



Marlon Brando's Legacy Lives On

A ground-breaking eco-retreat, The Brando in French Polynesia is the living embodiment of the actor's passion for this delicate environment

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⬆️ **Clockwise from above:** The Brando is a haven for resident and migrating bird species; the island is a living sanctuary; its coral gardens are studied and protected; a traditional Polynesian outrigger; catch and release fishing.



Decades before eco-tourism became a global movement, movie star Marlon Brando dreamt of a luxury resort built in harmony with nature. The release of the *Waltzing With Brando* film trailer last November reignited interest in this lesser-known chapter of the Hollywood icon's life — his passion for environmental preservation. On the remote Tetiaroa Atoll in French Polynesia, his visionary dream came to life as The Brando, a resort standing as a testament to his revolutionary vision.

I experienced Brando's legacy firsthand at this refuge, frequented by luminaries like Britney Spears, Leonardo DiCaprio, Johnny Depp and the Obamas. It's more than a resort — the property is a nature preserve, an open-air laboratory and, as Brando envisioned, a "university of the sea." The Brando seamlessly merges luxury with ecological responsibility, standing as a global model for sustainable travel.

A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

Brando became enamoured with French Polynesia and his French Polynesian and Chinese co-star Tarita Teriipaia while filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*, which premiered in 1962. Tetiaroa, an atoll of twelve motus encircled by a coral reef, captivated Brando, and he purchased it in 1967. He envisioned Tetiaroa as a self-sufficient sanctuary and an intersection of luxury and environmental preservation. "You can't bring culture here; you have to adapt to theirs," he once said, highlighting his reverence for the island's natural and cultural abundance.

Brando started building his dream into reality in the 1970s, erecting a modest hotel and airstrip on Tetiaroa. However, the project faced insurmountable challenges, from battering tropical storms to financial unviability. A turning point appeared when Brando formed a deep friendship with local hotelier Richard Bailey, and together, they dreamed up the groundwork for Brando's ultimate vision. After his death, the Brando Family Trust and Bailey's Pacific Beachcomber carried that vision forward, culminating in the opening of The Brando in 2014.

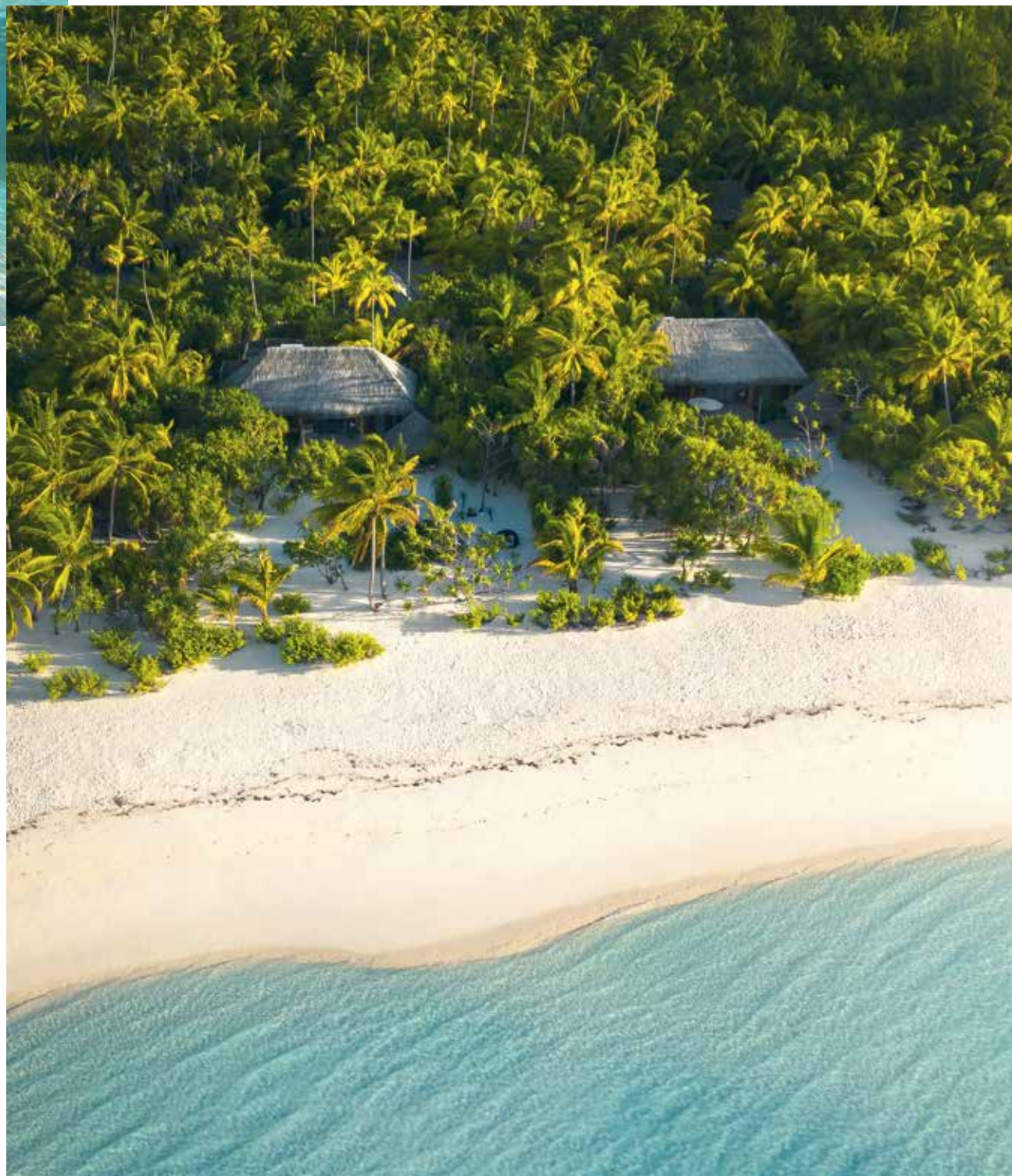
BAREFOOT LUXURY MEETS SUSTAINABILITY

Set on Motu Onetahi, an islet on Tetiaroa, The Brando's 35 villas each offer a private stretch of white sand beach and a secluded infinity pool. Privacy is paramount; guests must sign a waiver promising not to photograph other visitors. Yachts cannot dock directly at the resort to preserve the delicate coral reef. Instead, guests are encouraged to moor in Tahiti and take the short and scenic flight aboard the resort's plane. For those exploring the broader atoll, it's possible to moor off one of its motus, like Rimatuu.

From dipping underneath the translucent, kaleidoscopic waters to spotting eagle rays gliding by, it's an unparalleled experience of wonder and solitude. "Tetiaroa is beautiful beyond my capacity to describe," Brando once said, and his sentiment



Clockwise from top left: Turtle hatchlings in the lagoon; maintaining the resort's beehives; the islands boast its own natural wonders; castaway luxury; The Brando was the world's first LEED Platinum certified resort.



still resonates. It seems impossible to encompass the island's incomparable beauty in mere words.

But The Brando is more than just one of the world's most opulent resorts. It was the first to receive LEED Platinum Certification, the world's highest standard for sustainable construction. Its structures blend locally sourced materials with cutting-edge green technology. Photovoltaic panels generate 60% of the resort's energy needs, while onsite composting and a dedicated recycling centre minimise waste.

Guests can also tour the world's largest seawater air conditioning system (SWAC), which cools the resort by drawing frigid water from the ocean's depth. This remarkable innovation reduces energy usage by up to 90% compared to traditional air conditioning.

Environmental stewardship shines during The Brando's green tour, where I got a firsthand glimpse behind the scenes. During the tour, the guide lifts the curtain on renewable energy initiatives, waste management and organic gardens. One fascinating feat is the mosquito sterilisation program, which nearly eradicated mosquitoes on the atoll by breeding and releasing millions of sterile males. The result? A disease-free paradise for both local wildlife and visiting guests.

The Tetiaroa Society, a non-profit dedicated to protecting and studying the atolls, hosts several nature-centred activities.

I joined a naturalist for a snorkelling excursion with humpback mothers in calving grounds with their babies. It is a magical experience without the crowds at one of the few places where you can swim with these elegant creatures.

Other activities include bird-watching tours of Motu Tahunai Iti, known locally as Bird Island, home to boobies, terns and egrets. Local Polynesians lead classes on *pareu* tie-dyeing, Tahitian language and traditional instruments for those interested in Polynesian culture.

A LEGACY THAT INSPIRES

Brando's vision has come to fruition at The Brando, where scientists gather to pioneer research, and local schoolchildren are invited to visit and learn. The property is a model for sustainable hospitality and luxury worldwide.

As I float in the crystalline lagoon, surrounded by Brando's cherished serenity, I meditate on how his forward-thinking and eccentric vision fused the intersection between indulgence and environmental concern. For those seeking a trip where luxury coexists with purpose, The Brando is an unparalleled escape encapsulating what Brando called "the delicate balance between man and nature."



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