

# **New Zealand – Land of the long white cloud**

## **Introduction**

New Zealand, island country with population of about 4,035,000 people. It occupies the area of 270,534 sq km, in the South Pacific Ocean, It is located over 1,600 km south east of Australia. The capital is Wellington; the largest city, and a leading port is Auckland.

## **Land and People**

New Zealand comprises the North Island and the South Island (the two principal islands), Stewart Island, and the Chatham Islands. Small outlying islands belonging to New Zealand include the Auckland Islands, the Kermadec Islands, Campbell Island, the Antipodes, Three Kings Island, Bounty Island, the Snares Islands, and the Solander Islands. Dependencies are Tokelau and Ross Dependency. The Cook Islands and Niue, both internally self-governing, are in free association with New Zealand.

The North Island is known for its active volcanic mountains and its hot springs. The country's longest river (the Waikato) and largest lake (Taupo) are both on the North Island. On the South Island, the massive Southern Alps extend almost the length of the island, and in the southwest are beautiful fjords. The largest areas of virgin forest are in the southern and northern extremities of the South Island. Among the unusual animals native to New Zealand are the kiwi, certain species of parrot, the tuatara (survivor of a prehistoric order of reptiles), and various frogs and reptiles. New Zealand has no native land mammals other than bats. Large oyster beds are found in the Foveaux Strait between Stewart Island and the South Island. Extensive areas of New Zealand have been set aside as national parks, including the Fiordland, Mt. Aorangi-Cook, and Tongariro parks.

More than 85% of the population lives in urban areas. In addition to Wellington and Auckland, the principal cities are Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Hutt City, and Invercargill. People of European background constitute almost 70% of the population. The Maori, New Zealand's indigenous inhabitants, now make up about 8% of the population, with most living on the North Island. Almost 5% of the population is of Asian descent, while Pacific Islanders make up over 4%. Both English and Maori are official languages. New Zealand has no established religion; the three largest faiths are Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian.

## **Economy**

Agriculture has traditionally been the mainstay of the economy, although it now employs only 10% of the population, while services and industry make up a much greater percentage of the gross domestic product. The agricultural sector has diversified from a reliance on sheep raising to such additional enterprises as dairying, forestry, and horticulture. Wheat, barley, potatoes, pulses, fruits, and vegetables are grown; wool, beef, lamb, mutton, and fish are additional agricultural products. The mining sector produces coal, gold, iron, and natural gas. There is extensive food processing and wood and paper products, textiles, machinery, and transportation equipment are manufactured. Banking, insurance, and tourism are also important. Beginning in the 1980s, New Zealand transformed its highly protected and regulated economy into one that was much more privatized, market oriented, and deregulated. The principal exports are dairy products, meat, wood and wood products, fish, and machinery. Imports include machinery and equipment, vehicles, aircraft,

petroleum, electronics, textiles, and plastic. The main trading partners are Australia, the United States, Japan, and China.

## Government

New Zealand is governed under The Constitution Act of 1986, adopted in 1987, as well as other legal documents. The monarch of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, represented by the governor-general, is the head of state. The government is headed by the prime minister, who is appointed by the governor-general following legislative elections. Members of the 120-seat unicameral parliament (the House of Representatives) are elected by popular vote for three-year terms using a system of mixed constituency and proportional representation. Administratively, the country is divided into 16 regions and one territory (the Chatham Islands). New Zealand is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

## History

New Zealand has been inhabited since at least A.D. 1000 by Polynesian Maoris. The first European to visit was the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman, who stopped there during his voyage of 1642–43. New Zealand was charted by Capt. James Cook on his three voyages (1769–78). Between 1792 and 1840, sealing, whaling, and trading led to European settlement. In a series of intertribal wars between 1815 and 1840, tens of thousands of Maoris died.

In 1840 the first settlement was made at Wellington by a group sent by the New Zealand Company, founded by Edward Gibbon Wakefield. In that year the Treaty of Waitangi guaranteed to the Maoris the full possession of their land in exchange for their recognition of British rule. But as European settlement increased, Maori opposition to land settlement resulted in continuing conflict from 1860 to 1872.

Originally part of New South Wales (Australia), New Zealand became a separate colony in 1840 and received a large measure of self-government after 1852. In 1907 it assumed complete self-government as the Dominion of New Zealand, but, preferring that Great Britain handle most of its foreign affairs, did not confirm the Statute of Westminster (1931) until 1947.

New Zealand has been a leader in progressive social legislation. It was the first country to grant (1893) women the right to vote. A comprehensive social security system was begun in 1898 with the enactment of an old age pension law.

During World War I and World War II, New Zealand fought on the side of the Allies, and it joined the UN forces in the Korean War. New Zealand also sent troops to aid U.S. forces in South Vietnam in the 1960s. In 1951, New Zealand joined in a mutual defense treaty with the United States and Australia. This pact was suspended in 1986 after David Lange's Labor government refused to let U.S. ships with nuclear arms enter its ports. In 1997, Jenny Shipley of the National party, which had been in power since 1990, became New Zealand's first woman prime minister.

The Labor party, led by Helen Clark, and its center-left coalition defeated the National party in the 1999 elections and formed a minority government. Clark's coalition retained power, again as a minority government, after the 2002 elections. After the court of appeals ruled in 2004 that Maoris could pursue land claims to New Zealand's beaches and seabed, the government passed legislation that nationalized the contested areas in an effort to prevent Maoris from gaining an exclusive legal title to them. The law alienated the government's Maori supporters and prompted the establishment of a Maori political party.

Parliamentary elections in Sept., 2005, resulted in a narrow victory for Labor, which secured a plurality of the seats. Clark formed a government with the support of three smaller parties, including the anti-immigration New Zealand First party. Clark and Labor lost the Nov., 2008, parliamentary elections to John Key, a wealthy former currency trader, and the National party, and Key became prime minister of a center-right coalition government. A strong earthquake in Sept., 2010, and a second one in Feb., 2011, caused widespread damage in Christchurch. Key and the National-led coalition remained in power after the Nov., 2011, elections.

## Geography

Lying in the south-west Pacific, New Zealand consists of two main islands - the North Island and the South Island. Stewart Island and many smaller islands lie offshore.

The North Island of New Zealand has a 'spine' of mountain ranges running through the middle, with gentle rolling farmland on both sides. The central North Island is dominated by the Volcanic Plateau, an active volcanic and thermal area. The massive Southern Alps form the backbone of the South Island. To the east of the Southern Alps is the rolling farmland of Otago and Southland, and the vast, flat Canterbury Plains.

## Native inhabitants

Moriori and Maori

The inhabitants of New Zealand at the time of Tasman's visit were the Maori, who began settling the land in the early 9th century. They had come to North Island from other Pacific islands, the last wave from Tahiti about AD 1350, in a fleet of large canoes. According to Maori oral history, when Kupe, a Maori navigator, voyaged here by canoe in the middle of the 10th century, the islands were uninhabited. Prior to Maori immigration, a dark-skinned race, the Moriori, of whose origin nothing is known, settled on the eastern coast of North Island; it is believed that they came to hunt the moa, a wingless bird about 3.7 m (about 12 ft) tall, which is now extinct. Some of these people were absorbed into the Maori population; the remainder were driven out and allowed to settle in the Chatham Islands, where the last survivor is said to have died in the mid-20th century. The Maori spread out along the coast and the rivers on both the main islands, although they were more numerous on North Island. In the late 18th and early 19th century British missionaries and whalers, despite fierce opposition from the Maori, established settlements and trading posts in New Zealand, chiefly among the Bay of Islands on the North Island. Systematic immigration began in 1839 and 1840 under the auspices of the New Zealand Company, which had been organized in London.

**Monetary unit:** New Zealand dollar

**Languages:** English, Maori (both official)