

Waitangi Day: New Zealand's National Day (B1)

New Zealand is a unique country, so it's not surprising that its national day is unique too!

New Zealand is unique in many ways. Its nearest big neighbour, Australia, is more than 4,000 kilometres away! Because it is so isolated, it has some unique plants and animals, like the kiwi, a bird that can't fly. People from New Zealand are often called "Kiwis" too.

New Zealand also has sheep... a lot of them! In fact, according to the 2015 **census**, there are almost seven times more sheep than people in New Zealand!

New Zealand society is unique too. Fifteen percent of the population is Maori. The Maoris arrived in waka (large canoes) from Polynesia about 1,000 years ago. The Maori name for the country is Aotearoa, which means the Land of the Long White Cloud." Compared to Australia, New Zealand isn't very big (it's about the same size as Britain or Japan) but its climate and land are very varied: it has mountains, called the Southern Alps, and **rainforests** and many beautiful beaches. The climate in the north is sub-tropical, but in the south, it is much colder. There are penguins in the south!

A Little History

On Waitangi Day, there are cultural exchanges and political speeches by Maori leaders and representatives of the national government in Waitangi. There are no parades or fireworks, like many countries do. In the rest of the country, Waitangi Day is a day to eat Maori food, do Maori dances, and watch *waka* canoe races. Many countries' national days celebrate independence or a revolution, but Waitangi Day, on 6 February, celebrates peace. In 1906, New Zealand became an independent country. To honour the country's history, Waitangi Day is still the national day.

In the past, Maori culture wasn't respected by *Pakeha* (the Maori word for white people), but that is changing now. Twenty years ago, Maori language and culture were disappearing. Now, Maori children learn them at school, and even *Pakeha* children learn about Maori traditions. James Cook, a British explorer, colonised New Zealand in 1740. On 6 February, 1840, a representative of British Queen Victoria signed a peace treaty with 40 Maori chiefs. The Treaty was signed in a place called Waitangi. It established that New Zealand was part of the British Empire, and that the Maori had the same rights as other British citizens.

Help:

- **rainforest** (n) tropical forest. For example the Amazonian rainforest.
- **census** (n) normally every 10 years, the government asks residents to answer questions about where they live, their marriage status, their job, etc