

# New Zealand Waitangi Day Special

## Heritage and adventure abound in tourist haven

New Zealand, known by its indigenous residents as “land of the long white cloud,” is an island nation of 5.2 million people in the southwest Pacific Ocean. Called Aotearoa in the native Maori language, it comprises the North Island, South Island and over 600 smaller islands.

Waitangi Day marks the initial signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the British and Maori chiefs, an agreement regarded as the founding document of the nation.

The South Island, larger but more sparsely populated than its northern counterpart, is a popular tourist drawcard. Called Te Waipounamu in Maori (literally “the waters of Greenstone”), large parts of the island are rural or protected as nature reserves, with only four urban areas hosting populations over 50,000. Natural landscapes abound, and visitors come from all over the world to experience the wild beauty and its flora and fauna.

Aoraki, or Mount Cook, is the highest point in New Zealand and covered 40% by glaciers. November to March is ideal for hiking and cycling this World Heritage Site, while June to August is the time for winter

mountaineering. Skiing and snowboarding enthusiasts can take their sports to the extreme with helicopter-based access to Tasman Glacier’s two runs. The national park is also a dark sky reserve, with restrictions on light pollution making it optimal for stargazing.

At the far southwest is the aptly named Fiordland, another World Heritage Site containing Milford, Dusky and Doubtful Sounds. Carved out of the landscape by over 100,000 years of glacial activity, the fiords can be explored in kayaks or by hiking one of the three “great walks” used to navigate the park. Milford Track is a challenging 53 kilometers long and includes Sutherland Falls, the country’s tallest. These walks take three to four days, with hikers staying in tents or huts along the way. Many other day hikes allow birdwatchers to keep an eye out for some of the region’s rarest birds, like the takahe and the kaka.

The largest urban area on South Island is Otago, settled first by Europeans in the mid-1850s (evidence shows the Maori may have settled there around 1250). Boasting a vibrant arts scene, culture

vultures will appreciate the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, the Centre of Contemporary Art, The Arts Centre, and performances at the Court Theatre.

Hop-on, hop-off tours are possible on the city’s restored heritage streetcars, guided by drivers knowledgeable about local events and history. The nearby scenery, meanwhile, is everything New Zealand promises, with the Banks Peninsula home to the former French settlement of Akaroa and the port town of Lyttleton.

Adrenaline junkies will undoubtedly be drawn to Queenstown, at the heart of Otago’s wine region, for the bungee jumps, giant swings, zip lines, jet boating, skydiving and white water rafting. Other, more sedate, activities are on offer with cycling, hiking and scenic tours by boat or plane. Four ski areas are within 90 minutes of downtown, which has developed a sophisticated dining scene to pair with the local viticulture.

*This content references excerpts from the official New Zealand government tourism website. For more information, please visit <https://www.newzealand.com/int>.*



Left: A restored heritage streetcar rolls through Christchurch. Right: Sutherland Falls sends water cascading 580 meters down from Lake Quill.

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