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THE MAN AND THE MACHINE ISSUE

EXPLORING THE ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND CULTURE

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TRAVEL

Treasured Island

Marlon Brando first fell in love with the wild splendour of Tetiaroa in 1962 while filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*. His legacy of conservation continues in this luxurious modern-day resort.

by Iroshini Chua photography by Kevin Chua



TIHONI WHISTLED, GENTLY AND SOULFULLY.

As if mesmerised by the tune, the hermit crab that was carefully cupped in his hands peeped out of its borrowed shell and scuttled forward to my surprise. “We have been doing this since we were kids,” our French Polynesian guide smiled infectiously. He returned the hermit crab to the coral-peppered floor shaded by coconut palms and picked up a giant coconut crab. A cocktail of vivid blue, purple and orange, its resplendent shell was a work of art. “This is only a teenager! It can grow to 1m in leg span and can pluck your finger off with one swift pinch!”

We are on an Ultimate Discovery Tour of the motus (islets) of The Brando that occupies the South Polynesian atoll of Tetiaroa some 30 miles northeast of Tahiti. Red-footed

booby birds and frigate birds soared above us as we waded ankle-deep on a sand bar that spilled into the horizon. Aboard our boat and gliding over crystal-clear waters, we clap eyes on manta rays and blacktip sharks, while pretty schools of parrot-fish break the surface of the sublime shallows. Snorkelling transforms the seascape, with its kaleidoscope of cavorting marine life a submerged gallery.

The Brando has indeed upped the ante in the Pacific Ocean, fulfilling the ultimate jet-setting private island fantasy. It serves up ‘responsible luxury’ in the form of a



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self-sufficient ultra-luxe eco-resort aimed at maintaining the diverse ecosystem that thrives on the atoll. At €3,000 per night (all-inclusive), the well-heeled can bury their bare feet in the luminous white sands and sip a Star-Drop Martini laced with Tahitian pearls in a crystalline lagoon dubbed the 'Billionaires' Pool'. Pétrus? Check. The Brando has the most exquisitely stocked wine cellar in all of French Polynesia. Michelin-star-studded fare? Check. The resort's fine-dining restaurant is helmed by chef Guy Martin (of Le Grand Véfour fame in Paris), who has three Michelin stars.

Once a playground for French Polynesian royalty, Marlon Brando first fell in love with the wild splendour of the island in 1962 while filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Marlon wedded his French Polynesian co-star Tarita Teriipaia and acquired Tetiaroa from the blind daughter of a Canadian dentist. It became his solace and escape from prying eyes for more than three decades. Marlon Brando dreamt of an ideal future for the island: energy autonomy, tertiary education and conservation of wildlife and culture.

After 10 years of negotiations, Richard H Bailey, president and CEO of Pacific Beachcomber, SC secured rights to bring all of Brando's visions to fruition. Drawing from his wealth of experience in environmental protection and sustainability skills, he guided the construction of the property over six years. The Brando opened on 1 July 2014, the 10th anniversary of Marlon Brando's death.

Cosseted by a coral barrier reef, the only way into the island is by a 20-minute Air Tetiaroa flight from Papeete. From a bird's-eye vantage point the island appears to be a garland of 12 untouched motus (islets) strung together to incorporate an iridescent aquamarine lagoon within. Only upon landing do you perceive the hidden villas set in plain sight within the foliage.

"Privacy is not something that I'm merely entitled to, it's an absolute prerequisite," Marlon Brando once said. He would have applauded Pierre-Jean Picart, the architect behind the drawing board who set 35 concealed one- to three-bedroom villas on a private beach, created secluded enclaves at the sleek roof-top bar and fashioned a unique birdhouse spa suite that sits 6m above the ground nestled within the trees.

Our airy villa was a split-level contemporary space complete with ultimate luxury fittings, a plunge pool and an outdoor bathtub that looked out to Mermaid Bay. A thatched roof cabana for outdoor dining and bean bags strewn on the sand facing the aquamarine seascape invited pure, unadulterated relaxation.

The Brando boasts one of two Sea Water Air Conditioning (SWAC) systems in the world. Naturally chilled waters of the sea from a depth of nearly 1km are piped and converted into low-energy, high-efficiency air conditioning for the resort. In addition to SWAC, the resort receives its energy needs via solar panels and a biofuel thermal power station fuelled by coconut oil.

The EcoStation is another one of Marlon Brando's realised dreams for the island; a centre of scientific research and teaching on the eco-system and preservation of tropical islands, it is solely managed by the not-for-profit Tetiaroa Society. Current projects include a sustainable fisheries project, atoll conservation plan and protecting the green sea turtles that nest on the island.

The Brando's philosophy makes it one of the cleverest island destinations. The Godfather has left his indelible mark on this planet and his legacy of conservation continues in the capable hands of the current inhabitants of Tetiaroa. ◇

thebrando.com

