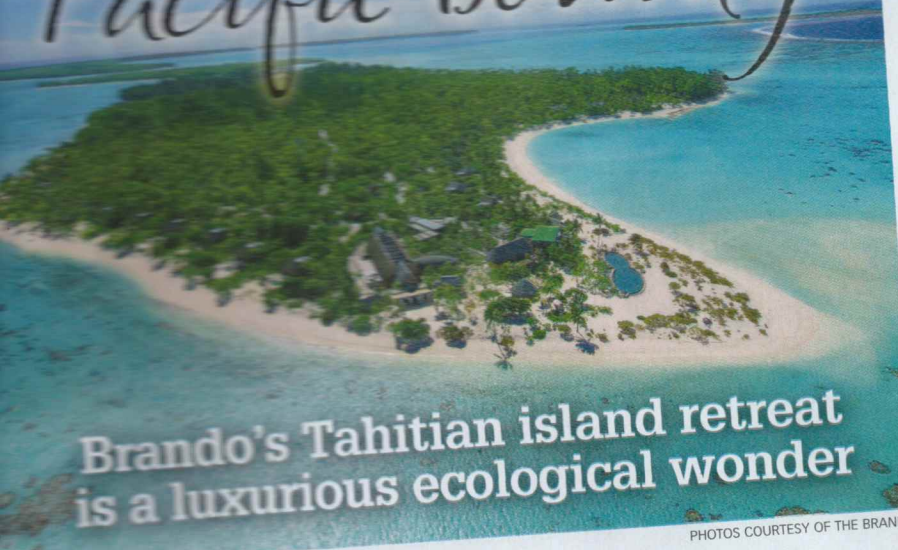


# Pacific bounty



## Brando's Tahitian island retreat is a luxurious ecological wonder

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BRANDO

By Peter Greenberg

MORE THAN A half century ago, Marlon Brando seduced us—as moviegoers—with the magic, the light and the romance of French Polynesia, in *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

At the same time, back in 1962, the South Pacific also seduced Marlon Brando.

When the actor first came to the small, 4.5-acre island of Tetiaroa, once a retreat for Polynesian chiefs and royalty, he realized that it was more than just a quiet place to get away from it all. It was a secluded private Polynesian hideaway where he could have it all: untouched, palm-fringed beaches, stunning turquoise water and an almost endless display of coral, fish and spectacular marine life. He decided to buy it, stay there and build his own very private paradise.

"My mind is always soothed when I imagine myself sitting on my South Sea island at night," he once said. "And if I have my way, Tetiaroa will remain forever a place that reminds Tahitians of what they are and what they were centuries ago."

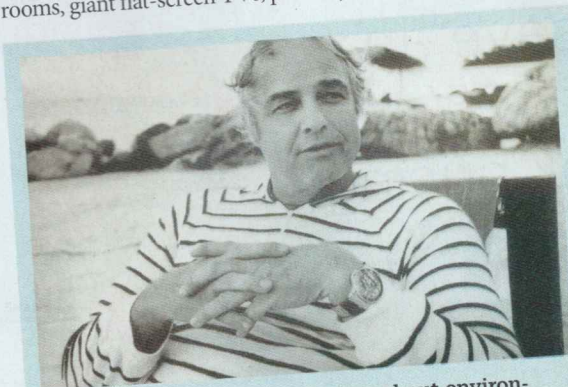
### The Brando, a resort

Brando died in 2004, and no one quite knew what would happen with his island. But then, last year, on the 10th anniversary of his death, the very private Tetiaroa reopened as The Brando, a resort. It is, to a substantial extent, preserved the way Brando wanted it. Yes, there are 35 beachfront villas, but this is far from your typical beachfront resort. It's truly a green destination, in both actions and words. And the villas are low to the ground, allowing

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the island to remain barely visible from the sea. But don't think that the resort is an obsessively eco-politically correct, rustic bare-minimum destination. On the contrary, the villas and bungalows have plunge pools, media rooms, giant flat-screen TVs, private yards and



Marlon Brando (above) had ideas about environmental protections and safeguards for his island (top) that were way ahead of his time.

beach access. And, for those Type As who desperately need connectivity, Wi-Fi. There are two restaurants: one with Polynesian-inspired dishes, the other with east-west fusion and French cuisine. Personal motorized watercraft? Forbidden. But there are kayaks and canoes.

### Unconventional luxury

"This is the most different experience I've ever had in the hotel business," says owner Dick Bailey, a hotelier who lives in Tahiti and became Brando's friend 16 years ago. "This idea of a resort came out of a conversation I had with Marlon back in 1999. He had a very specific vision of what he wanted to do with his island."

True to his larger-than-life movie image, Brando made Bailey an offer he couldn't refuse: the opportunity to build a resort that



### In our digital editions

Click here for a short video showing highlights of The Brando. (See page 12 for details.)

didn't destroy the nature, or the essence of the island itself.

Brando's vision—like almost everything else the actor did in his life—went against conventional wisdom. "He didn't want just another resort," says Bailey. "For example, he never wanted to build over-water bungalows. He wanted visitors to his island to have the same experience he had when he first saw it—to be able to walk around the entire island without any visual or physical obstruction. He wanted to keep the entire island in its natural state."

### Environmental protections

And then there were Brando's nonnegotiable environmental concerns, which made him way ahead of his time.

"The entire island is fossil-fuel-free," says Bailey. "We use alternative renewable energy. If you can imagine an island of total luxury essentially off the power grid, then that's Tetiaroa. Brando believed something that most of us didn't think possible—that you could sustainably run a resort and still deliver a truly luxury product."

Twenty-five hundred solar energy panels power everything. That even includes air conditioning, but not through normal means. "Brando was convinced we could provide air conditioning without consuming huge amounts of electrical power," says Bailey. "He put me in touch with a scientist he knew in Hawaii, and, sure enough, we found a way to do it." The solution? Pump in deep sea water (which maintains much colder temperatures) and use that very cold water to provide air conditioning. And that water comes in at such a low energy surge that the solar

energy can support it.

Each evening, guests have the option to hear lectures about the environment. There are also special day trips to the small uninhabited islands nearby to visit the wildlife there. Tetiaroa even has its own research center.

Uncrowded? Absolutely. Quiet and pristine? Yes. And perhaps the best indication of The Brando's true seduction: If you're walking along the beach looking for footprints in the sand, you just need to look behind you. Because chances are the only footprints you'll see are the ones you just made. ☞

Peter Greenberg is the multiple Emmy Award-winning travel editor for CBS News and host of *The Travel Detective* on public television (petergreenberg.com).