



Inside Air Tahiti's Dreamliner Livery – Tattoos With Meaning

by **Joanna Bailey** · May 29, 2020 ·  3 minute read

Advertisement:

Despite rising popularity in recent years, tattoos remain a divisive subject, particularly in aviation. But for one airline, tattoos are an important part of their heritage, carrying huge symbolism in their culture. Here is the story of the Air Tahiti Nui Dreamliner's tattoos and what they mean.



There's a lot more to the Air Tahiti Nui 787-9 than meets the eye. Photo: Air Tahiti Nui.

The world's most recognizable 787

The [Air Tahiti Nui Dreamliner](#) is arguably the world's most iconic Boeing 787. Beautifully adorned in shimmering blue with hints of bright turquoise, at first glance, it's not all that different to the previous livery seen on the [A340s it replaced](#). But the Dreamliner is full of symbolism, heritage, and deep meanings, not to mention some pretty awesome tattoos.



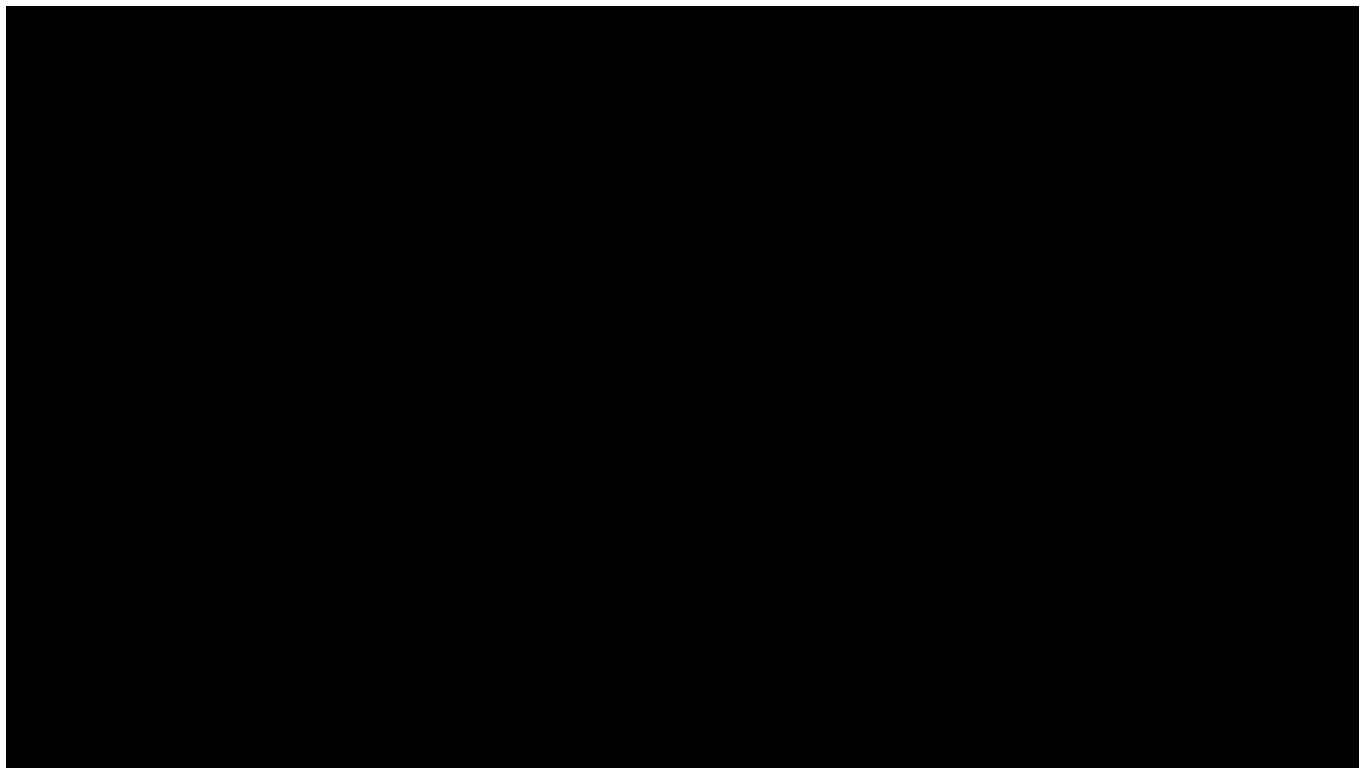
It doesn't look a million miles from the old livery, right? Photo: Air Tahiti Nui

Thanks to the efforts of [Shashank Nigam, founder and CEO of SimpliFlying](#), one of the world's largest aviation marketing firms, we now know a whole lot more about the meaning behind the dreaming. He had the pleasure of visiting Air Tahiti's wonderful Polynesian home and finding out a whole lot more about the airline and how it became such a success.

Advertisement:

Featured Video:

You can watch the complete mini-documentary in the video below:



One of the topics discussed was the unusual livery of the Air Tahiti 787 Dreamliner. It turns out it's a whole lot more than just a pretty design.

What's in a livery?

The first thing anyone notices about the [Air Tahiti](#) Dreamliner is the beautiful deep blue. In a [world of white airplanes](#), it's great to see something a little bit different, so it always catches the eye at the airport. There are actually three different blues on the plane, inspired by the skies, the ocean and the lagoons of Tahiti.

Advertisement:

Air Tahiti has four Dreamliners in its fleet, each with a thoughtful registration number linked to Tahitian words. The first two letters, F-O, designate the country of origin and can't be changed, but the final three letters are unique to each plane. They are:

- MUA – meaning forward
- NUI – meaning big

- TOA – meaning warrior
- VAA – meaning canoe

When you put them all together, there's a little Easter egg from this fun-loving airline, in that they make a complete Tahitian phrase: *Toa mua nui vaa* – The warrior going forward in the great canoe!



The registrations of the four Dreamliners have a hidden meaning. Photo: Air Tahiti Nui

With the historical link between aviation and shipping, this is a wonderful play on words that definitely has that Tahitian *mana*.

Advertisement:

The last thing to mention before we get on to tattoos is the bold red double stripe down the side of the plane. This was carried forward from the A340s but has been restyled to fit the gorgeous curves of the Dreamliner. As with everything on the Dreamliner, it has a meaning; in this case, it represents the flag of French Polynesia.

Air Tahiti's tattoos

What looks at first glance like a pretty pattern on the flank of the Dreamliner is actually a collection of symbolic tattoos. Every single one was chosen for its meaning.

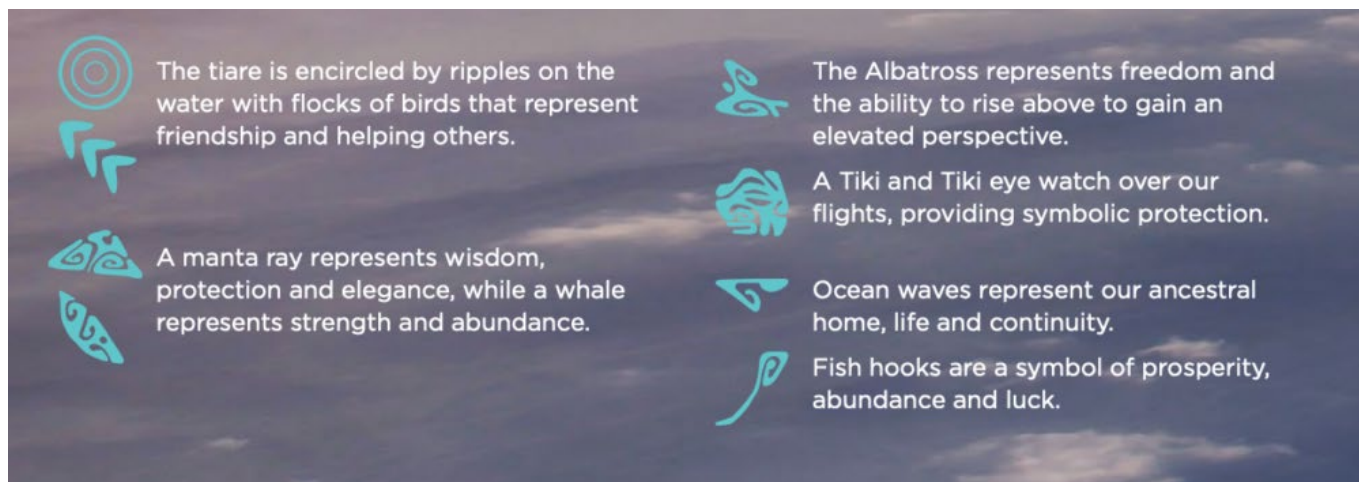
The designers of the livery, Seattle-based design company *Teague*, told Nigam that they wanted to bring ethnicity to the plane, to show the Polynesian heritage. In the end, it was decided that the best way to do that would be through tattoos.



Every tattoo has a symbolic meaning. Photo: Air Tahiti Nui

Starting at the tail, the traditional white tiare that has adored Air Tahiti's tails from the beginning, is surrounded by ripples, or waves, which represent freedom. The circling birds within the waves stand for friendship and helping others.

Moving down the fuselage, the soaring albatross shows how Air Tahiti can rise above its challenges, while the manta ray below depicts elegance and wisdom. A Tiki follows this, a symbol of the Tahitian Gods, who watches over and protects the flight, next to a whale for strength and endless abundance.



Some of the Air Tahiti tattoos and their meaning. Photo: Air Tahiti Nui

Anyone who has seen the Tahitian inspired film Moana will know the importance of Maui's fishhook, but on the Air Tahiti Dreamliner, it represents prosperity and luck.

It's a visual story of Tahiti and its people, and fascinating to look at once you understand its more than just a pattern. The end result is a truly beautiful aircraft, only overshadowed by its even more beautiful interior.

Have you been on Air Tahiti's Dreamliner? Would you like to? Let us know in the comments.

Advertisement:



Joanna Bailey

Editor - Joanna has worked in publishing for more than a decade and is fast becoming a go-to source for commercial aviation analysis. Providing commentary for outlets including the BBC, CNBC, and others, she works closely with IATA, AviaDev and various airlines and suppliers to get the inside track on the global marketplace.



Related Articles: