

New Zealand Waitangi Day Special

Maori traditions integral part of celebrations

Every year on Feb. 6, New Zealanders celebrate Waitangi Day, a public holiday to commemorate the signing of New Zealand's founding document — the Treaty of Waitangi — between the British Crown and the Maori in 1840.

The national holiday was first declared in 1974. Since then, it has grown in significance in New Zealand 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 many other events are held throughout the country.

History of Maori

Maori have been in New Zealand since approximately A.D. 1350.

According to the Maori, the first explorer to reach New Zealand was the legendary figure Kupe. Using the stars and ocean currents as his navigational guides, he is said to have ventured across the Pacific on his *waka hourua* (voyaging canoe) from his ancestral Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki. It is thought that Kupe made landfall at the Hokianga Harbour in Northland, around 1,000 years ago.

More *waka hourua* followed Kupe over the next few hundred years, landing at various parts of New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the first European to catch

sight of New Zealand was Dutch explorer Abel Tasman. He was on an expedition to discover a great southern continent "Great South Land" that was believed to be rich in minerals. In 1642, while searching for this continent, Tasman sighted a "large high-lying land" off the west coast of the South Island.

Prior to 1840, it was mainly whalers, sealers and missionaries who came to New Zealand. These settlers had considerable contact with Maori, especially in coastal areas. The Maori and Europeans traded extensively, while some Europeans lived among the Maori.

Waitangi activities

Each February, the *ngatokimatawhaorua*, one of the world's largest Maori ceremonial *waka* (war canoe) that sits on the grounds at Waitangi, 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 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.

Celebrations across the nation

In Auckland — New Zealand'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.

Moreover, family-friendly events such as picnics; local food stalls; traditional *kapa haka* performing arts shows, which incorporate harmonious singing, rhythmic dancing and ferocious Maori war dances; music and entertainment can be found in abundance on Waitangi Day in Auckland.

In addition, an event celebrating Waitangi Day takes place at Waitangi Park on Wellington'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*, which literally means "to acknowledge, promote and celebrate." 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 and a folk music festival.

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



Waitangi Day is celebrated all over New Zealand on Feb. 6 and festivities include a folk music festival. TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

Congratulations on Waitangi Day



Congratulations on the 180th Anniversary of Waitangi Day

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