

# New Zealand



Capital: Wellington

Largest city: Auckland

Population: 4.500.000

Form of government: Parliamentary democracy and Constitutional monarchy.

Currency: New Zealand dollar

Independence: Nov. 25, 1947

Drives on the left



**New Zealand** is an island country in the south-western Pacific Ocean comprising two main landmasses (the North Island and the South Island), and numerous smaller islands, most notably Stewart Island and the Chatham Islands.

New Zealand is notable for its geographic isolation: it is situated about 2,000 km southeast of Australia across the Tasman Sea, and its closest neighbours to the north are New Caledonia, Fiji and Tonga.

The majority of New Zealand's population is of European descent; the indigenous Maori are the largest minority. The most commonly spoken language is English.

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Elizabeth II, as the Queen of New Zealand, is the country's head of state and is represented by a ceremonial Governor-General. The Queen has no real political influence, and her position is essentially symbolic. Political power is held by the Parliament of New Zealand and the Prime Minister, who is the head of government.

### **Local government and external territories**

The early European settlers divided New Zealand into provinces. These were abolished in 1876. As a result, New Zealand has no provinces, states or territories. However in 1989, the government completely reorganised New Zealand with 12 regional councils and 73 territorial authorities. The territorial authorities are 16 city councils, 57 district councils, and the Chatham Islands Council.



New Zealand comprises two main islands, the North and South Islands and a number of smaller islands. Cook Strait, 20 kilometres wide at its narrowest point, separates the North and South Islands. The total land area is a little less than that of Italy or Japan, and a little more than the United Kingdom. The country has extensive marine resources.



The Dutch explorer Abel Tasman was the first European to see the islands in 1642 .

Auckland is New Zealand's most populous city

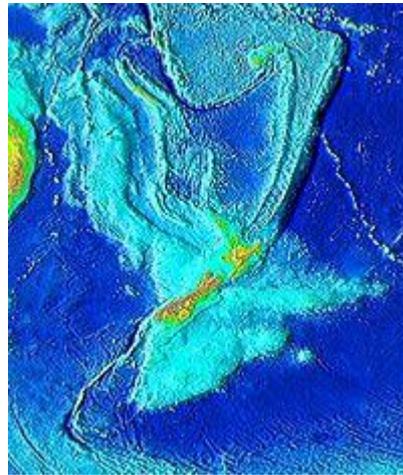
The South Island is the largest land mass of New Zealand, and is divided along its length by the Southern Alps. There are 18 peaks over 3000 metres the highest of which is Mount Cook at 3754 metres. The top of South Island contains areas of forest and other national parks. The south-eastern corner of South Island is Fiordland, an area of high mountains cut through with steep fjords.



The North Island is less mountainous but full of volcanoes with a volcanic plateau centred around the dormant caldera of Lake Taupo. The highest North Island mountain, Mount Ruapehu (2797 m.), is an active cone volcano. The northern end of North Island around the city of Auckland is a flatter area that was once covered by huge kauri trees.



New Zealand is part of Zealandia, a submerged continent nearly half the size of Australia. About 25 million years ago, a shift in plate tectonic movements began to pull Zealandia apart.



New Zealand is culturally and linguistically part of Polynesia, and is the south-western anchor of the Polynesian Triangle.

## Climate

The latitude of New Zealand, corresponds closely to that of Italy in the Northern Hemisphere. However, its isolation from continental influences and exposure to cold southerly winds and ocean currents give the climate a much milder character. The climate throughout the country is mild and temperate, mainly maritime, with temperatures rarely falling below 0 °C (32 °F) or rising above 30 °C (86 °F) in populated areas.

## Economy

New Zealand has a modern, prosperous, developed economy and has a relatively high comparable to Southern Europe.

New Zealanders have a high level of life satisfaction as measured by international surveys. New Zealand is one of the most free market capitalist economies according to economic freedom indices.

New Zealand is a country heavily dependent on free trade, particularly in agricultural products. Its principal export industries are agriculture, horticulture, fishing and forestry.

The New Zealand dollar is the currency of New Zealand which is sometimes informally known as the "Kiwi dollar".



## Energy

In 2008, oil, gas and coal generated approximately sixty-nine percent of New Zealand's gross energy supply and thirty-one percent was generated from renewable energy, primarily hydroelectric power and geothermal power.

## Agriculture

Agriculture has been and continues to be the main export industry in New Zealand. Dairy products, (the largest company of the country, Fonterra, a dairy cooperative, controls almost one-third of the international dairy trade), meat, wood, fruit and fishing are the most important products. New Zealand also has a thriving wine industry, which had a bumper year in 2007; wine became New Zealand's "12th most valuable export" in that year, overtaking wool exports.

## The flag

The flag of New Zealand is a defaced Blue Ensign with the Union Flag in the canton, and four red stars with white borders to the right. The stars represent the constellation of Crux, the Southern Cross, as seen from New Zealand.



The dramatic and varied landscape of New Zealand has made it a popular location for the production of television programmes and films, including the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and the "The Last Samurai".