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This New All-inclusive Resort Is One of the Most Luxurious in Fiji

Stay on the tiny Fijian island of Laucala — now owned by the co-founder of Red Bull and operated by Como Hotels and Resorts.

By Wendy O'Dea | Published on August 19, 2022



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND

The air is heavy and humid as my chartered flight from Nadi, Fiji's international airport, touches down on the tiny island of Laucala. But I can take the heat because arriving at this tropical utopia allows me to finally see Como Hotels and Resorts' new flagship property and it's first in the South Pacific.

Known for its impeccable service and holistic Shambhala wellness programs, Como Laucala opened in Dec. 2021. Before the 45-minute private jet flight from Nadi to Laucala, I took a direct red-eye flight from Los Angeles International Airport, which clocks in at a little over 10 hours. And it was worth every single minute.

There's been an air of mystery surrounding Laucala (pronounced La-thah-la) since Malcolm Forbes purchased the private refuge 50 years ago. But it was the vision of the current owner, Dietrich Mateschitz, co-founder of Red Bull, to develop the ultra-luxe, private Laucala Island Resort, now operated by Como Hotels. The destination has generally remained under the radar, and this level of exclusivity has attracted many celebrities over the years, including Oprah, who once rented out the entire property.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND

The resort, built using native materials on a former coconut plantation, boasts 25 standalone villas. The villas are tucked tightly into the lush tropical rainforest, which itself is set along the pristine white-sand beaches or, as is the case with the owner's villa, perched atop the highest hill with 360-degree panoramic views. Every accommodation features one, two, or three bedrooms, a separate lounge with floor-to-ceiling accordion doors, televisions equipped with a Bluetooth entertainment system, high-speed Wi-Fi, and a complimentary bar fully stocked with top-shelf liquors, wine, and Red Bull (of course). Need snacks or supplies replenished? A private butler will take care of that.

For travelers like me who judge hotels by their bathrooms, Como Laucala sets the bar high. Gigantic bathtubs carved from stone or wood sit beneath a high, conical-shaped thatch roof with a whimsical light fixture resembling a squad of giant squid, their tentacles draping dramatically overhead. The fixture (and the massive jellyfish chandelier in the sunken living room) was designed exclusively for Laucala using local shells and magimagi (coconut threads) and appear to come to life, clinking and wriggling, when a warm breeze blows through.

Outdoor villa living is no less impressive — each has about 250 square meters of manicured private space. The outdoor areas include two open-air showers, another eye-popping bathtub, daybeds, sun loungers, a dining bure, and an infinity pool overlooking a private beach. And if that isn't enough balm for the soul, a wooden yoga platform is also available.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND

In addition to zooming around the resort's paved paths in a personally assigned open-air buggy (ok, it's a golf cart), guests can explore the 3,500-acre island by booking a farm tour with the resort's executive chef. While most of the island is uninhabited and untouched, the farm raises livestock and cultivates organic crops in a hydroponic vegetable garden, an herb garden, and an orchid pavilion.

Those efforts have resulted in the resort being up to 85% self-sustaining, and Como aims to gradually push that percentage even higher. But that doesn't mean it's not supporting the local economy. According to executive chef Dan Boller, the resort will only farm produce that cannot be obtained from local suppliers.

"[We] are passionate about supporting local communities as much as possible," he told me. "If local farmers or fishermen can provide the products we need, then we won't grow it here."

This commitment to growing or sourcing fresh, local ingredients aligns with Como's farm-to-table culinary ethos, personalized for each guest.

Upon my morning arrival, I went directly to the Plantation House, one of five dining options on the island, where the chef prepares a Tau Tray with small bites of multiple items from the menu. The experience allows guests to discover what they like best from the menu. As it turns out, I liked it all.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND

Other dining options on the property include the Seagrass Lounge and Restaurant serving Thai cuisine, the spectacular Rock Lounge serving Teppanyaki, the casual Beach Bar, and the Pool Bar. The last one is, of course set alongside the resort's massive lagoon-style pool, complete with an Instagram-ready 82-foot raised glass lap pool.

In three days, I couldn't experience all of Como Laucala's activities, including a dizzying number of water sport offerings, horseback riding, hiking, cycling, tennis, and golfing. The 18-hole championship course was designed by David McLay Kidd and weaves through the jungle then, at hole 10, alongside an unspoiled, secluded beach that is, perhaps, a bit too distracting. Guests can also book trips on the resort's submarine for an added thrill (though it is, unfortunately, currently out of commission).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND

While most activities and dining are included in COMO Laucala's all-inclusive price, some outer reef activities, such as deep-sea fishing incur additional charges. Specialty items from the resort's wine cellar and premium treatments from the Como Shambhala Retreat spa menu also come at an additional cost.

Not surprisingly, this luxury doesn't come cheap. Nightly rates for villas run between \$6,000 to \$12,000, and (when not in use by Mateschitz) the owner's villa can go for up to \$50,000 per night.

When it's time to depart, I reluctantly make my way to the private airstrip, where I'm met by many of the friendly Fijian faces I came to know during my stay. Standing under the open-air bure, they sing "Isa Lei," the traditional Fijian farewell song, and wave as our flight taxis down the runway. During takeoff, I realize that, though I've crossed a Como visit off my travel list, it hasn't gotten any shorter because it has now been replaced with "return to Fiji's COMO Laucala."



PHOTO: TREY RATCLIFF/COURTESY OF COMO LAUCALA ISLAND