

New Zealand Waitangi Day

Waitangi Treaty Grounds: New Zealand's birthplace

On Feb. 6, 1840, representatives of the British crown met with prominent Maori chiefs from the northern part of North Island, to sign the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand's founding document was then transported around the country to allow chiefs from other tribes to sign.

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

Maori and Europeans

At the time, the relationship between Maori and European settlers was not particularly harmonious.

The notion of central governance was foreign to Maori as each tribe lived by laws set by a "rangatira" (chief) whose authority was limited to within his tribal boundary. British settlers, in turn, regularly disregarded Maori tribal laws, which often led to conflict between the two groups.

As most early rangatira could not speak or understand English, the English version of the treaty was translated into Maori.

However, there were discrepancies in meaning between the two translations, and some obligations that the treaty placed on the partners are still contentious.

Waitangi Day

The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi is commemorated by the Waitangi day national holiday on Feb. 6.

In the past, this day has been tarnished by angry protests as Maori fought to have the rights that had been promised to them under the Treaty, honored by the government. However, in recent years, many "iwi" (tribes) have

settled their grievances with the government and Waitangi Day has become a peaceful celebration of nationhood.

Waitangi Treaty Grounds

In 1932, the grounds where the Treaty was first signed were gifted to the nation in trust by Lord and Lady Bledisloe. Lord Bledisloe was a former governor general of New Zealand.

Today the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, part of the 404-hectare gifted site, are referred to as the birthplace of New Zealand.

The grounds include one of New Zealand's oldest and most

visited historic homes. Treaty House, originally named "The Residency" was built for the first British resident, James Busby and his family. The name was changed to Treaty House at the request of Lord Bledisloe after the house was restored in 1933.

NZ cultural icons

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds are also home to two of the nation's cultural icons - "Te Whare Runanga" and a ceremonial "waka taua" war canoe.

"Te Whare Runanga" is a carved Maori meeting house erected to commemorate the centenary of the first signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The elaborate carvings covering the house were produced by the local Ngapuhi tribe, though the building is representative of all Maori tribes.

Ngatokimatawhaorua, one of the largest Maori waka, sits in the grounds. The 70-year-old waka was refurbished ahead of relaunching as part of the 2010 Waitangi Day celebrations. At 35.7 metres long, up to 2 metres wide and weighing 12 tons, the vessel makes for an impressive sight on



A cut above: Te Whare Runanga at Waitangi is a beautifully carved meeting house, which was built in 1940 to commemorate the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi nearby 100 years previously.
NEW ZEALAND TOURISM BOARD/BEN CRAWFORD

the water with its crew of up to 80 paddlers and 55 passengers.

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds are a popular destination for tourists, both domestic and international. The Waitangi Visitor

Centre has an impressive audio visual show that tells the story of Waitangi and surrounding areas. There are also live cultural performances, a gift shop and an artifacts gallery.

The article is excerpted from the official website of the New Zealand Tourism Board. For more information, visit www.newzealand.com

Congratulations
on Waitangi Day



Congratulations
on the 174th Anniversary
of Waitangi Day

