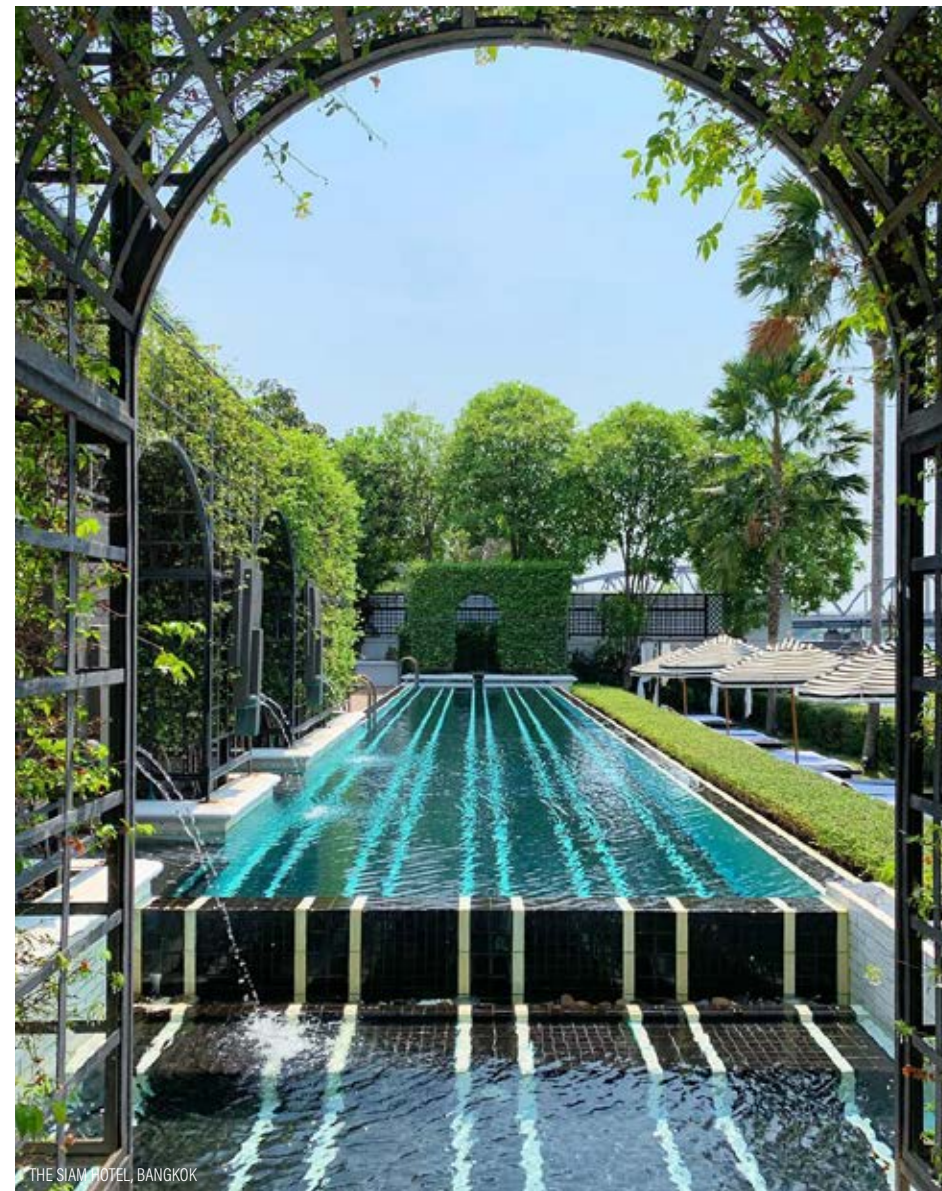


# PERMANENT SOUVENIRS

HOTELS TEAMING WITH LOCAL TATTOO ARTISTS GIVE GUESTS DESTINATION-SPECIFIC MEMENTOS.

BY JILLIAN DARA

PRIVATE SACRED TATTOO SESSION, THE SIAM HOTEL, BANGKOK



THE SIAM HOTEL, BANGKOK

In 2018, under the list of hotel experiences at The Siam, a 39-key boutique resort along the Chao Phraya River, I encountered Sak Yant tattoo sessions for the first time. These weren't just any skin art. As with the rest of the hotel's signature offerings, like Muay Thai training and Thai culinary courses, these tattoos were steeped in ancient Thai culture and tradition.

Sak Yant tattoos are magical religious designs that can be traced back over two millennia to the animistic Tai tribes in southwestern China and northwestern Vietnam. The patterns are created by hand using a khem sak, a sharp metal stick reminiscent of a needle, which honors the traditional stick-and-poke technique of how ancient religions tattooed their prayers and celebrated deities. Due to their sacred nature, The Siam created a consecrated space for Sak Yant inking.

"A Sak Yant tattoo is a spiritual blessing, deeply rooted in Buddhism, Hinduism, and

Animism. It can only be performed by a trained Ajarn (master) or Buddhist monk as part of a Wai Kru (sacred ceremony)," shared Michael Wang, hotel manager of Anantara Siam Bangkok, which added Sak Yant tattoos to their cultural-based programming in 2020. "Sak Yant tattoos have long been revered in Thailand, but their global appeal has surged in recent years," he explained. The sudden increase has the team witnessing increased bookings from guests who specifically reserve a session with their on-staff Ajarn.

Yet, Sak Yant isn't the only ink trending with travelers. In Hella, Iceland, Hotel Rangá recently announced a new partnership with local tattoo artist Jana Tomanová to provide personalized tattoo service for guests throughout 2025. Tomanová is renowned for her landscape drawcards that she likens to a travel journal, which she can translate to ink on the skin, or guests can opt for a design of their choice in one of her fine line silhouettes or lettering.



PRIVATE SACRED TATTOO SESSION, THE SIAM HOTEL, BANGKOK

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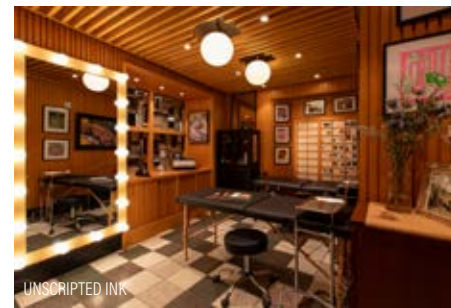
TATTOO CONSULTATION, THE SIAM HOTEL, BANGKOK



THE SIAM HOTEL, BANGKOK



UNTITLED AT 3 FREEMAN ALLEY, CREDIT: KATHRYN SHELDON



UNSCRIPTED INK



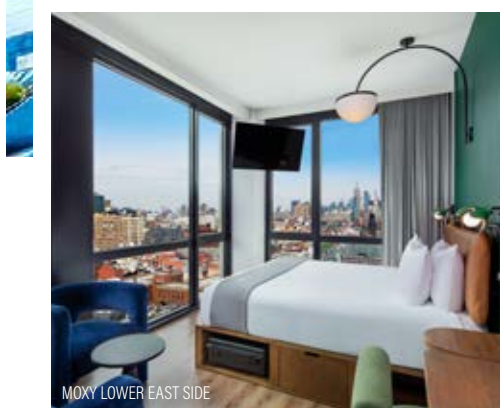
UNTITLED AT 3 FREEMAN ALLEY, THE GARDEN



UNTITLED AT 3 FREEMAN ALLEY, LOBBY MURAL



UNSCRIPTED INK



MOXY LOWER EAST SIDE

“Tattoos used to be considered rebellious, but today they are really about self-expression, and we are seeing guests of all ages interested in getting tattoos,” said Sonja Chase, general manager of Thompson Seattle, which has run a tattoo artist-in-residence program for the past few years. Inspired by the growing demand from travelers seeking unique amenities and experiences in a destination, Chase and her team dedicated a quarterly weekend to a celebrity artist takeover, like Alice Kendall, owner of Wonderland Tattoo in Portland, Oregon, or Justice Wolf, known for their hand-poked tattoos out of Port Townsend, Washington, where both guests and locals could reserve an appointment.

In New York City, the Lower East Side-based Untitled Hotel at 3 Freeman Alley hosts an onsite tattoo parlor, Unscripted Ink, founded by Liv Novotny, who says tattoos are “the ultimate souvenir.” Guests can book an appointment any day of the week, but the hotel also hosts special events like the weekly Tattoo Happy Hour. “We knew that a newspaper waiting under the door in the morning would not have the same impact on this generation as a tattoo commemorating their trip to New York,” shared Gadi Peleg, founder of GPG Hospitality.

Moxy Hotels across New York embrace a unique approach by offering partnerships with local parlors as part of its “Key to the City” program, where guests can access special deals at nearby businesses. Moxy Lower East Side currently partners with Crystal Ink of LINES New York; guests can show their Moxy room key to receive a \$100 discount on tattooing services.



NORTHERN LIGHTS, HOTEL RANGA

“THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT BEING AWAY FROM HOME THAT MAKES PEOPLE MORE OPEN TO TRYING SOMETHING NEW.”

Whether new or repeat clients, Julia Pandolfo, senior marketing director for Lightstone’s Moxy Hotels, said guests are booking rooms just to get “Key to the City” access. “We’re not just offering a unique amenity — we’re giving guests entry into a destination at a neighborhood level,” Pandolfo said.

In the past, Moxy Chelsea offered a “Tattoos and Veuve with Boo” package where guests could declare their love with semi-permanent tattoos from Ephemeral Tattoos, and at Moxy Times Square, celebrity tattoo artist JonBoy was a previous long-standing tattoo artist in residence.

“Guests have really embraced it,” said Pandolfo, who’s seen parents getting their first tattoo while dropping their kids off at nearby New York University, friends getting matching NYC themed tattoos, and even parents and children getting matching family tattoos on their vacation. “There’s something about being away from home that makes people more open to trying something new — like finally getting that tattoo they’ve been thinking about,” Pandolfo said.



WRONG WAY CABINS, CREDIT: COLBY RABON



WRONG WAY CABINS, TAUREAN TATTOO



ATELIER EVA



THE STANDARD NEW YORK

Brooklyn-based tattoo studio Atelier Eva noticed that up to 40% of bookings came from clients traveling from another city to get inked by founder Eva Karabudak, who has tattooed Sam Smith, SZA, and Joe Jonas, to name a few. The Standard New York partnered with the acclaimed artist to offer guests staying at its High Line and East Village locations \$100 credits. Further, any clients traveling to NYC for a tattoo at Atelier Eva receive 15% off The Standard's best available rates.

Outside of the urban accommodation, Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins in Asheville, North Carolina, started working with Em Gallagher of Taurean Tattoo in 2023.

"Part of our mission in opening Wrong Way was to convey a sense of place and share the outdoor-centered personality of Asheville. Tattoos are a beautiful extension of this with designs that reflect the place, like nostalgic campground symbols or the Fonta Flora," co-owner Shelton Steele said.

Tattoos as souvenirs is part of what Chase called "a dramatic" shift in the perception surrounding the inked landscape. "I have a full sleeve myself," Chase shared, explaining there was a time she made every effort to cover them up at work. "Now, I get to help curate a space that embraces this form of art and expression for not only guests and locals, but our colleagues as well."



ATELIER EVA



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