation House Restaurant; Laucala Island's holistic spa.

spacious terrace, bathing in the hot tub, or swimming in the large private pool, that is carved directly into the rocks of the shore.

The four restaurants provide romantic candlelight dinners on the private beach or fine dining with an elaborate degustation menu in the Plantation House Restaurant. I loved chef Martin's rendition of "White," a white dessert made with coconut and white chocolate. I even challenged him to make me a vegan dinner! My favourite restaurant though was the Seagrass Restaurant, perched on a Cliffside where I could sit and watch the stars reflect on the ocean surface.

I went trotting on the beach with the my favourite horse, Oscar, took my first open water PADI diving course, went on a sunset cruise in the island's luxury yacht, only to be surprised by a barbecue laid out to welcome me back to the jetty.

Risako topped it all by inviting me to visit the neighbouring island, Naivivi, to meet the local chief. We landed in the knee-deep water and walked over to the rolling hillside village. We had no idea that there was a welcome serenade waiting for us with young men and their guitars singing island songs, around a big bowl of local grogg, *kava* and an array of homemade tapioca and coconut snacks. Apparently I was the chief guest and had to make a speech! The welcome was heart rendering in its warmth and simplicity. It could be that the islanders just needed an excuse to spend the afternoon doing what they do best, drink *kava* and sing mesmerising songs. Now I understand why Paul Gaugin never returned to France from the Pacific Islands! 679/888-0077; [laucala.tv](http://laucala.tv); from USD 4,200 all inclusive. +

## 3 More Spa Retreats

### LEELA PALACE UDAIPUR, INDIA

The ultimate tented spa suite in this grand hotel overlooks Lake Pichola with its sparkling waters. A spectacular experience of being one with nature in royal surroundings as you swim in the private pool of this suite! [leelahotels.com](http://leelahotels.com).

### AMANKORA, GANGTEY VALLEY, BHUTAN

Soak in a tub heated with red-hot volcanic rocks in the middle of a potato farm and watch the vast Gangtey Valley from the privacy of your hut, Aman style! [amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com).

### COMO SHAMBALA ESTATE, UBUD, BALI

Listen to the Ayang River flow below you or the sound of the birds, as you enjoy a spa treatment in the open air "bale" pavilion perched on the forested cliffside of this beautiful estate. [comoshambala.com](http://comoshambala.com).

I was invited (normally offered only to honeymooners!) to experience a massage treatment in the very exclusive and private Tadra beach. A special speedboat took me out round the island while the therapist was waiting to welcome me with a chilled glass of champagne. Lying under the Fijian *bure* listening to the ocean and the swaying coconut trees, while I allowed the warm coconut oil to seep into my body, was an experience of nature at its best.

The groups of villas at the resort are tucked away amidst the palm trees giving complete seclusion and privacy. My favourite was the Overwater Villa. This two-bedroom villa is the epitome of paradise—elevating the resort to a work of marine art. It appears to float above the emerald-green lagoon, allowing guests (often Hollywood celebrities) to reside in luxury over an omnipresent ocean whether relaxing on the