

INTERVIEW

The traditional tattoo art of *patutiki* is rooted in the French Polynesian culture of the Marquesas Islands. **Nori Jemil** reports from *Aranui 5*

Q. How did you become Aranui Cruises' onboard tattoo artist?

A. My home is Ua Pou in the Marquesas and my house is in Tahiti. When I was just out of college, a friend saw me drawing and he taught me tattooing. I started working for Aranui in 2009, joining the restaurant as the second chief, so I take over when the restaurant manager is away. Many passengers had asked about where to get a tattoo on the trip and it was my idea to start tattooing on board.

Q. Why is this art so important to the region?

A. Tattoo was invented here. The god of the Marquesas people is Tiki, who populated Te Henua Enata [The Land of Men – the indigenous name for the Marquesas]. Originally people were tattooed before and after each battle. Tattoos increase *mana*, the spirit that Polynesians speak of when they discuss the life force in all living beings and the natural world.

Q. Do many passengers take you up on your services?

A. About 15 people come for a tattoo during a cruise. The arms and legs are most popular. Women often ask for a small tattoo – maybe a dolphin or a flower on their shoulder or foot. It's usually a first tattoo. I sometimes do a whole back, but that takes much more time.

Q. You also work in the restaurant morning and evening – how do you manage your schedule?

A. I take time in the day to book in a large tattoo, like a torso, which can take up to five hours. The smaller ones can be booked any time.

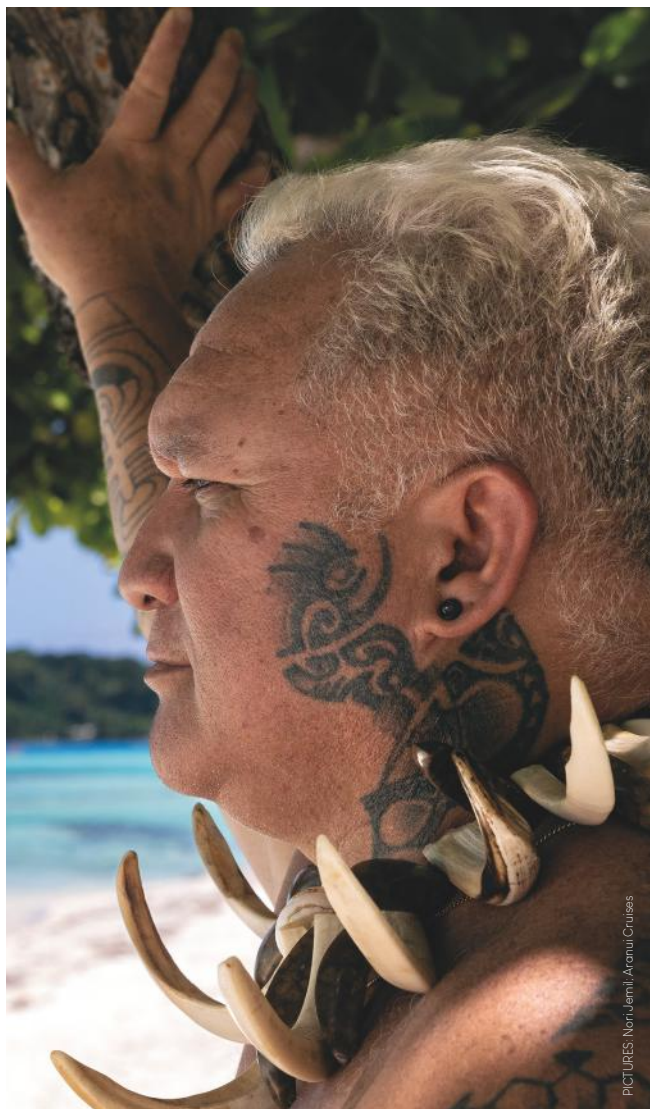
Q. Where did you get your own tattoos?

A. When I was 25, I tattooed my legs and later the inside of my left arm. My nephew did the outside of that arm, while my cousin did my right arm and my back. Another cousin did my face, and my nephew also did my chest. My shark tattoo is the emblem of my family.

Q. Do you have a favourite place in the Marquesas?

A. Fatu Hiva – it has few people, cars or houses and it's so beautiful. It has a special energy. The best way to see it is to hike or cross over in a car. If I can take my day off to visit Fatu Hiva, I do. You must go there and see it.

BOOK IT: Air Tahiti Nui has flights from Paris, Los Angeles or Seattle to Tahiti, starting from £1,694 return, with connections to London or other UK regional airports. The 12-day Marquesas Islands cruise departing from Papeete on *Aranui 5* costs from £4,175, including meals and guided shore excursions. airtahitinui.com/en; aranui.com/en



Moana Kohumoetini

tattoo artist, Aranui Cruises