

The godfather of eco-bling: Brando's Tahitian paradise

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The tiny, palm-fringed atoll of Tetiaroa was once a favourite holiday spot for Tahitian royalty before the late American movie star fell in love with it while filming "Mutiny on the Bounty" in 1961 on islands close

by.

Brando married co-star Tarita Teriipaia and the couple raised a family on Tetiaroa, now home to a luxury eco-resort that bears the reclusive actor's name and regularly pampers A-list clientele such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Johnny Depp and Barack Obama.

Guests at "The Brando" help fund research projects by paying up to \$10,000 a night to stay in the elegant thatched villas overlooking a turquoise lagoon.

As Pippa Middleton soaks up the rays on honeymoon or Obama seeks inspiration to write his memoirs, scientists quietly go about their work testing ocean acidification to study the effects on coral bleaching.

Behind the butler service and Michelin-star cuisine, the resort has built on Brando's own vision for a sustainable environment, to become one of the most eco-friendly hotels in the world, running on solar power and [coconut oil](#).



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Luxury eco-tourism is a growing sector of the travel industry with big name hotel brands such as Alila and Aman investing heavily in ensuring their green credentials.

Boutique resorts that pride themselves on sustainability and giving back to the local community, such as Song Saa private island in Cambodia, Nihiwatu in Indonesia, and the Soneva hotels in Thailand and the Maldives, are also increasingly in demand.

But Tetiaroa, where legend has it British sailors who seized control of the Bounty in 1789 found vestiges of a pagan sex cult, has the added bonus of old Hollywood glamour.

Brando's granddaughter Tumi grew up on the island, fishing for snapper and grouper in the lagoon, home to juvenile lemon and black tip sharks which glide lazily among the corals as guests snorkel.

The 29-year-old works as the chief communications officer for the non-profit Tetiaroa Society, a scientific organisation devoted to marine wildlife founded by the Brando estate, which owns the atoll.



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Coconut power

"Our aim is to raise awareness," she told AFP as marine biologists

studied shark populations inside the three-mile (4.8 kilometre) wide lagoon, which contains at least 167 species of fish, including parrotfish and spotted eagle rays.

"First among local people, because we want to protect our environment. Maybe America or China—they come to my mind first because they're the biggest polluters—can emulate us."

Opened in 2014, the hotel's electricity comes from more than 2,000 solar panels which line the island's tiny runway and generators fuelled by coconut oil. Its air-conditioning is powered by deep seawater—a brainwave of Marlon Brando's.

Mosquitoes are dying out at the resort where researchers have found a way to sterilise an invasive species capable of carrying dengue and Zika virus.

Brando previously ran a modest eco-lodge after buying Tetiaroa where celebrity buddy Robert De Niro, a guest in the late 1980s, once amused himself by waiting on tables.



Following Brando's blueprint, naturalists at the island's research centre monitor its countless tropical birds and turtle sanctuary, ready to rescue clumsy hatchlings before they can become a meal for predators

Brando died in 2004, but Tetiaroa, located some 2,700 miles south of Hawaii, has been preserved in line with his ecological vision—resort staff even keep a pet cat called Marlon in homage.

"He was passionate," said Tumi. "He was dragged here by Hollywood,

then grandma made him come back."

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'Canary in the coal mine'

Luxury eco-resorts offer high-rollers a chance to offset any guilt they might feel over their carbon-heavy lifestyles.

"You need to look at the full picture of sustainability," said Rochelle Turner, research director at the World Travel and Tourism Council.

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