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# **New Zealand**

***Where is New Zealand?***

New Zealand is a country in Southwestern Oceania, southeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean, with two large islands (North and South Island), one smaller island (Stewart Island), and numerous much smaller islands. New Zealand has a total land area of 268,670 sq km and a coastline of 15,134 km.

***Time Zones***

New Zealand is 12 hours ahead of GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) making it one of the first places in the world to see the new day. Summer time (or Daylight Saving Time) is an advance of one hour at 2am in the morning on the first Sunday in October and back to NZST at 3am in the morning on the third Sunday morning of March.


## **Landscape**

New Zealand is a long narrow country lying roughly North/South with mountain ranges running much of its length. It is predominately mountainous with some large coastal plains and is a little larger than Britain, slightly smaller than Italy, and almost exactly the size of Colorado.

The only `geographical feature' New Zealand doesn't have is live coral reef. New Zealand has all the rest: rainforest, desert, fiords, flooded valleys, gorges, plains, mountains, glaciers, volcanoes, geothermics, swamps, lakes, braided rivers, peneplains, badlands, and our very own continental plate junction... As a result of the latter, earthquakes are common, though usually not severe.

The North Island has a number of large volcanoes (including the currently active Mount Ruapehu) and highly active thermal areas, while the South Island boasts the Southern Alps - a spine of magnificent mountains running almost its entire length. Another notable feature of New Zealand is its myriad rivers and lakes: notably the Whanganui River, Lake Taupo and the breathtaking lakes Waikaremoana and Wanaka.

***Flora and Fauna***

New Zealand is believed to be a fragment of the ancient Southern continent of Gondwanaland which became detached over 100 million years ago allowing many ancient plants and animals to survive and evolve in isolation. As a result, most of the New Zealand flora and fauna is indigenous/endemic. About 10 to 15% of the total land area of New Zealand is native flora, the bulk protected in national parks and reserves.

New Zealand has the worlds largest flightless parrot (kakapo), the only truly alpine parrot (kea), the oldest reptile (tuatara), the biggest earthworms, the largest weta, the smallest bats, some of the oldest trees, and many of the rarest birds, insects, and plants in the world.... New Zealand is home to the world famous Tuatara, a lizard-like reptile which dates back to the dinosaurs and perhaps before (260 mill years?). The only native land mammals are two rare species of bat. New Zealand's many endemic birds include the flightless kiwi, takahe, kakapo and weka. Far too many species of bird have become extinct since humans arrived on New Zealand included the various species of Dinornis (moa) the largest of which stood up to 2.5 metres high. There is also some unique insect life such as the Giant Weta and glow worms. Other than two spiders, there is a lack of any deadly poisonous things (snakes, spiders, etc.) which is why New Zealand Agricultural Regulations are so strict.

Introduced species - pigs, goats, possums, dogs, cats, deer and the ubiquitous sheep - are found throughout New Zealand but their proliferation in the wild has had a deleterious effect on the environment: over 150 native plants - 10% of the total number of native species - and many native birds are presently threatened with extinction.

New Zealand's offshore waters hold a variety of fish, including tuna, marlin, snapper, trevally, kahawai and shark; while its marine mammals - dolphins, seals and whales - attract nature-lovers from around the world. There are 12 national, 20 forest, three maritime and two marine parks, plus two World Heritage Areas: Tongariro National Park in the North Island and Te Waihipouna-mu in the South Island.

One of the most noticeable plants is the pohutakawa (known as the New Zealand Christmas tree) which detonates with brilliant red flowers around December. The great kauri trees in the few remaining kauri forests in Northland are very old with some believed to be up to 2000 years old. Much of the South Island is still forested, particularly the West Coast.

***Climate***
Lying between 34S and 47S, New Zealand sits squarely in the `roaring forties' latitude which means a prevailing and continual wind blows over the country from east to west; this can range from a gentle breeze in summer to a buffeting, roof-stripping gale in winter. The North Island and South Island, because of their different geological features, have two distinct patterns of rainfall: in the South Island, the Southern Alps act as a barrier for the moisture-laden winds from the Tasman Sea, creating a wet climate to the west of the mountains and a dry climate to the east; while the North Island's rainfall is more evenly distributed without a comparable geological feature such as the Alps.

The New Zealand climate is temperate with no real extremes. Temperatures are a few degrees cooler in the South Island, and both islands receive snow in winter. Being an island nation, the yearly range of temperatures is quite small, around 10 degrees Celsius variation between winter and summer. Winter falls in the months of June through August and summer from December through to February.

It is important to remember that New Zealand's climate is maritime, rather than continental, which means the weather can change with amazing rapidity and consequence. New Zealand enjoys long hours of sunshine throughout the year making it an ideal year round destination. In winter the South Island mountain and central North Island do have heavy snowfalls providing great skiing. The busy tourist season falls in the warmer months between November and April, though ski resorts, such as Queenstown, are full during winter.

## **Demography**

Total population is about 3.7 million. Over 70% of the population are in the North Island. The largest centre is Auckland (over 1 million), and the capital Wellington.

The official languages are English and Maori. English is more widely spoken, though the Maori language, for so long on the decline, is now making a comeback due to the revival of Maoritanga. A mellifluous, poetic language, the Maori language is surprisingly easy to pronounce if spoken phonetically and each word split into separate syllables. Pacific Island and Asian languages may be heard in cities.

**Culture**

The dominant cultural groups are the Pakeha and the Maori. Other smaller groups include Yugoslavian Dalmatians, Polynesians, Indians and Chinese. A common thread that binds the entire population is its love of sport - especially the national game of rugby union - and outdoor pursuits such as sailing, swimming, cycling, hiking and camping. The secular aside, Christianity is the most common religion, with Anglicanism, Presbyterianism and Catholicism the largest denominations. An interesting religious variation is the synthesis of the Maori Ratana and Ringatu faiths with Christianity.

New Zealand art is multifarious, valuing innovation, integrity and craftsmanship that reflects Pakeha, Maori and Melanesian heritage. Wood, stone, shell and bone carvings are readily available while larger works such as tukutuku (wood panelling) can be seen in most maraes (meeting houses). Paua shell, greenstone, greywacke and greenwacke pebbles are often fashioned into jewellery that takes its inspiration from the landscape: earrings shaped like the leaves of a gingko tree; sunglasses modelled on native fern tendrils; and necklaces in frangipani-flower designs. There is a lively theatre scene in the country, especially in Wellington, and a number of galleries, including the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, which is the oldest viewing room in New Zealand and one of its best. The music scene is vigorous and fecund, spawning a pool of talent - from Split Enz and Crowded House to the thrashing guitar pyrotechnics of Dunedin's 3D's and Straitjacket Fits - lauded locally and overseas.

## **Politics**

***Constitution***New Zealand shares with Britain and Israel the distinction of being one of the three developed countries that does not have a codified Constitution on the U.S. model. When the country was annexed by Britain in 1840, the British parliament enacted that all applicable law of England as at 1840 became the law of New Zealand. In 1856, the New Zealand parliament was given the power to enact its own law and nothing changed when full independence was achieved (26-9-1907) except that the British parliament lost its overriding authority. We have, thus, never had the problem that Australia and Canada have had of "repatriating" a constitution that was really an Act of the British parliament.

Our constitution, like the British, consists of parliament's own conventions and rules of conduct, some legislation such as the New Zealand Constitution Act (1986, not enacted), and fundamental rules applied by the Courts which go back into English history. It evolves rather than is amended.

The flag of New Zealand is blue with the flag of the UK in the upper hoist-side quadrant with four red five-pointed stars edged in white centered in the outer half of the flag; the stars represent the Southern Cross constellation.

The National Anthem of New Zealand is "God Defend New Zealand".

***Form of Government***

Constitutional monarchy, with a single-chamber parliament.

The monarch is said to "reign but not rule": except for a residual power to actually govern in the event of some complete breakdown of the parliamentary system, the monarch has merely ceremonial duties and advisory powers. When the monarch is absent from the country, which is most of the time, those duties and powers are delegated to the Governor-General who is appointed by the monarch for a limited term after approval by the government.

Parliament is the consitutional "sovereign" - there is no theoretical limit on what it can validly do, and the validity of the laws which it enacts cannot be challenged in the courts (although the courts do have and use wide-ranging powers to control administrative acts of the government). A new parliament is elected every three years (universal suffrage at age 18). The leader of the party which commands majority support in parliament is appointed prime minister and he or she nominates the other Ministers of the Crown. The ministers (and sometimes the whole majority party in parliament) are collectively called "the government". Our system almost entirely lacks formal checks and balances - the majority party can virtually legislate as it likes subject only to its desire to be re-elected every three years.

Until now, members of parliament have been elected on a single-member constituency, winner takes all, system similar to those of Britain and the U.S.A. As a result of referenda conducted in 1993, future parliaments will be elected on a mixed-member proportional system modelled on that of Germany.

The administration is highly centralised. The country is divided into "districts" (the urban ones called "cities") each with a District (or City) Council and Mayor, but their powers are limited to providing public facilities (not housing) and enforcement of by-laws (local regulations) such as parking regulations. The Police are a single force controlled by the central government.

***The Justice System***

There is a four-level hearings and appeals system:

 Top level Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (London)

 |

 Court of Appeal (Wellington)

 |

 High Court (in all cities)

 |

 Bottom level District Courts (most towns)

There is also the Small Claims Court which handles smaller personal disputes.

Civil and criminal cases start in the District or High Court, depending on their seriousness and appeals go up the chain. Certain rare cases can start in the Court of Appeal. District and High Court judges sit alone or with juries. The Court of Appeal (and on certain rare occasions the High Court) consists of three or five judges sitting "en banc". The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council consists mainly of British Law Lords with New Zealand judges also sitting in New Zealand cases; in theory its decisions merely "opinions" for the benefit of the monarch as the fount of all justice, but in practice its rulings have the force of ultimate appeal.

All judges are appointed by the government - High Court judges are nominated by the Law Society, but District Court judges apply for the job like any other. Various special-purpose courts (Industrial Court, Maori Land Court, Family Court, etc.) exist and have the same status as either a District Court or the High Court.

## **History**

The Polynesian navigator Kupe has been credited with the discovery of New Zealand in 950 AD. He named it Aotearoa (Land of the Long White Cloud). Centuries later, around 1350 AD, a great migration of people from Kupe's homeland of Hawaiki followed his navigational instructions and sailed to New Zealand, eventually supplanting or mixing with previous residents. Their culture, developed over centuries without any discernible outside influence, was hierarchical and often sanguinary.

In 1642, the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman briefly sailed along the west coast of New Zealand; any thoughts of a longer stay were thwarted when his attempt to land resulted in several of his crew being killed and eaten. In 1769, Captain James Cook circumnavigated the two main islands aboard the Endeavour. Initial contact with the Maoris also proved violent but Cook, impressed with the Maoris' bravery and spirit and recognising the potential of this newfound land, grabbed it for the British crown before setting sail for Australia.

When the British began their antipodean colonising, New Zealand was originally seen as an offshoot of Australian enterprise in whaling and sealing: in fact, from 1839 to 1841 the country was under the jurisdiction of New South Wales. However, increased European settlement soon proved problematic: a policy was urgently required regarding land deals between the settlers (Pakeha) and the Maori. In 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, with the Maori ceding sovereignty of their country to Britain in exchange for protection and guaranteed possession of their lands. But relations between the Maori and Pakeha soon soured (the Maoris became increasingly alarmed at the effect the Pakeha had on their society while the Pakeha rode roughshod over Maori rights outlined in the treaty). In 1860, war broke out between them, continuing for much of the decade before the Maori were defeated.

By the late 19th century, things had temporarily calmed down. The discovery of gold had engendered much prosperity, and wide-scale sheep farming meant New Zealand became an efficient and mostly self-reliant country. Sweeping social changes - women's suffrage, social security, the encouragement of trade unions and the introduction of child care services - cemented New Zealand's reputation as a country committed to egalitarian reform.

New Zealand was given dominion status in the British Empire in 1907 and granted autonomy by Britain in 1931; independence, however, was not formally proclaimed until 1947. The economy continued to prosper until the worldwide recession in the 1980s, when unemployment rose dramatically. Today the economy has stabilised, thanks largely to an export-driven recovery. Internationally, New Zealand was hailed during the mid-1980s for its anti-nuclear stance - even though it meant a falling-out with the USA - and its opposition to French nuclear testing in the Pacific (which France countered, to much opprobrium but little penalty, by blowing up the Greenpeace vessel Rainbow Warrior as it sat in Auckland Harbour).

The Maori population is now increasing faster than the Pakeha and a resurgence in Maoritanga (Maori culture) has had a major and lasting impact on New Zealand society. Culturally, the most heartening aspect had been the mending of relations between the Maori and Pakeha (in 1985, the Treaty of Waitangi was overhauled, leading to financial reparations to a number of Maori tribes whose land had been unjustly confiscated). However, a recent clumsy take-it-or-leave-it attempt by the New Zealand government to offer financial reparations has resulted in an upsurge of militant Maori protests. Maoris have disrupted events, occupied land claim areas, set up roadblocks and threatened to blow-up the New Zealand parliament. The disharmony has shocked New Zealanders and placed national conciliation at the top of the political agenda.

**26,000,000 B.C.**

Southern alps rise above the ocean.

**700 A.D.**Possible early settlement on the South Island by an archaic Maori population originating in Polynesia.

**10C**Date of discovery of New Zealand by Polynesian navigator Kupe according to Maori legend. Islands named Aotearoa, "Land of the Long White Cloud".

**12C**Settlement of the North Island.

**13 and 14C**"Great Migration" from the Society Islands. Dwindling moa population. Warrior society established.

**1642**Dutch explorer Abel Tasman discovers west coast of the South Island. Dutch name the country "Nieuw Zeeland" after the Dutch island province of Zeeland.

**1769-70**Captain James Cook circumnavigates and charts both islands, taking possession of "New Zealand" for Britain.

**1820s**First European settlement (in the Bay of Islands).

**1830s**Intertribal wars abate due to introduction of musket and wholesale slaughter.

**1840**Treaty of Waitangi signed. Maoris cede sovereignty to Britain, obtain guarantees of land ownership and "rights and privileges of British subjects."

**1850-1880**"Wool period" with importation of sheep from Australia. Also a period of war and conflict over land ownership.

**1882**Refrigerated ships introduced. Farmers turn to meat and dairy production.

**1893**New Zealand becomes the first country in the world to give women the vote.

**1907**Independence from UK.

**1914-1918**One of every three men between 20 and 40 killed or wounded fighting for Britain in World War I.

**1939**New Zealand sends troops to fight for the Allies in Europe.

**1941-45**Threatened by Japan, defended by United States Navy (eventually led to ANZUS pact in 1951, a defensive alliance with the U.S. and Australia).

**1947**New Zealand becomes independent by adopting Statue of Westminster.

**1973**Britain joins European Economic Community and adopts their trade barriers to New Zealand's agricultural products. Combined with high oil prices, this was enough to devastate the economy.

**1973-1984**Robert Muldoon's National Party expands welfare state and government interventionism, running huge budget deficits financed with overseas money. High inflation and unemployment cause massive emigration to Australia.

**1975**Treaty of Waitangui Act passed to settle Maori land claimson the basis of original treaty.

**1984**New Labour government eliminates agricultural subsidies and wage and price controls, lowers tax rates, begins a radical program of privatization.

**1985**The bombing of the Rainbow Warrior from Greenpeace in Auckland by French secret service agents. One man was killed (Fernando Pereira).

## **Economy**

Since 1984 the government has been reorienting an agrarian economy dependent on a guaranteed British market to an open free market economy that can compete on the global scene. The government had hoped that dynamic growth would boost real incomes, reduce inflationary pressures, and permit the expansion of welfare benefits. The results have been mixed: inflation is down from double-digit levels, but growth has been sluggish and unemployment, always a highly sensitive issue, has exceeded 10% since May 1991. In 1988, GDP fell by 1%, in 1989 grew by a moderate 2.4%, and was flat in 1990-91. Current (1994) growth is around 2-4% and rising.

The economy is based on agriculture (particularly dairy products, meat, and wool (68 m sheep, 2 m dairy cows)), food processing, wood and paper products, textiles, machinery, transportation equipment, banking and insurance, tourism, mining. Fish catch reached a record 0.5 m tonnes in 1988. Highly dependent on external trade, New Zealand is currently trying to move from being a primary to a secondary producer.

***Currency***
Decimal system based on New Zealand dollar, with cent denominations. Coins are 5, 10, 20, and 50 cents, 1 and 2 dollars. Notes are 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 dollars. Major credit cards are accepted widely.

***Stockmarket***
Same as overseas.

***Interest Rates***

Fluctuating between 6 and 8% depending on overseas markets.

***Taxes***
New Zealand operates a Goods and Services Tax of 12.5 per cent on ALL goods and services sold and this is usually included in the display price. The exceptions are purchases at duty free shops. Visitors cannot claim refunds on this tax however when a supplier agrees to export a major item to a visitors home address then GST will not be charged on the goods or the freight.

Income tax 24% on first $30,874/year, 33% for every $ above this. There are various rebates for things like low incomes, children, donations, Housekeeper, Home/Farm/Vessel Ownbership, and others.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Government Revenue Source (1990)*  | *How it was expected to be spent (1990)*  |
| Income TaxGost and Service TaxOther Direct TaxesExcise DutiesHighway taxOther Indirect Tax | $16,950$5,500$360$1,670$670$790 | EducationHealthTransportAdministrationDevelopment of IndustryGovernment BorrowingForeign RelationsSocial Services | $3,912.5$3,791.1$711.6$2,769.0$1,231.3$575.1$1,733.7$10,292.1 |
| **Total**  | **$25,940**  | **Total**  | **$25,016.4**  |

## **Life in General**

***Business Hours***
Banks 9:00am to 4:30pm - can vary slightly. Otherwise, Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5:30pm. Late night for shopping is either Thursday or Friday. Changes to the Shop Trading Hours Act means that most shops are open for longer hours than this. Almost all are open Saturday morning, many are open on Sunday with some shops and markets remaining open later during the week.

Automatic teller machines are widely available including a system in many supermarkets and petrol stations called EFTPOS where you can buy goods with your card and a PIN number and/or obtain cash. All international credit cards are accepted in New Zealand. Travellers cheques can be changed in banks, hotels, stores, etc.
There is no restriction on the amount of foreign currency which may be brought into or taken from New Zealand. Funds may be in the form of bank notes, coins, travellers cheques or any other instrument of payment. Visitors may convert surplus New Zealand currency at any outlet authorised to deal in foreign exchange.

***Events***
Some of the noteworthy cultural events include: Summer City Programme (January to February; Wellington) which is a series of festivals around the city; Marlborough Food & Wine Festival (2nd week in February; Blenheim); International Festival of the Arts (February, even-numbered years only; Wellington), an entire month of national and international culture; Golden Shears Sheep-Shearing Contest (March; Masterton), a must for lovers of sheep, scat and sweat; and Canterbury Show Week (November; Christchurch) which has agricultural exhibits, rides and local entertainment.

***Tipping***
Tipping is not unheard of in New Zealand. Employed people don't depend on tips for their income and service charges are not [usually] added to hotel and restaurant bills. Tip for service if you think it's deserved.

***Getting There & Away***
The overwhelming majority of visitors arrive by air. There are three airports that handle international flights: Auckland (the major exit/entry point), Wellington and Christchurch. Departure tax on international flights is NZ$20. A few cruise ships visit New Zealand, but there are no regular passenger ship services and working your way across the Pacific as crew on a yacht now seems a thing of the past.

***Getting Around***
Although New Zealand is a compact country and generally easy to get around, it makes good sense to fly - especially for the views over the mountains or volcanoes. A variety of discounts also makes flying economical. New Zealand has two major domestic airlines: Air New Zealand and Ansett New Zealand. Several smaller airlines - Mt Cook Airline, Eagle Air and Air Nelson - are partly owned by Air New Zealand and have been grouped together as `Air New Zealand Link'. This network provides thorough coverage of the country.

New Zealand also has an extensive bus network, with the main operator being InterCity (servicing both the North Island and South Island). The two other major bus operators are Newmans (North Island) and Mt Cook Landline (South Island). Services on main bus routes are frequent (at least once a day); unfortunately they can be expensive and slow. A good alternative is to use shuttle bus companies which are smaller, cheaper and friendlier than the large bus companies. Some of them are designed to cater especially for foreign travellers and/or backpackers and have lots of little `extras' that make them particularly attractive; other companies, perhaps drawing on the experiences of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, can take you around New Zealand on `alternative' buses which are often an unhurried way of seeing the country.

Main train routes are few, though train travel is reasonably quick. Trains are modern and comfortable, and the fares are sometimes cheaper than those by bus on the same routes.

Car travel (New Zealanders drive on the left) is recommended as the roads are good and well signposted and the distances short. Rentals of cars, motorcycles and campervans are popular with a range of special deals available.

There are plenty of boat services, including the Interislander ferry (operating between Wellington in the North Island and Picton in the South Island.

And finally, there's always cycling around the country. Many travellers describe New Zealand as a cyclists' paradise: it's clean, green, uncrowded and unspoiled, and there are plenty of places where you can camp or find cheap accommodation. Bicycle rental can be daily, weekly or monthly and is inexpensive.

***Crime***
While it may be `safe' compared to most other countries, serious crime does exist here and visitors should take sensible precautions. Always lock your vehicle, and don't leave it in isolated locations for extended periods. Avoid leaving valuables visible in the car. Avoid areas/situations which appear unwholesome. The emergency phone number (police, ambulance, fire) is 111, and ask the operator for the service required (this can be used from payphones without paying).

***Health***
New Zealand operates a no-fault accident compensation scheme which covers residents and visitors. Personal injury through accident entitles the injured party to compensation for reasonable expenses related to the accident. Due to abuse, this has been reworked recently and compensation is far harder to obtain.

***Water Supply***

New Zealand cities and towns have good public water. Water is safe to drink out of the tap. The water in Christchurch \*is\* totally untreated and is supposed to be the purist domestic water supply in the world...

In bush walking areas giardia has been found so its advisable to check before drinking from rivers or streams. Boiling water for five minutes or more is advised where advice is not available.

***Communications***
Telephone Country Code = 64

The Telephone is similar to British Telecom style. Uses BT 600 plug (not RJ-11) Phone line is pins 2 and 5 of the BT 600 plug (RJ-11 is pins 3 & 4). Hotels will have difficulty in converting plugs styles but conversion cables are available from retailers.

Most New Zealand telephone systems can handle DTMF tone dialling. BEWARE: New Zealand pulse dialing is the reverse of most countries. The digit are reversed and so produce different numbers of pulses. The conversion is:

 digit | # of Pulses

 --------+------------

 0 | 10

 1 | 9

 2 | 8

 [.....]

 8 | 2

 9 | 1

The best solution is to use tone dialing.

***Electricity***
The normal electricity supply is 230 volts 50 hertz alternating current (AC).

3 pin appliance socket from a viewpoint looking at the wall or a plug seen from the inside as one would while wiring it up.

 phase ----- / \ ---- neutral

 (or live)

 | --------- earth

If the wires you have are brown, blue, and green [yellow or white striped], then; brown = phase, blue = neutral, green = earth. The old code is red, black, green respectively. If you have ANY doubts, please consult a qualified electrician.

Most hotels will have shaver plugs suitable for all international appliance of low power rating, and which will supply 110 and 230 volts. These plugs may be for shavers only.

***TV Information***

New Zealand runs on PAL G on UHF. This gives the same picture and sound spacing (5.5MHz), but the channel spacing is slightly wider - the same as that used for 6MHz intercarrier spacing. Standard 50 hertz field rate, 25 hertz frame rate. We also use NICAM for stereo tv, rather than one of the various analogue systems.

In the Southern Hemisphere, the locally-vertical component of the field is in the opposite direction to where it would be an equivalent distance north of the equator. This affects the colour convergence of video monitors. It's not a \*huge\* difference, and it took computer companies until the late 1980s' to wake up to the difference and ship different monitor versions to New Zealand, South America, and Australia. Northern hemisphere monitors \*work\* but the colours won't be as crisp as you'd expect.

# **North Island**

In ancient Maori mythology, the North Island is Te Ika a Maui (the Fish of Maui). According to the story, Maui was fishing with his brothers when he hooked the North Island from the ocean. His ravenous brothers, ignoring orders not to touch the fish, began gnawing at its flesh, causing the fish to writhe and thresh about - this frenzy of movement is the reason behind the island's undulant and mountainous landscape.

There are snow-fringed mountains in the Tongariro National Park, exclamatory geysers and bubbling mud pools in Rotorua and a profusion of rivers, lakes and streams. But the North Island is more than rips and fissures: it has its share of rolling pastures, forest-clad hills and stretches of long, sandy beaches. It also has New Zealand's two largest cities - Auckland to the north and the country's capital, Wellington, to the south - which are focal points for arts and entertainment, historic buildings, great dining and a variety of accommodation.

***Auckland***
The largest city in New Zealand, Auckland, is almost enclosed by water and covered in volcanic hills. Auckland has a spectacular harbour and bridge (and a fanatical number of yachting enthusiasts) which has earned it the sobriquet 'City of Sails'. A magnet for the people of the South Pacific islands, Auckland now has the largest concentration of Polynesians in the world. Highlights include the Auckland Museum, which houses a memorable display of Maori artefacts and culture, and Kelly Tarlton's Underwater World & Antarctic Encounter, a unique simulacrum of ocean and exploration activities.

There is great shopping in the suburbs of Parnell and Newmarket, well-preserved Victorian buildings in Devonport, Polynesian handicrafts, cafes, restaurants and markets in Ponsonby, panoramic views of the city from the extinct volcano One Tree Hill, and good swimming beaches including Kohimarama and Mission Bay.

The Hauraki Gulf off Auckland is dotted with islands such as Rangitoto, Great Barrier and Waiheke, which have affordable accommodation, a number of walks and diving possibilities and, in the case of Waiheke Island, excellent art galleries. Auckland is also a good starting-point for visiting the amazingly scenic Coromandel Peninsula and Hauraki Plains regions to the south-east.

***Northland***
Northland is the cradle of both Maori and Pakeha culture: it was here that the Pakeha first made contact with the Maori, the first whaling settlements were established and the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Often referred to as the 'winterless north' because of its mild year-round temperatures, Northland has a number of interesting museums (Otamatea Kauri & Pioneer Museum), glorious, blonde beaches (Ninety Mile Beach) and diving spots (Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve, reckoned by Jacques Cousteau to be among the top 10 diving sites in the world), historic towns (Pahia and Waitangi), game fishing (Bay of Islands) and flora and fauna reserves (Waipoua Kauri Forest).

***Great Barrier Island***

Great Barrier Island at the mouth of the Hauraki Gulf has acres of long, white sandy beaches on its eastern shore, deep-water sheltered inlets on its western shore, and a rugged spine of steep ridges running down the centre. The 80,000 hectare preserve has a number of walking tracks which combine old logging trails and tramways. Natural hot springs, towering kauri forests and a serene aura make it a perfect escape. Flights and ferries operate from Auckland, 88 km south.

***Bay of Plenty***

The Bay of Plenty, given its name by Captain Cook in 1769 because of the number of thriving Maori settlements, has a consistently mild climate year-round, good beaches and is the home of the kiwi fruit - a fuzzy, brown, sweet-tasting fruit and a major source of export revenue for the region. The city of Tauranga offers activities such as jet-skiing, water-skiing, windsurfing, parasailing, diving, surfing, fishing and harbour cruises. Across the inlet from Tauranga is Mt Maunganui, a popular holiday resort with beaches and saltwater pools. Rotorua, one of the most visited cities in New Zealand, is famous for its kinetic thermal activity (Whakarewarewa is the best known site and the location of Pohutu, an active geyser that gushes forth every hour), a large and influential Maori population, trout springs and wildlife parks.

***East Cape***

The East Cape, as opposed to the Bay of Plenty, is little visited, but its isolation belies an area endowed with native forest, wild coasts and picturesque bays, inlets and coves. During the summer, the coastline turns vermilion with the explosion of flowers from the pohutukawa trees lining the shores.

***Cape Runaway***
A succession of picturesque bays leads to Whangaparaoa (Cape Runaway), at the very tip of the East Cape. The beaches are deeply shelved and littered with driftwood, and the old Anglican church, nestled under Norfolk pines on a lone promontory, should not be missed. Cape Runaway can only be reached by foot and it's advisable to seek permission before going on private land.

***Central North Island***

Hamilton, New Zealand's largest inland city, is surrounded by some of the world's richest dairy farming and agricultural regions. It is a city of museums, zoos and parks, and offers river cruises on the Waikato River, the country's longest (425 km). Further south is the region of King Country, once the stronghold of powerful Maori chiefs. The town of Waitomo is famous for its limestone caves and subterranean black-water rafting (a wetsuit, caver's helmet, inner tube and abundant courage are all that's required) while Te Kuiti, named after the belligerent Maori leader Te Kooti, is recognised as 'the shearing capital of the world'. Even further south is Taumaranui, which makes a good base for kayaking, rafting and jet-boating on the Whanganui River.

The west coast region of Taranaki is dominated by Mt Taranaki (also officially known as Mt Egmont), a dormant volcano rising 2518 metres. Other highlights in Taranaki include the Egmont National Park and the region's world-class surfing and windsurfing beaches. New Zealand's largest lake, and the geographical centre of the North Island, is Lake Taupo. Dotted around its shores are towns with cheap accommodation and great dining possibilities (trout is a speciality). Nearby are the spectacular Tongariro and Whanganui national parks; the former is renowned for its ski slopes while the latter has several excellent walking tracks and recreational water activities on the Whanganui River. East of the national parks is the Art Deco city of Napier, with its splendid weather and beautiful beaches.

***Wellington***
The capital city of New Zealand, Wellington, is situated on a splendid harbour at the southern tip of the North Island. Often maligned by its northern counterparts for its ill-tempered weather - the winds are often of gale-force calibre in winter - Wellington is a lively city of culture and arts (with festivals almost every month), and great ethnic restaurants and cafes. It is also home to the country's government and national treasures. Buildings of interest include: the modernist Beehive (the executive wing of Parliament); the old Government Building (one of the largest all-wooden buildings in the world); the National Library (housing the most comprehensive collection of books in the country); and the Katherine Mansfield Memorials (the property where the famous author was born in 1888). In addition, there are museums, a zoo and stunning views of the city from atop Mt Victoria. Cuba Street has great shopping, Thorndon has historic sites of interest, Lambton Quay is the primary business street and Mt Victoria is the place to go for cheap accommodation and dining.

# **South Island**

The South Island crams in glaciers, fiords, turbulent rivers, trout streams, rainforests, mossy beech forests, palmy beaches and a number of mountains that top 3000 metres - a repertoire to inspire even the most sluggish arms, legs and lungs. It's an island where you can fish, paddle, pedal, raft, hike and walk in some of the most gorgeous scenery on earth.

Most journeys begin in postcard-perfect Picton, where the ferry from the North Island arrives, or Christchurch, a city under the delusion that it is somewhere in southern England. From either of these points, you can make your way to any number of attractions: the labyrinth of tributaries known as the Marlborough Sounds; nearby Nelson, a city famous for its wines and succulent seafood; Mount Cook National Park, where New Zealand's tallest peaks are found; Queenstown, nestled beneath the saw-toothed peaks of The Remarkables; and, further south, the reserves of podocarp forests and fauna found in the Catlins. The people, much like the weather and topography, are robust. The roads are excellent for a self-drive holiday.

***Marlborough Sounds***

The convoluted waterways of the Marlborough Sounds, formed when the sea invaded a series of river valleys after the ice ages, are home to bays, islands and coves. Separated by forested knuckles of land that rise from the sea, the Sounds are an exhilarating place with activities such as sea kayaking and white-water rafting and interesting wildlife that includes sea gannets, tuatara lizards (relics from the dinosaur age), even carnivorous snails! There are also great walks, including the Queen Charlotte Walkway (a 58-km track among lush forest) and the Abel Tasman Coastal Track in the Abel Tasman National Park (220 sq km of beaches, sea coves, forest and granite gorges).

Wine, good food and a climate conducive to year-round activity are features of the towns of Nelson, Picton and Blenheim. The crayfish from Kaikoura are superb but it is a town famous for much larger fry - sperm whales. Whalewatch and dolphin swimming tours are manifold and inexpensive.

***West Coast***

Wild, craggy and desolate, the West Coast is an area buffeted by heavy seas and drenching rain. Keri Hulme, the Booker Prize winner, calls the region home, drawing inspiration from its 'bleak and ascetical' landscape. Understandably, those who live here - commonly known as `Coasters' - occupy a unique place in the national folklore. Activities include canoeing and riding the rapids down Moeraki River, fishing for brown trout in the lakes, watching penguins and fur seals lazing on the greenstone beaches, and squelching through forests (which are much to the liking of the rapacious ringtail possum).

***Harihari***
Harihari, a small town on the West Coast, made world headlines in 1931, when Guy Menzies completed the first solo flight across the Tasman Sea from Australia. The journey was hassle-free but the landing proved a disaster: the aircraft overturned in a swamp, and Menzies, on undoing his safety straps, fell - much to the delight of the cheering locals - head first into the mud. The town is now known as a base for coastal walks, birdwatching and trout and salmon fishing.

***Westland National Park***

The Westland National Park has over 60 glaciers, with the most accessible being the Fox Glacier and Franz Josef Glacier: you can almost hear the strangulated groans, tweaks and gurgles as they slowly advance down the mountainside. The town of Greymouth is the western terminal for the passenger train TranzAlpine Express, which winds its way over the Southern Alps - through beech forests, glacial valleys and mountains - on to Christchurch.

***Canterbury***
The hub of the South Island, Canterbury is one of the driest and flattest areas of New Zealand. The predominant feature of the region is the capacious Canterbury Plains, situated between the coast and the mountain foothills, which is devoted to farming and agriculture.

Paradoxically, Canterbury contains most of New Zealand's highest mountains such as Mt Cook and Mt Tasman. The area's major city is Christchurch which has genteel, sylvan suburbs, up-market eateries and cafes, and is home to the Wizard, a Rabelaisian figure who dominates lunchtime discussion in Cathedral Square. Gently steering its course through the city and suburbs is the ankle-deep, willow-lined Avon River - perfect for punting.

To the east of Christchurch is the feral coastline of Banks Peninsula, dominated by gnarled volcanic peaks; it is also the location of Lyttelton, which has excellent arts and crafts stores. A good day trip from Christchurch is to the Frenchified town of Akaroa which boasts the best fish & chips in the country. West of Christchurch is the settlement of Arthurs Pass, which is a great base for tackling walks, climbs and skiing in Arthurs Pass National Park. To the south lie the picturesque towns of Geraldine and Fairlie, the high, tussock-grass plateau known as the Mackenzie Country and the World Heritage Area that is Mt Cook National Park. The imperious Mt Cook (3755 metres) is the highest peak in Australasia, and offers plenty of walks and unlimited scope for tramping, rock climbing, lung-cleansing and sightseeing.

***Copland Pass***

The gruelling four-day Copland Pass trek in the Mt Cook National Park is a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that can only be completed in good weather by well-prepared, experienced teams or with professional guides. The terrain varies from glaciers and snowfields to rainforest and thermal pools. The pass is 2150 metres high and is surrounded by dramatic 3000-metre peaks. This is no stroll and should only be attempted by professional masochists experienced in the use of ice axes, crampons and alpine route-finding. Apparently the sense of achievement in crossing the pass entitles you to enter an elite club of euphoric high-achievers.

***Queenstown***
Queenstown, set in a glacial valley on the edge of Lake Wakatipu, is a town synonymous with hairy adventures: parasailing; schussing down icy rapids in jet boats; white-water rafting; and bungy jumping off Skippers Canyon Bridge - the latest and most terrifying stunt is plunging 300 metres from a helicopter.

***Fiordland National Park***

Fiordland National Park, which takes its name from its glacier-carved coast, is a wilderness of mountains, ice and beech forests. The scenic climax of Fiordland is undoubtedly Milford Sound where cruise ships bob toy-like beneath the shadows of towering mountains and waterfalls. There are classic alpine walks, including the Routeburn Track (in Mt Aspiring National Park), the Hollyford Valley and the Milford Track (billed as the 'finest in the world').

***Otago Peninsula***

Otago Peninsula is a significant wildlife area with woodland gardens, albatross, penguin and seal colonies, plus aquariums, museums and historic sites. Dunedin, a student city on the peninsula, is a hub for arts and entertainment, and is famous for producing an eclectic pool of internationally successful rock bands. Scottish to its core, the city has a rich architectural heritage with many museums, galleries and castles.

***Southland***

There are a series of huge lakes in the area, including Hawea and nearby Wanaka in Otago, and Lake Te Anau in Southland. Te Anau, gouged out by a huge glacier, is New Zealand's second largest lake and features caves full of glow worms, and waterfalls and whirlpools. The Catlins, the largest remaining area of native forest on the east coast of the South Island, is between Invercargill and Dunedin. It has reserves of rarefied plants and trees, plus fauna such as fur seals, sea lions, penguins and ducks.

***Stewart Island***

New Zealand's third largest island, Stewart Island is an ornithologist's delight: tuis, parakeets, kakas, bellbirds, fernbirds and robins abound. The kiwi, rare in both the North and South Island, is common over much of the island, particularly around beaches. A good network of walking tracks and huts exist in the northern part of the island but the south is forgettable, being undeveloped and isolated. The people (a paltry 450 in all) are hardy, taciturn and suspicious of mainlanders, the weather is changeable and the accommodation is basic; there are, however, excellent-value homestays on the island.