Introduction

New Zealand is a country made up of islands in the South Pacific Ocean. The Maori people lived on the islands for hundreds of years before Europeans arrived in the 1600s. New Zealand’s capital is Wellington.

Geography

New Zealand lies about 1,600 kilometres south-east of Australia, its nearest neighbour. The Tasman Sea lies off the west coast of the country and the South Pacific is to the east.

Two long islands called the North Island and the South Island make up almost all of New Zealand. The Cook Strait separates these two islands. The country also includes a number of small islands, some of them hundreds of kilometres from the main group.
Plants and Animals

Much of New Zealand was once forested. After European settlers arrived in the 1800s, however, many of the islands’ original trees were cut down for wood and to make farmland. Today, original forests survive mainly in national parks. Many of New Zealand’s native plants are found nowhere else in the world.

Because New Zealand is far from other large bodies of land, animals cannot reach the islands from other places on their own. Therefore, before New Zealand was settled by humans, it had only a few reptiles, frogs and bats. One of the reptiles, the lizard-like tuatara, had been extinct elsewhere for 100 million years. The tuatara still exists in New Zealand, though only in isolated parts of the country and on outlying islands.

The early Maori settlers of the islands brought the dog and the rat with them. Later, European settlers introduced red deer, opossums and rabbits. Many of these animals damaged plants and soil.

New Zealand has long been home to many types of birds. Flightless birds thrived on the islands because there were no large animals to prey upon
them. Several types of flightless birds are left in New Zealand, including the **kiwi**, New Zealand’s beloved national symbol.

![Kiwi bird](kiwi.jpg)

*The kiwi is a flightless bird that is the national symbol of New Zealand.*

New Zealand’s other birds include the parrot known as the kakapo, the fish-eating cormorant and the penguin.

![Birds in New Zealand](birds.jpg)

People

The **Maori** are a Polynesian people. Their population may have reached as high as 200,000 before Europeans began settling on the islands in the 1800s. Warfare and diseases brought by the Europeans reduced the Maori population to about 42,000 by the end of the 1800s. Even so, the Maori are a larger element in New Zealand’s population today than are **Aboriginal peoples** in Australia or **Native Americans** in the United States. About 10 per cent of New Zealanders claimed to have Maori ancestors.
The great majority of the population, however, is made up of Europeans, mostly of British origin. The country also has small groups of Chinese, Indians and people from other Pacific islands.

English is the main language of New Zealand. Both English and Maori are official languages. The majority of New Zealanders are Christians.

The North Island has about three times the population of the South Island. About 86 per cent of New Zealanders live in cities and towns. The largest cities are Auckland, Christchurch, Manukau, North Shore, Wellington and Waitakere. All except Christchurch are on the North Island.

The culture of New Zealand is mainly European, but Maori artistic and cultural traditions have been revived. Maori songs and dances have become increasingly popular, especially among the young. The cultural life of the European New Zealanders has developed rapidly since the early
1900s. Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, who has European and Maori ancestors, was one of the world’s leading opera singers.

Important public holidays in New Zealand include ANZAC Day (25 April) and Waitangi Day (6 February). Waitangi Day is considered the country’s national day. It commemorates the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Great Britain and Maori tribes.

A popular festival is Te Matatini which celebrates Maori culture. It lasts three to four days. The *kapa haka* (‘row dance’) competition is the focus.
Economy

**Agriculture** is still the country’s leading source of exports. The raising of sheep and cattle is the major agricultural activity. New Zealand’s sheep population is about 7 times its human population.

Apples, barley, wheat and corn (maize) are among the main crops. The volcanic zone on the North Island provides fertile soil that is excellent for growing many different kinds of crops. **Fishing and forestry** are also important in New Zealand’s economy. The country’s main exports include meat, wool, dairy products, fish and wood products such as paper.

**Service industries** employ more people than any other part of the economy. The major services include banking, insurance and tourism.
History
According to the traditional beliefs of the Maori, they arrived on the islands of New Zealand in the AD 1300s. They say that they had sailed from a mythical land called Hawaiki.

European Contact and Settlement
In 1642 the Dutch sailor Abel Tasman became the first European to see New Zealand. He once tried to land, but he was driven away by Maori warriors. No other European visited New Zealand until the British explorer Captain James Cook did so in 1769. He returned on two later voyages. Cook sailed around both main islands and made good maps of them. He also established friendly relations with the Maori.

Cook’s journal of his travels inspired colonists and other explorers to go to the islands. The first Europeans in New Zealand were whale and seal hunters. Beginning in the late 1700s whaling companies based in Australia, set up small stations on the main islands. The next people to come to New Zealand were missionaries, who arrived in the early 1800s. They eventually converted most of the Maori to Christianity.

In 1840 the Maori and the British signed the Treaty of Waitangi. In this agreement the Maori accepted British rule in exchange for protection of their land rights.

Relations with Britain and Other Countries
In the 1880s New Zealand farmers began to ship butter, cheese and meat to Britain. In 1907 New Zealand became a self-governing state within the British Empire. New Zealanders fought alongside British and other Allied forces in both World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45). They formed part of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). These experiences caused their feelings of national unity to grow. Two years later New Zealand gained full independence from Britain. New Zealand remained a member of the Commonwealth, meaning that it kept friendly ties with Britain.