

The 11 Coolest Painted Airplanes You Can Fly On

(Courtesy of Peter Thornton, SMARTERTRAVEL)

Airline liveries are an important part of brand recognition but if you've ever looked out the terminal windows at a major hub airport, it can be a monotonous scene of the same old paint job on every plane.

On rare occasions, you may find that your plane has a special livery either to promote a movie, specific event, or highlight an attraction. Here are 11 of the coolest airline paint jobs from around the world and where you might spot one on your next trip.

ANA – Star Wars Jets

Several airlines have painted their planes with a Star Wars theme but Japan's All Nippon Airlines has led the pack. In mid-2015, ANA painted four of its long-haul jets to represent Star Wars characters and three of them are still flying today.

The R2-D2 ANA Jet is perhaps the most fitting as it depicts the friendly droid while maintaining ANA's blue and white color scheme. The Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner (registration [JA873A](#)) features a total of 215 seats spread between business, premium economy, and economy. It can be found flying from both of Tokyo's hubs in Narita (NRT) and Haneda (HND) to/from select cities in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the U.S., including Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco, and Houston.

The BB-8 ANA Jet, a Boeing 777-300 (registration [JA789A](#)) also flies 250 seats between the U.S. and Japan, including Chicago and New York, while the C-3PO ANA Jet, a Boeing 777-200 (registration [JA743A](#)) was primarily used for high-capacity Japanese domestic flights with a total of 405 seats.

Once Japan opens its borders for tourism, keep your eye on the [ANA Star Wars Project webpage](#) to see where these planes will be flying in the future. While you'll never be able to guarantee which specific aircraft you'll be flying, with a little luck—and “the Force” on your side—you could be flying one of these droids on your next ANA flight.

Alaska Airlines – West Coast Wonders

Alaska Airlines recently painted one of its Boeing 737-9 MAX aircraft with a mural of swimming orcas and a bold deep blue color scheme. The “[West Coast Wonders](#)” livery is meant to honor the natural life of the Pacific Ocean and reflects the fact that orcas migrate between the Baja peninsula and Alaska every year, much like Alaska's aircraft.

You can track where aircraft [N932AK](#) has flown recently and upcoming flights on the popular live air traffic site Flightradar24. The plane features 16 first class, 24 premium, and 138 standard economy seats. It seems to fly mostly between Hawaii or Alaska and major cities along the West Coast.

Icelandair – Hekla Aurora

Icelandair plans to update its normal livery in 2022, but it will still keep its specialty-painted planes, including [Hekla Aurora](#), which depicts ‘Hekla’, one of Iceland's volcanoes, and the northern lights, ‘Aurora’, across the fuselage. The paint job is part of a campaign to entice travelers to make a stopover in Iceland when traveling between North America and Europe.

The Boeing 757 aircraft (registration [TF-FIU](#)) is currently flying between Reykjavik and European destinations such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen. The cabin has special mood lighting that displays the northern lights, and, if you're lucky, you may even get to see the real thing out the window on a flight to or from Iceland.

Eva Air – Sanrio Characters (Hello Kitty)

Eva Air currently has six jets painted with Sanrio characters like Hello Kitty, Badtz-Maru, and Gudetama. The cartoon characters are widely popular across Asia and the Hello Kitty flights have historically sold more seats than typical Eva Air flights. Unfortunately, Eva Air has suspended Sanrio-themed inflight service on these flights due to the pandemic, but you'll still find the colorful aircraft flying.

To find out which routes are served by these special liveries, check out the dedicated [Hello Kitty Eva Air route map](#), though routes are always subject to change. For instance, when looking up the Shining Star plane (registration [B-16722](#)) on Flightradar24, I noticed that the Boeing 777-300 aircraft recently flew from Taipei to Los Angeles even though it's showing as the aircraft used for the Taipei-Chicago route on the Eva Air Hello Kitty page.

The Chicago-Taipei route is currently scheduled to resume service in April 2022. Once normal touristic travel resumes to Taiwan, look out for these special flights, which may once again include a quirky onboard experience complete with Hello Kitty-themed boarding passes, snacks, napkins, and pillows.

Nok Air – Birds

If you happen to be flying within Thailand or the surrounding region, you may find yourself onboard one of the most interesting fleets in the world. "Nok" is how you say "bird" in Thai, which is why all of Nok Air's Boeing 737 and Bombardier Q400 aircraft are painted as birds, complete with a signature beak on the nose of the airplane.

Each [aircraft](#) has a unique name and design, which gives the budget airline a fun personality. Better yet, flights are incredibly cheap, so once we're able to travel to Thailand again, grab a seat on one of these birds.

Southwest – Freedom One

In June 2021, Southwest celebrated 50 years of flying by [unveiling](#) its Freedom One aircraft, featuring the 50 stars and 13 stripes of the American flag on a Boeing 737-800. The inaugural flight included a crew made up entirely of employees who served in the military and the plane is dedicated to those who serve or have served in the armed forces.

You'll find Freedom One (registration [N500WR](#)) flying all over the USA. As with all of Southwest's planes, it has an all-economy class cabin.

WestJet – Disney Magic Plane

Canadians looking to visit Disney World or Disneyland may get a special treat with a flight on the [Disney Magic Plane](#). Since 2013, WestJet has been flying this special livery primarily on transborder flights between Canada and either Los Angeles or Orlando. You may find this Boeing 737-800 (registration [G-GWSZ](#)) featuring 12 premium and 162 economy seats on a few other routes as well. Either way, your kids will love flying on a plane with Mickey Mouse painted on the tail.

Rossiia Airlines – Leolet

Russian carrier Rossiia Airlines has a few special liveries dedicated to the conservation of rare species and wild animals. The [Tigrolet](#) or ‘Tigerplane’, a Boeing 747 with the face of a tiger painted on its nose, may be Rossiia Airlines’ most impressive plane, but it doesn’t appear to currently fly the double-decker jumbo jet.

[Leolet](#), a slightly smaller Boeing 777-300 (registration [EI-UNP](#)) is painted with the face of a Far Eastern leopard. It is one of the rarest leopard subspecies in the world but recent conservation efforts have slowly started to increase its population. The Leolet aircraft has 18 business and 355 economy class seats. It can be found flying to cities in the Far East of Russia and popular resort destinations abroad.

Emirates – Dubai Expo

To promote the World Expo in Dubai, Emirates [painted one of its Airbus A380s](#) with this spectacular livery. It features the brave stuntwoman who stood on top of the Burj Khalifa for one of Emirates’ latest viral advertisements holding a sign reading “See you there”. After the paint job, Emirates took this plane for a spin around the highest building in Dubai for a special [promo shoot](#).

You’ll find this jumbo jet (registration [A6EEU](#)) flying mostly between Dubai and major European cities such as London and Paris, though it also flies a few routes within the Middle East. The double-decker features 14 first class, 76 business, and 401 economy class seats. It’s likely that this livery will be replaced shortly after the end of the Dubai Expo in March 2022 so if it comes to an airport near you, don’t miss your chance to see this beauty.

Brussels Airlines – Aerosmurf

Brussels Airlines has five special liveries that it dubs [Belgian Icons](#). Each plane has a tie to Belgium and my favorite would have to be [Aerosmurf](#). The Airbus A320 is covered with the famous blue characters from the Belgian comic franchise Smurfs. Who wouldn’t want to fly on a plane with captain Smurfette and Papa Smurf as co-pilot?

The design came from a contest in 2017, which artist Marta Mascellani won by public vote. And there’s more to this plane than the livery on the outside. Once you step inside, you’ll follow little blue Smurfs’ footprints to your seat.

At the time of writing, Flight Aware was showing Aerosmurf’s (registration [OO-SND](#)) last flight landed over three weeks ago. However, the Brussels Airlines site says this livery will stay until 2023 so hopefully we’ll see it flying around Europe soon.

United – The Rise of Skywalker

In 2019, [United started flying a Star Wars plane](#) of its own. To celebrate the latest film, *The Rise of Skywalker*, United painted one of its Boeing 737-800s in a fascinating Star Wars-themed livery. One side of the tail features a red lightsaber, while the other side has a blue lightsaber, reflecting the two sides of the Force. Inside the plane is a plaque welcoming you aboard with the message of connecting people and uniting the world. You’ll also find headrests with logos of the Resistance on one side and First Order on the other. If you’re a Star Wars fan, a seat onboard this special United aircraft (registration [N36272](#)) is like a dream come true. Look for it flying on routes across the USA.