

# ESCAPE



TIM MCKENNA

WANDERLUST

## *ISLAND Beauty*

*The legacy of Hollywood legend Marlon Brando shines at THE BRANDO, the South Pacific's premier private island resort*

By Paul Rubio

Rewind to the early 1960s when a young Marlon Brando arrived in French Polynesia to film *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The South Pacific had long piqued Brando's curiosity, and his freshman trip to the island nation sparked love at first sight.

By 1967, Brando had consummated his love affair with French Polynesia by purchasing Tetiaroa, a breathtaking atoll roughly 30 miles north of Tahiti,

anchored by a lustrous blue lagoon and fringed by 12 palm tree-studded motus (islets), vibrant patches of coral, and countless white sand beaches. At his remote home away from home, Brando sought to preserve—and even share—a piece of French Polynesia's natural splendor and biological heritage by not only protecting the land but creating a world-class research station and the planet's foremost carbon-neutral resort.

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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: A ONE-BEDROOM VILLA AT THE BRANDO; A TWO-BEDROOM VILLA; AERIAL VIEW OF TETIAROA; VILLA BATHROOMS BRING THE OUTDOORS IN; GREEN SEA TURTLES ARE FREQUENT GUESTS AT THE BRANDO.

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Fast-forward to present day when Brando's dream project has materialized into something more elevated, high-tech, and highbrow than the movie star could have ever imagined. Brando didn't live to see the fruits of his vision—he passed away in 2004—but he entrusted prominent hotelier and fellow environmentalist Richard Bailey to crystalize and execute his plans. The actor's legacy now flourishes at Brando's family estate vis-à-vis a hyper-exclusive and eco-minded private island resort, The Brando, on the motu of Onetahi, complemented by the other safeguarded islets of Tetiaroa, which remain completely untouched.

What makes The Brando so special—as in arguably best-island-retreat-in-the-world special? In a word: everything. From its profound history to its detail-oriented magic to a surreal, cinematic backdrop of extreme tropical exotica (rich in rare flora and fauna) and an unwavering sustainability mantra, this is ultra-luxury with a soul.

Marlon Brando wasn't the first or the last influ-

ential figure to frequent Tetiaroa. In fact, as far back as the eighteenth century, the atoll was a favorite of Tahitian royalty, according to oral history and evidenced by ancient structures and ceremonial sites that archaeologists have uncovered in recent decades. Beyond Brando's 40-year relationship with his beloved Tetiaroa, regulars at his namesake resort read like a who's who of popular culture: actor Leonardo DiCaprio, socialite Pippa Middleton, and former President Barack Obama, who began his post-presidential memoir, *A Promised Land*, on-island.

Besides a glitzy title, the famous primarily flock to The Brando for the very same reason as other well-heeled travelers: to escape at their own pace. Home base is one of 35 eco-chic villas, which begin at a generous 1,033 square feet and seamlessly integrate into the native surrounds thanks to pandanus leaf roofing and building materials made of local or certified organic, renewable, or recycled components. Floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors ensure continuous spatial flow, opening to a vast private terrace inclusive of an infinity-edge pool, dining area, and swathe of sandy beach that is shared, at times, with nesting green sea turtles.



FROM FAR LEFT: DINNER ON THE BEACH; A RED-FOOTED BOOBY; THE COCOON-LIKE TREATMENT ROOMS AT VARUA TE ORA POLYNESIAN SPA. BELOW: THE BRANDO SUITES BORA BORA.



PAUL RUFFO



## BRANDO SUITES BORA BORA

The Brando flaunts all one could covet in a French Polynesian vacation—everything except an overwater bungalow, that is. To curtail any FOMO (fear of missing out) one might have in the island nation that invented overwater accommodations, The Brando teamed up with The InterContinental Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa to create four overwater

Brando Suites Bora Bora, the design of which mirrors The Brando's own aesthetic. The four parcels of prime floating real estate deliver unobstructed vistas of Mount Otemanu, framed by brilliant

turquoise waters. These million-dollar views are present from the master bedroom, private infinity pool, terrace, sundeck—just about every nook of the suite's 3,465 square feet. Special packages allow guests to visit both The Brando private island plus its sister overwater suites. ([thalasso.intercontinental.com](http://thalasso.intercontinental.com); [tahititourisme.com](http://tahititourisme.com))



While it's possible to fulfill a cast-away fantasy without ever leaving the confines of the villa, most choose to maximize their time at The Brando discovering greater Tetiaroa. After all, one of Earth's most dramatic blue lagoons beckons, explorable by kayak, stand-up paddleboard, *va'a* (Polynesian outrigger canoe), or mask and snorkel. The latter best reveals the atoll's prolific coral gardens and marine life thriving therein (more than 167 species have been documented here). Undeveloped areas of Onetahi and surrounding virgin motus are also the subjects of daily naturalist-led tours. One specializes in bird-watching and photography as thousands of land and seabirds call islet Tahuna Iti home, including great frigate birds and red-footed boobies. Another promises a scenic lay of the land, while yet another focuses on the atoll's pre-Brando origins, visiting the remains of an ancient Polynesian temple or *marae*. There are also regularly scheduled cultural experiences like Polynesian dance classes, ukulele lessons, and traditional weaving sessions.

Activities are bundled into The Brando's all-inclusive rate, as are meals, libations, and treatments at Varua te Ora Polynesian Spa. Enjoy a romantic dinner in the privacy of your villa or interact with the chef at intimate Japanese teppanyaki restaurant, Nami. Sample fine French cuisine at Les Mutinés, fraternize with fellow guests over daytime tiki cocktails at the beachfront Bob's Bar, or feast on Polynesian fish dishes at toes-in-the-sand Beachcomber Café. The Brando's guests have complete liberty to make their days as action-packed or languid, scheduled, or spontaneous as desired.

Immersed in this excess, it's easy to forget that The Brando is nearing its goal of becoming fully

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THE BRANDO

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ABOVE, FROM LEFT: BIKE ACROSS THE MOTU OF ONE-TAHI ON A BRANDO-BRANDED TWO-WHEELER; SUNSET VIEWS FROM A ONE-BEDROOM VILLA; FINE FRENCH DINING AWAITS AT LES MUTINÉS.

carbon neutral and self-sustainable. Those villas, for instance, are part of a pioneering scientific experiment, cooled by a complex seawater air-conditioning (SWAC) system (fed by the cold of the ocean depths) and powered by solar energy generated from photovoltaic solar panels along Tetiaroa's airstrip and coconut oil biofuel. Bike past the villas on Turtle Beach and stumble upon The Ecostation, a duo of wet and dry research laboratories flanked by housing for international scientists conducting short- and long-term studies in fields like ecology, marine biology, physical geography, and conserva-

tion. Chat with a visiting researcher, attend evening lectures, or request a green tour to learn more about The Brando's sustainability initiatives and the resort's noteworthy Platinum LEED certification (the highest possible rating for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

It's the earth-friendly ingenuity that realizes Brando's vision for Tetiaroa; molding the South Pacific's most exclusive resort was an afterthought. But together, it's the best of both worlds—resolute environmental stewardship without compromising luxury. You can be sure Brando would be proud. (*thebrando.com*) <<

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