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Geography

New Zealand is a long narrow country lying roughly north-south. Consisting of the North and South Islands (and a number of smaller islands), it covers 103,736 square miles (166,940 square kilometres) and is 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometres) long. It covers an area slightly larger than the United Kingdom.

New Zealand is situated in the South Pacific, approximately 6,500 miles (10,400 kilometres) south west of North America and 1,400 miles (2,250 kilometres) east of Australia.

Discovery

The Dutch navigator, Abel Tasman, sighted and named New Zealand in 1642. However, it was not until 1769 that Captain James Cook charted the coastline and explored the country. Whalers and traders began to arrive on New Zealand's shores soon after Captain Cook.

The first European settlers arrived in the early nineteenth century at the Bay of Islands and established missionary stations in the area. Mass immigration occurred shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

Population

New Zealand has a population of almost 3.5 million people, three quarters of whom live in the North Island, one of the two main islands. New Zealand Maori make up approximately 10% of the population, and Polynesian people approximately 4% of New Zealand's multi-cultural society. Chinese, Indian and Asian ethnic groups are increasing in population size within New Zealand.

Time Zone

New Zealand is exactly twelve hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. In summer, early October to late March, we enjoy an extra hour of daylight saving, to extend the warm summer evenings.

Climate

New Zealand has a particularly clear and unpolluted atmosphere with average daily sunshine hours ranging from seven to eight in summer and four to five in winter.

Ranging from subtropical in the north to temperate in the south, the mean summer temperature is 23° Celsius (74° Fahrenheit) and 14° Celsius (57° Fahrenheit) in winter. Seasons are opposite to those in the Northern Hemisphere - winter is between June and August and summer is between December and February.

Government

A British Colony since 1840, New Zealand declared national sovereignty in 1947, but remains a constitutional monarchy with a Queen Elizabeth as head of state. Recently, New Zealand replaced the previous 'first past the post' electoral system with a new mixed member system of proportional representation. There are now several mainstream political parties - National and Labour, who were the 'traditional' parties along with more recent political parties including New Zealand First and the Alliance. The current government is a coalition between National and New Zealand First.

The Economy

Even though well over 80% of New Zealanders live in towns and cities, agricultural products are the basis of New Zealand's economy and is the biggest export earner. That's not surprising when you consider that one third of the country's total area is sown in pasture and that sheep out number people by twenty five to one!

Tourism, forestry, horticulture, fishing and manufacturing have become increasingly important sectors in the economy in recent years. Australia is New Zealand's largest export market, followed by Japan, Asia, the United States and the United



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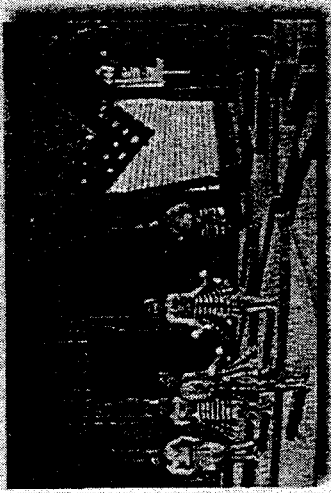
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Maori Culture



New Zealand is home to the *Tangata Whenua* (people of the land), the Maori. It is believed that the Polynesian navigator, Kupe was the first man to sight New Zealand around 950AD and then returned home to tell of his findings. Around 1350AD seven great migratory canoes (whaka) sailed from Hawaiki to New Zealand.

They called the country *Aotearoa, Land of the Long White Cloud*, and quickly adapted to the cooler climate and spread throughout the country. Here they developed a culture quite distinct from the rest of the Pacific since the long distances and treacherous ocean conditions discouraged return voyages.

The Maori have a close kinship with their environment, with legends and gods representing certain spheres, such as *Tane Mahuta* (God of the Forest) and *Tangaroa* (God of the Sea), who are remembered through song and dance.

Ancient Maori traditions and artforms have become precious *taonga* (treasures) of the modern Maori. Status and prestige are gained from ancestors who contribute to the living by giving spiritual strength and guidance to those who call on them. It is for this reason that traditional artforms such as the carved walking sticks, greenstone necklaces and bone carvings are treated with respect, as they carry the spirit of the original owners.

The *whakapapa* (family tree) is retold in the intricate carvings on every marae. The marae, or meeting house is still today the main focus for ceremony and community identity. Visitors are welcomed onto the marae with a strict formal protocol and traditional welcome which includes the *haka* (challenge) and a *hongi* (pressing of noses). You may have the opportunity to sample *kai* (food), cooked in a *hangi* (feast steamed in an earth oven).

You will be able to experience Maori culture all over New Zealand, but in particular at *Rotorua, Waitangi*, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in *Wellington*, the *Auckland Museum* and the National Marae in *Christchurch* also offer insights into the Maori cultural heritage.

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