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# New Zealand

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New Zealand is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It consists of two main landmasses—the North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui) and the South Island (Te Waipounamu)—and over 600 smaller islands. It is the sixth-largest island country by area and lies east of Australia across the Tasman Sea and south of the islands of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Tonga. The country's varied topography and sharp mountain peaks, including the Southern Alps (Kā Tiritiri o te Moana), owe much to tectonic uplift and volcanic eruptions. New Zealand's capital city is Wellington, and its most populous city is Auckland.

The islands of New Zealand were the last large habitable land to be settled by humans. Between about 1280 and 1350, Polynesians began to settle in the islands and subsequently developed a distinctive Māori culture. In 1642, the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman became the first European to sight and record New Zealand. In 1769, the British explorer Captain James Cook became the first European to set foot on and map New Zealand. In 1840, representatives of the United Kingdom and Māori chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which paved the way for Britain's declaration of sovereignty later that year and the establishment of the Crown Colony of New Zealand in 1841. Subsequently, a series of conflicts between the colonial government and Māori tribes resulted in the alienation and confiscation of large amounts of Māori land. New Zealand became a dominion in 1907; it gained full statutory independence in 1947, retaining the monarch as head of state. Today, the majority of New Zealand's population of around 5.3 million is of European descent; the indigenous Māori are the largest minority, followed by Asians and Pasifika. Reflecting this, New Zealand's culture mainly derives from Māori and early British settlers but has recently broadened from increased immigration. The official languages are English, Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language, with the local dialect of English being dominant.

A developed country, New Zealand was the first to introduce a minimum wage and to give women the right to vote. Recognised as a middle power, New Zealand ranks very highly in international measures of quality of life and human rights and has one of the lowest levels of perceived corruption in the world. It retains visible levels of inequality, including structural disparities between its Māori and European populations. During the 1980s, New Zealand underwent major economic changes that transformed it from a protectionist to a liberalised free-trade economy. The service sector dominates the country's economy, followed by the industrial sector, and agriculture; international tourism is also a significant source of revenue. New Zealand and Australia have a strong relationship and are considered to share a strong Trans-Tasman identity, stemming from centuries of British colonisation. The country is part of multiple international organisations and forums.

Nationally, legislative authority is vested in an elected, unicameral Parliament, while executive political power is exercised by the Government, led by the prime minister, currently Christopher Luxon. Charles III is the country's king and is represented by the governor-general, Cindy Kiro. New Zealand is organised into 11 regional councils and 67 territorial authorities for local government purposes. The Realm of New Zealand also includes Tokelau (a dependent territory); the Cook Islands and Niue (self-governing states in free association with New Zealand); and the Ross Dependency, which is New Zealand's territorial claim in Antarctica.