

New Zealand Waitangi Day

Joining together for a harmonious celebration of nationhood

On Feb. 6, 1840, the British government signed the Treaty of Waitangi with a number of Maori chiefs at a Bay of Islands settlement called Waitangi.

The treaty was written in both Maori and English and handed over governorship of New Zealand to the British. It enabled the peaceful purchase of land for settlement and gave the British the authority to establish rule in the country. In return, the British were to guarantee and actively protect Maori tribal authority over their possessions.

The ultimate intention of the Treaty of Waitangi, from the British perspective, was to protect Maori interests from the encroaching British settlement, provide for British settlement and establish a government to maintain peace and order.

The treaty has proved to be an enduring document. In 1988 when the Labor government tried to sell off state-owned assets, the New Zealand Maori Council contested its right to do so in the courts.



Kiwis are native to New Zealand. TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

The council's actions slowed down the government's sale program and forced it to enter into negotiations with the Maori. Its argument was based on the principle that the Maori ceded governorship to the crown or British in 1840 when they signed the Treaty of Waitangi, but not ownership of assets such as forestry. Forestry was part of the package of assets the government wanted to include in the sale program.

Over the years there have

been many settlements with Maori tribal groups based on the treaty that have forced governments to adopt a more consultative approach when developing new policies and regulations. Treaty considerations are now embedded in many official policies.

The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi is commemorated each year with a national holiday on Feb. 6, known as Waitangi Day.

In the past, this day has been

tarnished by angry protests as Maori fought to have rights that had been promised to them under the treaty, honored by the government. However, in recent years, many iwi (tribes) have had their grievances settled by the government and Waitangi Day has become a peaceful celebration of nationhood.

Maori culture

Maori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, make up 15 percent of the population and are well represented at the highest levels throughout the country.

Traditional Maori customs still play a big part in the lives of many modern Maori in New Zealand and are an intrinsic part of Kiwi culture for New Zealanders. Nothing arouses the passion of Kiwis like the haka the All Blacks go through for their pre-game ritual; nothing chills like the spine-tingling emotion upon hearing a karakia (prayer).

Probably New Zealand's best-known international Maori identity is opera diva Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. She made her debut at Covent Garden in 1971 and has been a star in the opera world ever since. But Dame Kiri isn't alone. People such as writer Witi Ihimaera, who penned the novel "Whale Rider," actor Temuera Morrison, film director Lee Tamahori, golfer Michael Campbell, artists Cliff Whiting and Shane Cotton, the late poet Hone Tuwhare and businessman Wally Stone add to the culture of Aotearoa.

It is a culture that, due to initiatives over recent decades to revitalize Maori language, art and culture, continues to grow from strength to strength. As singer Hinewehi Mohi, who

sings only in Maori, pointed out in an interview with Maori magazine Mana: "In Europe they've already done the Latin and Celtic thing — and they're ready for the Pacific. I'm quite staunch about te reo [language] in my music. People ask me to translate the lyrics and I shrug and say, 'Why?'"

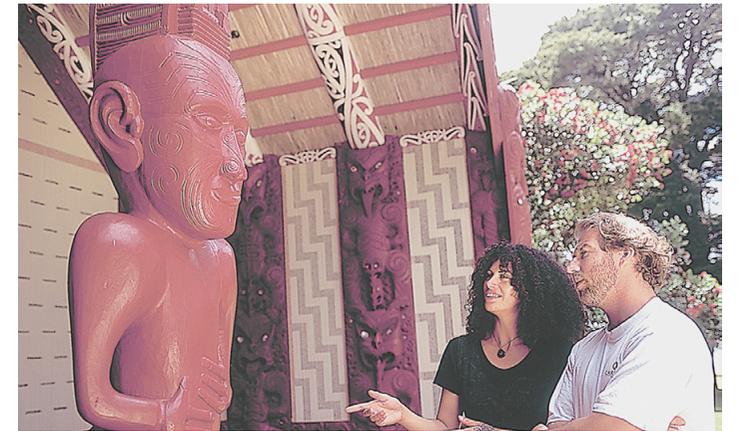
With nearly one-half of Maori language speakers less than 25 years of age, there may come a time when she won't be asked to.

Maori lost much of their land through European colonization and over the past decades many have been compensated for their loss. A number of iwi are in negotiations with the govern-

ment to settle their historical grievances.

Today, although many Maori live in urban areas, away from their tribal regions, their marae (meeting place) remains an integral part of their lives. Any visit to New Zealand is bound to provide an encounter with this country's unique Maori culture. An encounter that will allow visitors to experience rich traditions that have been passed on from generation to generation.

The article is excerpted from the official website of Tourism New Zealand. For more information, visit <http://media.newzealand.com/en>.



For travelers who are interested in experiencing Maori culture, the Waitangi Treaty Grounds are an essential itinerary item. DESTINATION NORTHLAND



View of the Auckland seaside suburb of Devonport TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

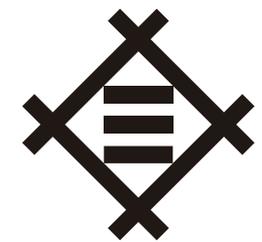
Congratulations on Waitangi Day



Congratulations on the 176th Anniversary of Waitangi Day



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