

Marin

BEST OF THE

COUNTY

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Destinations / JOURNEY

They come in many forms and exist all over the planet; here we bring you three of the best island escapes. Journey to the home of a former Hollywood legend, to a surfers' paradise and to an expansive estate on a once-private island now open to all (who can afford it).

FANTASY ISLANDS

“Marlon Brando originally intended Tetiaroa to be his back-to-nature retreat”

THE BRANDO • TAHITI

“PRIVACY IS NOT something that I’m merely entitled to,” said Marlon Brando; “it’s an absolute prerequisite.” To that end, he bought Tetiaora in 1967 after visiting while filming *Mutiny on the Bounty* in French Polynesia. It was a private island hideaway, far, far from Hollywood.

Today The Brando, which opened in July 2014, continues his vision of privacy in the lushness of an island paradise — away from the public’s prying eyes. It’s a super-luxury resort and the ultimate secluded escape. (Other movie stars have already discovered the island paradise, but no one is saying who.)

The price tag for a stay in Tetiaroa, an atoll of 13 little islets or “motus” 50 miles north of Tahiti, is high. But the rewards are beyond measure — bone-white sandy beaches fringed by coconut palms, a lagoon of crystal-clear water ringed by unspoiled coral. It’s a castaway’s dream, and a lovely one at that.

Part of The Brando’s attraction is its remoteness — it’s not easy getting there, and you can only arrive by helicopter or the twice-daily 20-minute flight on an eight-seater from Tahiti. So hidden are the 35 villas that you can only see their thatched roofs when you come in low for a landing.

HISTORY Marlon Brando originally intended Tetiaroa to be his back-to-nature retreat, and it remained that way for most of the 30 years he went there. The accommodations at first were rudimentary — 12 wooden bungalows, a kitchen, dining hall, bar and sinks made from seashells. Friends and family who didn’t mind the Robinson Crusoe ambience were happy to visit him, but it was never intended to attract a crowd. Enter Richard Bailey, a well-respected Tahitian developer with a sensitivity to the environment. The two developed a plan to turn Tetiaroa into a high-end luxury eco-resort. Unfortunately, Brando, who died in 2004, never lived to see its completion: it opened July 1, 2014, the 10th anniversary of the actor’s death.

ACTIVITIES There’s a fitness center, tennis and water sports, but for many the high point of The Brando experience is the spa, set among coconut palms at the center of a spiderweb of raised walkways. Couples can reserve a three-hour treatment in a wood-latticed cocoon high in the trees. Chef Guy Martin, owner of two-Michelin-star Le Grand Vefour in Paris, provides the exquisite cuisine, with specialties like salt-encrusted scallops and mahi-mahi in ginger. The Beachcomber, the more informal



of the two restaurants, is a great place for breakfast or lunch. Les Mutines (“mutineers,” as in the *Bounty* crew) is more formal and romantic, especially when candlelight flickers in the cool ocean breeze. At sunset, guests tend to gather at Bob’s Bar for the famous “Dirty Old Bob,” a bourbon-based concoction with just a touch of Tetiaroa honey from hives right there on the island. Most of the resort’s produce is also homegrown.

ROOMS A one-bedroom villa, hidden from its neighbor thanks to the careful planning of architect Pierre-Jean Picart, is “open plan,” with a main living room flanked on one side by a raised bedroom and bathroom plus outdoor bathtub; on the other side, a media room has Wi-Fi and a foldout bed. The two- and three-bedroom villas offer separate bedroom wings and are popular with families, although there are no formal children’s activities at the resort. There is 24/7 room service, and the minibars are stocked with drinks including champagne. Honey macaroon cookies await guests on arrival, with bicycles provided to pedal around the paved paths or to and from the main lodge. Brando conceived of using coconut oil as a source of biofuel, which now supplements power from 2,800 solar panels alongside the airstrip. The actor, often ahead of the technology curve, also thought of using deep-sea water for air-conditioning before that method existed; today a \$6 million plant built on the island does just that.

RATES Prices vary by season, from 2,400 euros (approximately \$2,700 per night) for a one-bedroom villa during the low season (April–June) and up to 9,000 euros (\$10,000 per night) for a three-bedroom during the Christmas holidays. The rates are all-inclusive. **BY JIM CALIO**