

HOTELS & RESORTS

## THIS MIGHT BE THE MOST SUSTAINABLE UBER-LUXE WHOLE-ISLAND BUY-OUT IN THE WORLD

With Kokomo Island Private Resort in Fiji, billionaire Australian property developer Lang Walker is melding ecological sensitivity with ultra luxury.

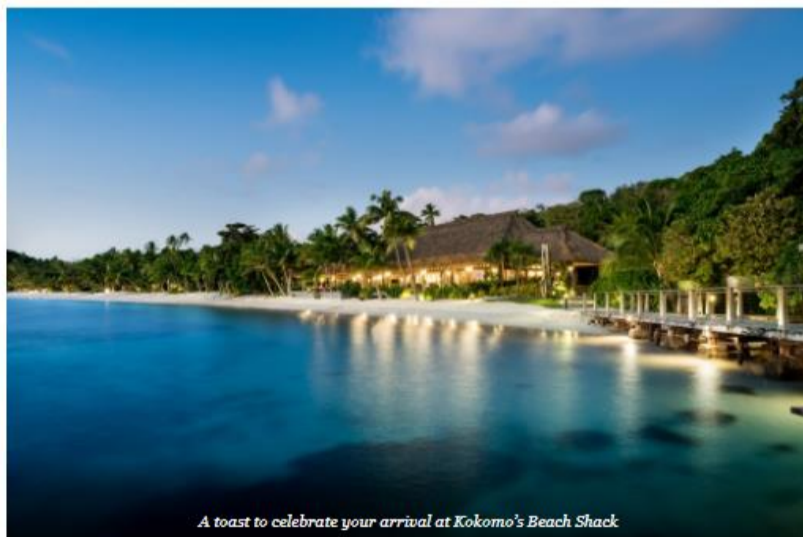


By Christian Barker  
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**“I’**VE BEEN A SAILOR AND A DIVER for over 60 years,” Lang Walker says. “Anything to do with water, I’m all over it.” Truer words were never spoken. Concrete may be this property tycoon’s stock in trade, but it’s seawater that runs through Walker’s veins.

As a young lad in Sydney, Walker raced small sailboats, and after finishing high school, he worked as a deckhand aboard yachts off the northern coast of Australia. At the age of 19, Walker joined the Royal Australian Navy, serving for seven years in the Clearance Diving Branch. Specializing in amphibious combat, rescue, recon, counter-terrorism and explosives, it’s one of the most mentally and physically demanding units in the navy.

Unsurprisingly, Walker says he loves a challenge. He attributes no small measure of his success as a property developer over the past five decades to taking on projects others might find too daunting. It’s an approach that has paid off handsomely. Today, with a net worth of A\$4.48 billion (US\$3.38 billion) according to this year’s *Australian Financial Review* Rich List, Lang Walker is one of the wealthiest people in the world.



*A toast to celebrate your arrival at Kokomo’s Beach Shack*

The four-meter dinghy Walker sailed as a boy has long since been replaced by a succession of super-yachts. He could spend his leisure time anywhere he likes, but Walker has chosen to throw his considerable resources behind carving out a patch of paradise in Fiji. What’s more, he’s decided to share it — and not just with his family, though Walker regularly holidays here with his wife, children and 10 grandkids. (It’s the “glue” that holds the clan together, he says.) The spot in question: a little place called Kokomo.

When Walker first visited the 56.5-hectare Pacific isle that would become **Kokomo Private Island Resort**, “I thought it was the most beautiful place on earth,” he says. Arriving here on his 58-meter sloop (also called *Kokomo*), Walker explains, he found some of the best diving he’d ever encountered, on the fourth-largest barrier reef in existence, in waters safely accessible to large yachts. He also discovered the bare bones of a luxury resort, abandoned by a previous developer.



Ocean pool deck



Hobie Cats



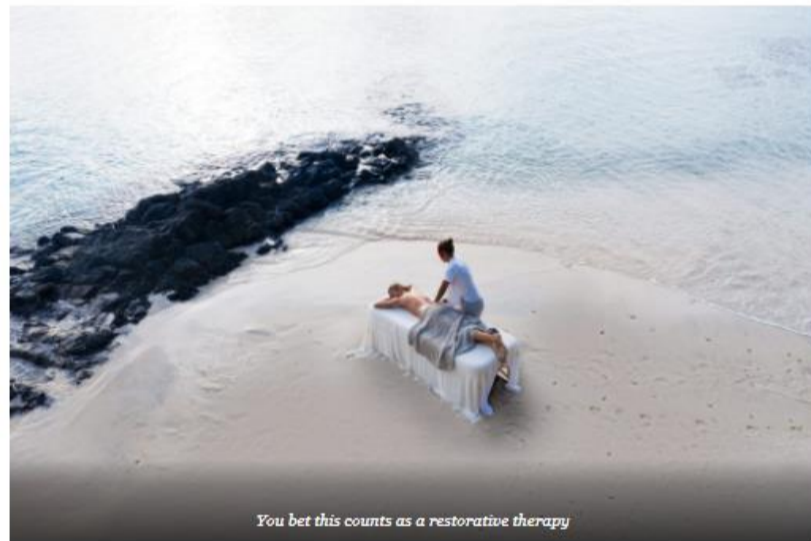
Locavore lunch



Koko Cabana

“A mate of mine said to me, ‘If anyone can fix it, you can.’ I looked at it and I thought, yeah, I know what to do,” Walker says. So he acquired the property and set about constructing his dream private island resort. “I’ve always loved difficult things,” Walker says — and with Kokomo, he got precisely that. An initial budget of \$10 million and a timeline of 18 months blew out to \$100 million and five years, before Kokomo finally opened in 2017.

Walker jokes that the island is his (very, very) expensive hobby and expresses doubts that he’ll ever recoup his outlay. But having invested to the extent that he has, he’s determined to make Kokomo one of the best resorts of its kind. Beyond the usual luxury trappings — outstanding cuisine, beautiful décor, extensive activities, plush spa treatments and such — one area where the resort excels is sustainability and ecological sensitivity.



You bet this counts as a restorative therapy

“We’re so fortunate to work for owners that are as passionate about the environment as we are,” says Cliona O’Flaherty, one of two marine biologists in residence at Kokomo. Alongside her counterpart Viviana Taubera, O’Flaherty — an Irish transplant who’s worked in Fiji since 2014 — oversees Kokomo’s multiple marine conservation initiatives.

Key among these is a manta ray acoustic and satellite tagging project, plus funding and participation in the long-term study of these vulnerable creatures. The resort also operates a coral nursery and restoration project to protect and revitalize nearby reefs, threatened by the effects of climate change. Another major initiative is a mangrove-forest restoration program, maintaining local islands’ mangrove populations, which play an essential role in sea-life ecosystems and coastline preservation.



Manta-tagging project



Mangrove planting



Coral regeneration

This year, Kokomo instituted a new clam nursery project with the Fiji Ministry of Fisheries, O’Flaherty says. “We’re helping propagate clams and transplant them back onto the reef, because they’ve been massively over-harvested at the moment. And then we also have a turtle conservation project that we’re soon to launch,” she notes.

“Our goal is to engage and excite people about our projects,” O’Flaherty says. “From the minute guests step off the plane, they’re already actively participating in sustainability initiatives without even knowing it. From the traditional architecture, to how we source our foods on the island from our five-acre onsite farm, or our sustainable fishing ‘dock-to-dish’ initiatives, it’s all been thought out so that everything’s sustainability focused.”



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Organic plants at The Farm; Cliona O'Flaherty and Sean Flakelar; harvesting honey; Walker-d'Plank Bar

Kokomo's new general manager Sean Flakelar is a longtime veteran of Aman resorts, previously managing the group's Amanjiwo, Amanoi and Amangalla properties. He says sustainability and corporate social responsibility are integral to his approach as a hotelier. "Complementing the land, complementing the culture, trying to enhance and work together with the local environment and community — this has always been core to everything I've done over the 28 years I've spent in hospitality," Flakelar says.

Going beyond mere conservation and damage minimisation, Kokomo is one of a growing number of hotels and resorts pioneering what they call regenerative hospitality — actively improving their environment and community. "It's going to be a new movement that I think people will definitely, consciously gravitate towards," Flakelar says. Although maintaining a pristine setting is certainly to Kokomo's commercial advantage, these initiatives are not driven by the profit motive. As Walker puts it, "Some things aren't about making money."



In the house reef

*Due to current Fijian entry restrictions, Kokomo is presently available exclusively for full-island buyouts, from US\$36,000 plus tax per night for up to 12 guests, based on a minimum seven-night stay. (Additional guests, up to a total of 30, may be accommodated at an additional charge.) Guests may choose from among nine villas and four residences at the resort.*

*Package includes return helicopter or seaplane transfers from Nadi to Kokomo; breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, accompanied by a selection of alcoholic beverages including beer, wine and spirits; unlimited watersports and use of resort facilities; an introductory scuba dive or one tank dive, per person, per stay; a restorative back massage per person, per day; personal golf buggy per accommodation; dedicated butler service; and laundry and pressing service.*

[kokomoislandfiji.com](http://kokomoislandfiji.com)



Seaplane transfers are included in the price of admission

Link to article: <https://travelandleisureasia.com/>