

NEW ZEALANDER

Background

New Zealand (known in the Maori language as “Aotearoa” - “the land of the long white cloud”) is an independent member of the British Commonwealth. With 3.9 million people to occupy the 260,000+ sq. km. country, it has twice the land area of England with only a fraction of the population. New Zealand consists of two main islands (the North Island and the South Island), a smaller one (Stewart Island) at the base of the South Island and several other small islands nearby. The populace might be simplistically divided into two groups: Urban and Rural. Rural New Zealand still influences most of the culture’s typical ethos: a people with a history of rigorous taming of rugged bush-land and learning to adapt to survive. As a result of this, generally speaking, the New Zealander is versatile in practical ways, is usually willing to “have a go” at most things, and often has an unbounded confidence in their own ingenuity. Coming from a small population who have known what it is to struggle, New Zealanders generally tend to favour the “underdog”.

New Zealand’s nearest neighbours (Australia, the Cook Islands, and Fiji), are at least a three hour plane journey away, so historically speaking, geographical isolation has played an important role in the development of its social, cultural and economic character.

Historical Brief

The Maori, a Polynesian people, settled in New Zealand about 1300 AD. Prior to that a people called the Moriori lived there. The European influence began with Abel Tasman, the Dutch explorer who “discovered” and named New Zealand in 1642, and more specifically with Captain James Cook, a British explorer who arrived in 1769. The first European residents of note were missionaries, initially Anglican and Methodist, but later Roman Catholic and Mormon. Led by Bishop Samuel Marsden of the Church of England’s Sydney Diocese in Australia, the early missionaries beseeched the British Crown to annex the land in order to protect the Maori from exploitation and abuse by gain-seeking outsiders (whalers, traders, etc.). Their argument was that under British jurisdiction some semblance of law and order might be upheld.

Eventually the British Government decided on a process of colonial rule, beginning discussions with northern Maori chiefs which resulted in the Treaty of Waitangi being signed in 1840. In this treaty, Maori leaders recognised the British Crown as sovereign over New Zealand and in return were granted all the rights and protection of the Crown as her subjects. Maori were guaranteed possession of their lands and natural resources but if land was to be sold by Maori, the terms of the treaty laid out that they would only sell it to the Crown. European settlers’ demands for Maori land later led to confrontation and war in the mid-to-late 1800s. Subsequent loss of land and the linked psychological loss of identity for the Maori people has only recently begun to be addressed in New Zealand society.

Ethnicity

New Zealand has diverse ethnic groups with Europeans dominating at 77%, Maori and Pacific Islanders 18.2%, Asian 4.3% and all others 0.5%.

There are few (if any) full-blooded Maori remaining, so complete was the gradual integration of the European and Maori peoples. Nevertheless, there has been a recent resurgence of Maori cultural identity and many reclaiming the almost-lost parts of their heritage. As a consequence population numbers are increasing fastest among those who now call themselves Maori, and also among

immigrant Pacific Islanders. There was little officially recognised racial tension in the past, but things have been changing with a growing resentment of wrongs suffered by the Maori people during the years of colonisation. The reclamation of their waning culture with a more articulate voice is part of a recent call for restitution.

The Pacific Island communities from Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue and the Tokelaus are growing rapidly after an initial open entry policy in the late 1960s and '70s allowed them to take up residence and supply the much-needed manual labour for New Zealand's advancing industries. Existing residents tend to congregate together and provide the key for other family members to immigrate, thus presenting a cultural challenge to European and Maori New Zealander alike. The "Asian invasion" is another major cultural adaptation especially in urban Auckland (which is home to roughly one third of New Zealand's total population).

Characteristics

General

Summary of some characteristics found in a 'kapai Kiwi', a good true fully acculturated citizen of New Zealand:

- Traditionally family/relationship-oriented, share their money and possessions with others,
- A relaxed easy-going attitude to life
- Hospitable open and friendly. The home is open to family and friends to share the meals provided and stay overnight if that is the need. As guests, they are quite happy to sleep on the floor if necessary.
- Lead lives that indicate people are more important than being dictated to by a clock
- A willingness to turn their hand to anything; especially helpful in finding (ingenious) temporary quick-fixes. Not afraid of hard physical work.
- Partial to humour, fun-loving, enjoys leisure activities and sports.
- Spices friendships with light-hearted abuse or criticisms of one another's personality traits. Communication may involve sarcasm, the classic 'wind-up', or 'having you on' (essentially lying for a comic effect!).
- Strongly independent and self-sufficient. Can be cynical. Does not respond well to being 'told' what to do. Wary of authority figures. Leans toward egalitarianism.
- Can tend toward self-deprecation, and criticism of those who "think too highly of themselves". Sides readily with the powerless, the oppressed, and the underdog.

Language and Education

English and (since 1987) Maori are the official languages of the nation and there is compulsory education for every child between the ages of five and fifteen. Efforts are being made to revive the use of the Maori language and it is more and more becoming a compulsory subject in schools.

Politics and Economy

New Zealand is basically a parliamentary democracy with few restrictions on personal freedom. The police and judiciary system deal with matters of law. It is of little political or strategic importance in the wider world, but enjoys a high standard of living due to low import tariffs and relatively high wages.

Economically it is dependent on the export of its agricultural and horticultural products and thus is sensitive to market conditions in Europe, USA and Asia.

The Welfare State was introduced in the 1930s as a means of helping the under-privileged, but due to the abuse of the system and a changing social climate it has now become a burden too heavy to

maintain economically. The Government is currently in the process of backing out of this responsibility.

Society

Although solo parenting is common, the New Zealand family is generally a nuclear family. There is considerable dysfunction within some family units. Maori and Polynesian families however, have retained close extended family ties. With most European families having both parents working, this has placed increasing responsibility on children, particularly older ones, to look after each other and perform many household duties, thus reinforcing an independent and self-sufficient attitude.

Status and respect is achieved (earned), not acquired (by arbitrary appointment, age, birthright, etc.) among Europeans. High status and responsibilities are usually associated with those who have done well in business, in the academic world or who have been sporting achievers.

Sport and Leisure

Sport and leisure have a very high place in the New Zealand value system. New Zealanders rank among the world's best in many sporting events and other outdoor pursuits. Leisure activities abound and leisure time is much sought after. Working for income usually occupies five days of the week while the weekend has traditionally been set aside for family, household, and leisure activities. Most European New Zealanders see money as security and are reluctant to part with their 'hard-earned' pay for anything other than that from which they will directly benefit.

Technology

Technology is extensive and specialised. Most people possess a wide range of electronic consumer goods and most families have at least one car. (This is seen as essential since public transport is limited and friends and family can be widespread.) Home appliances and labour-saving devices are widely used to enable more time for leisure activities. Communications systems are generally efficient and of the latest technology.

Arts

The Arts are encouraged by national government and local authorities who provide some financial support. Music, song, dance, drama and other creative arts flourish in many Christian circles as well as in the wider society.

Spirituality

Although Polynesians still tend to be strong church-goers, the European population is generally a generation or two removed from 'traditional' Christianity. New Zealand is almost a 'model' secular society. For many, the church fulfils "a rites of passage" service that features at major family events such as weddings, funerals and the christening of children - arising from traditional Anglo-Catholic heritage. New Zealand culture exalts a person's right to his own opinions and belief system without preference or privilege for one over another. "Tolerance" has become one of society's highest virtues. This results in religious pluralism with people being exhorted to find and believe in what is right "for them".

New Zealand churches have been blessed by the Charismatic Renewal movement, one result of which was a large output of New Zealand-written songs of praise and worship in the 1970s and early '80s. Over recent years, there has been more growth in the musical quality and meaningful congregational participation in public worship. New Zealand Christianity is probably marked for its relatively pervasive acceptance of things 'charismatic' so that now, within nearly every Christian denomination there is a very vibrant and charismatic stream. The missionary advance has long existed in traditional churches, and independent missions interest is rising in newer fellowships. New

Zealand is one of the largest missionary sending nations per capita in the world - which could stem from the early settlers' missionary heritage. However, due to a limited resource base, New Zealanders involved in missions also tend to be among the least well-supported.