

Hawaiian Tattoos - Flowers & Tribal

Typical Hawaiian Tattoo Tribal Design

Hawaiian Tattoos
Hawaiian Tattoos -

Flower Designs, Turtle and Tribal Culture

What defines a Hawaiian Tattoo?

Similar to any other Polynesian tattoo, Hawaiian Tattoos come in many flavors and varieties. Some of the most popular designs could be characterized as a turtle, flower, or abstract tribal design. In fact, it is widely accepted that the name "tribal" came from European explorers discovering Hawaiian and other Polynesian tattoos. The explorers didn't know exactly what they were seeing, and they thought the different markings signified allegiance to a certain tribe. Hawaiian's have been tattooing themselves for thousands of years, it was part of a warrior's rite of passage to get the markings that he was a full member of the community. To not get a tattoo was to shirk society's standards, a somewhat reversal of modern tattoo mentality.

How were they applied before modern tattoo needles?

Fundamentally, a tattoo requires four things. A tattoo artist, tattoo ink (jet black ink in the Hawaiian case), a way to get the ink into the skin, and a person willing to get tattooed. The tattoo artists of Hawaiian antiquity held a high place in the community. They were carefully trained and a community with a good artist was well off. It was important to get tattooed by an artist who knew what he was doing because some of the contents of the ink they used were poisonous. Black ink was most commonly made up of kukui nut ashes and sugarcane juice. Colors, while rare, were made up of various different flowers such as the Hawaiian Iris. As far as a tattoo needle, there were many choices: bird beaks, bone splinters, urchin spines, animal claws, and cactus barbs. So to sum those up in one word, ouch! A person willing to get tattooed would have undergone extreme pain. Modern tattoo needles are extremely small and precise; some of these other sharp objects were basically the opposite. However, they all got the job done. The pain itself was regarded as a spiritual journey, and so the more tattoos covering your body, the higher your status.

Hawaiian Warrior Tattoo - Leg

How were they discovered?

Here we go, a little history never killed anyone, right? Captain James Cook, a famous British explorer sailed to the south pacific around 1765. As he and his naturalist (basically an old-school documentary maker) Sir Joseph Banks, sailed around the islands, they noticed that almost all of the inhabitants had these large black tattoos. The entire crew on Cook's ship was enthralled with the idea and many of them received tattoos themselves. When they ended their voyage back in London, high society was intrigued by the tattoos Cook and his men had received. Sir Joseph Banks (at the time just Joey B.) gained so much recognition for these tattoos that he was immediately admitted into the Royal Naturalist Society - their youngest member at 23.

Why should I get one inked?

Because you want to bare your tattoo and say "Can you smell what The Rock is cooking?" Well, for that to make sense, I'd have to tell you that the popular pro wrestler The Rock has some Hawaiian tribal designs on his shoulder. Anyway, these designs are not for the feint of heart. They use thick lines and lots of ink, so if you're worried about being able to cover these up with a thin t-shirt, think again. If you want something a little smaller, try a turtle, flower, island, dolphin or definitely something tropical. Once you get your tattoo inked, snap a picture, send it to us, and we'll post it right here on this page!

The Rock - Tattoo

