

New Zealand Waitangi Day

Festivals and events mark foundation celebrations

Waitangi Day is a public holiday held on Feb. 6 every year to commemorate the signing of New Zealand's founding document — the Treaty of Waitangi — in 1840.

The national holiday was first declared in 1974, and since then has grown in significance for all New Zealanders through the Maori renaissance that has fostered better understanding of the Treaty's ramifications.

Official celebrations are held at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds in the Bay of Islands, Northland, but there are also many other events throughout the country.

Traditional activities

Maori cultural performances, speeches from Maori and Pakeha (European) dignitaries, and a naval salute are all part of the annual Waitangi activities.

The Ngatokimatawhaorua, one of the world's largest Maori

ceremonial waka (war canoe), sits on the grounds at Waitangi. The 70-year-old waka was refurbished and relaunched for the 2010 celebrations.

Each February, the Ngatokimatawhaorua must be prepared for its Waitangi Day outing prior to the big event. Made from the trunks of New Zealand's giant kauri trees, the gigantic waka, which weighs an incredible six tons when dry, must first be moved by human force across the treaty grounds to the sea. It is then moored in the water for up to two days, allowing the wood to swell and become airtight, doubling its weight.

Carried out and blessed by members of the local iwi (tribe), this is a tradition that happens only once a year to celebrate Waitangi Day. The enormous wooden vessel, with room for 80 paddlers and 55 passengers, is an impressive sight both on land and afloat.

Waitangi also hosts a festival on the day that includes music, dance, food and traditional Maori customs.

Countrywide celebrations

Waitangi Day celebrations happen all over New Zealand.

In Auckland — New Zea-

land's largest city — the national day is celebrated near the city's birthplace at Bastion Point. It was at Orakei, in 1841, that Auckland Maori chiefs invited Gov. William Hobson to establish the city. This family-focused event features live entertainment, kai (Maori food) and kite flying against the spectacular coastal backdrop of Waitemata Harbour and Rangitoto Island.

The celebrations don't stop there, with family-friendly events taking place across the city. Picnics, local food stalls, traditional kapa haka, music and entertainment can be found in abundance on Waitangi Day in Auckland.

Wellington — the nation's capital — holds an event that celebrates Waitangi Day at Waitangi Park on the city's waterfront. Traditional Maori culture is showcased through a range of activities, including a waka fleet exhibition, Te Aro Pa walking tours, weaving, waka building, Maori myths and legends storytelling, as well as kapa haka.

In geothermal Rotorua, Waitangi Day is commemorated at Whakarewarewa — a living Maori village — with an

event known as "Whakanuia." This Maori word means "to acknowledge, promote and celebrate," and the day's activities center on learning about Maori cultural activities, including kai, crafts, Maori medicine, local legends and history.

Elsewhere, Waitangi Day celebrations offer a wide variety of activities from major sporting events to rodeos, as well as a folk music festival.

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



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Members of Te Kapa Haka o Te Whanau a Apanui from Opotiki perform during the 2015 Te Matatini National Kapa Haka Festival at Hagley Park in Christchurch. MARTIN HUNTER/GETTY

Congratulations on Waitangi Day



Congratulations on the 177th Anniversary of Waitangi Day

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