

Islands of Aotearoa

Overview

Nau mai, haere mai...! Welcome to Aotearoa - New Zealand. The name Aotearoa translates to "Long White Cloud", but is more commonly referred to as, the "Land of the Long White Cloud." Māori are the indigenous people of the land and maintain strong historical, genealogical and traditional ties with their Polynesian cousins in the more tropical islands of the Pacific.

Outside of Aotearoa, now used as the Māori name for New Zealand, the Polynesian Cultural Center provides a unique place where students are learning the culture and heritage of the Māori while obtaining a university degree.

A simple Māori greeting is "Kia Ora" or "hello".

Location

Aotearoa is located approximately 4,600 miles southwest of Hawai'i. The islands form the southwestern apex of the Polynesian Triangle and is the only part of Polynesia to experience four seasons.



Geography

Aotearoa consists of an estimated 600 islands. The two larger islands, north and south, are the main population centers. The largest of the smaller islands is located off the very southern boundary of the country (*Te Ara-the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*). Within one or two days drive one can see glaciers, fiords, snow-capped mountains, vast plains and hills, sub-tropical forests, a volcanic plateau and white-sandy beaches. The spectacular scenery of both major islands has recently been featured in the Hollywood movies *Wolverine*, *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, *The Hobbit Trilogy*, *A Wrinkle in Time* and more. The land mass totals approximately 270,000 sq. km. (*World Atlas*)- about the size of Japan or the United Kingdom.

Population

Over 4.8 million people live in Aotearoa, about 16.5% (*2018 Census*) of whom are of Māori heritage - making them the largest group of Polynesians today. Another 8.1% of the population (*2018 Census*) has immigrated there from various other Pacific Islands, especially Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau Islands. Auckland is generally considered the largest Polynesian city in the world.

History & Discovery

Māui - There are three original names for the country which were given by the great hero Māui, who, according to legend, 'fished up' the islands from the sea. The names are: "Te Ika-a-Māui or the Fish of Māui", "Te Waka-a-Māui or the Canoe of Māui" and "Te Punga-a-Māui or the Anchor-stone of Māui" (*Map, Te Ara- the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*).

Kupe & Ngahue - In the 10th century, the voyagers Kupe and Ngahue, knowing the Māui legends, added the names, "Te Wai Pounamu or The Greenstone Waters", following the discovery of Pounamu or Nephrite Jade. The name Aotearoa is associated with the voyage of Kupe (*Best, The Māori As He Was, p.22*). His wife, Hine-te-aparangi, was the first to sight the cloud formations above the land (*teara.govt.nz, Aotearoa*).

Dutch & English Seafarers - There were three names associated with the Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman: "Staten Landt or Land of Nations", "Nova Zeelandia" and "Nieuw Zeeland" (*Te Ara- the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*). The name, New Zealand, was "already well established" by the time of the English Captain James Cook (*NZ Geographic-Issue 6, 1990*). It wasn't until 2013 that alternative Māori and English names gained official recognition. Those names are the North Island or "Te Ika-a-Māui" and the South Island or "Te Waipounamu" (*Beehive.govt.nz, 11 Oct 2013*). A petition to use Aotearoa in the official

name for New Zealand was presented to Parliament in 2019 (*www.parliament.nz, 11 Apr 2018*).

Language

New Zealand has three official languages: English, Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (*Human Rights Commission*). The Māori language is similar to Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian, and other island languages due to the origins of the people and their migrations. In 1982, Māori pre-schools or Kōhanga Reo (language nests) were introduced to reinforce the teaching of the Māori language to children. These unique pre-schools have been a very successful model for Native Hawaiians, various Indigenous Tribes and First Nations People in Canada and the United States. Today, revitalization efforts continue and are focused on promoting, reinforcing and normalizing the use of the Māori language throughout the country.

Marae

Te Arohanui o Te Iwi Māori Marae - The 'marae' is the open area or courtyard in front of the ancestral meeting house Hawaikiroa at the Polynesian Cultural Center and includes the grounds and surrounding buildings. This marae is named after the founding performing arts group Te Arohanui Māori Company. They arrived to Hawai'i in the summer of 1963 to assist in the final preparations for the opening of the Center in October of that year. Te Arohanui o Te Iwi Māori translates as the "Great Love of the Māori People". The marae is a unique place where many cultural traditions and customs continue to be practiced.

Hawaikiroa - This Whare Tūpuna or ancestral meeting house is named after an ancient mariner who arrived to these islands of Hawai'i. According to legend, he named the islands after himself and his family, over 2,000 years ago (*Fornander, Vol. VI, 278-281*). Hawaikiroa is one of only five such houses located outside of Aotearoa New Zealand. Under the direction of the master carver, Hone Te Kauru Taiapa (MBE), carving began in the early 1960s and was completed in the summer of 1963. The layout of this house is patterned after another meeting house in Nuhaka, Aotearoa.

Hawaikiroa was shipped piece-by-piece to the Polynesian Cultural in Hawai'i and assembled on site.

The architecture and design elements of a Māori meeting house are filled with symbolism. The house itself represents the physical anatomy of a human body, the actual ancestor, who the building is named after. The apex of the building has two figures, the lower one, holding a paddle is Hawaikiroa, the upper one, his first-born son. The facing boards on the gable of the house represent his outstretched arms and hands extended and reaching towards the

ground. The inside ridgepole of the house represents his spine or backbone and the painted rafters his rib cage.

Kōwhaiwhai Rafter Panels - The kōwhaiwhai or painted scroll ornamentations on the rafters or rara (ribs) symbolize aspects of the natural world (*K. Wilson, Graduate Carver, NZMACI*).

Poupou - 'Poupou' (carved wall figures) form the framework of the house. They are stylized carved representations of some of the more significant descendants of this common ancestor, Hawaikiroa. Each figure depicts a specific ancestor. The eyes of each carving are 'pāua' or abalone shell. The stories, histories and genealogies of these ancestors continues to be preserved in the carvings themselves, the oral histories, the music, both ancient and contemporary and, even in the giving of their names to the present generation.

Kupe - Kupe is the second of the five houses outside of the country. Kupe currently houses the traditional game known as Tītī-tōrea. In pre-European times, this was a typical military game used to develop and maintain effective eye-hand coordination skills, essential in hand-to-hand combat, from a very young age. The game requires an even number of players who simultaneously toss sticks back and forth to each other in various patterns and in rhythm to music or chant. The object of the game is to catch the sticks without dropping any of them. Today it is a fun, but precise, recreational activity.

Pātaka (Raised Storage House) - Māori used a variety of raised structures with differing purposes, such as, the storage of personal belongings, including valuables, as well as, dried and preserved food. The foods, sometimes salted, dried or smoked to preserve them, were usually placed in containers, such as gourds. Chiefs also stored their heirlooms, weapons, adzes for canoe building, etc., in a pātaka.

Māra - Vegetables in the 'māra' (gardens) around the marae include, various types of kūmara or sweet potato, taro, and the hue (gourd). The sweet potato was a staple food. A great deal of ritual and ceremony surrounding both the planting and harvesting is still practiced today. There were a variety of tools used to dig, scrape, break up and loosen the soil, shovel, scoop and weed.

Waka Taua (War Canoe) - This waka taua is crafted from two types of native timber, Kauri and Tōtara. The oral and recorded histories provided by members of the Witehira, Wihongi and Tahere families provide a rich history for this unique canoe. According to family records, the Kauri tree was felled in the Puketī Forest, Northland in 1948. The canoe was originally intended as a gift for King George VI of England. The tree was 'roughed out' in the bush and transported to the Kohewhata Marae, outside of Kaikohe, Northland. The King's scheduled visit was cancelled and the hull was left there to rest unfinished in the paddock next to

Mangakāhia Road. The families agreed that the canoe should be completed and gifted to the building project that was taking place here in Lā'ie, Hawai'i, in time for the Polynesian Cultural Center's opening in 1963.

The canoe was named Te Ika-roa-a-Māui, or "Māui's Long Fish." The hull of the canoe is close to 60 feet long. It weighs nearly 2.5 tons with the stern and prow pieces, and the top boards attached to the hull. Elsdon Best was an eyewitness observer of these canoes who described them as follows, "A first-class war-canoe, with all its many fittings, its hundred paddles, its handsome elaborately carved stem and stern, and all its many ornaments and decorations of feathers, rouge, and mother-of-pearl, was always the work of many hands throughout many years."

"Their largest canoes were rigged with two masts, and carried a large light triangular-shaped sail on each." (The Waka Taua or War Canoe, Best, 60)

"The old war-canoe was a very beautiful object: painted red and black, with elegantly carved head and stern pieces, the bows adorned with grace-fully projecting curved rods, ornamented with tufts of white albatross-feathers, and with white feathers every few feet along the battens which covered the joint where the solid hull was built up by the top boards. They were very fast, and could, in favourable weather, travel ten miles an hour under the rhythmical dip of over a hundred paddlers. (Ibid, 62)

Poi Māori – Defined as a lightweight ball attached to a plaited cord of various lengths, 'poi' are swung or twirled rhythmically and in unison to sung accompaniment. Traditionally the 'poi' was made of raupō (bullrush/cat's tail) leaves attached to a flax rope. It can also be struck with the hand or other body parts to create a percussive rhythm. 'Poi' can be used to imitate the sounds, actions and rhythms of nature thus enhancing storytelling. Modern-day 'poi' are made from a variety of materials including foam, cotton batting, wool and plastic coverings, with the rope-like handle braided from yarn or cord.

Harakeke - Māori had many uses of harakeke or the flax plant. After harvesting the abundant plant, women would scrape the leaves with a sharp stone or shell to expose the inner fibers. These fibers would then be cleaned, prepared and woven, dyed and braided into many items such as mats, baskets, rope, fishing nets and the 'piupiu' for performing.

Kia Ngāwari (Be Kind or Tolerant) - Kia Ngāwari houses examples of the arts of Māori weaving and carving. Weaving techniques, include Tāniko (finger-weaving, related to twining), arapaki or tukutuku (ornamental lattice-work), whatu (weft-twining) and raranga (plaiting). Weavers without the use of looms, finger-weave cloth very similar to linen, which could then be used for wrap-around kilts, decorated cloaks of feathers and dog skin, 'piupiu' (flax-made kilt), chest and head bands. The threads are dyed from different bark and 'paru'

(iron-rich mud) and woven into cloth creating different designs and patterns. Today, Kiwi feather cloaks are especially prized because of their rarity.

The displays in Kia Ngāwari also highlight the mediums used in the carving arts, including wood, bone, stone, shell, shark teeth, and skin (tā-moko or traditional tattooing). Photos on display include Hone Te Kauru Taiapa, MBE; Matthew Cowley, a Polynesian Cultural Center visionary; numerous employees of the marae who are now deceased; and Te Arohanui Māori Company performers.

Weapons - Long and short clubs were the main two types of weapons for use in hand-to-hand combat. The Taiaha is a long-handled, fire-hardened wooden stave which combines the uses of a broadsword, quarterstaff, spear and club. The taiaha features a long, tapering flattened shaft or blade broadening towards the opposite end with a head, nose, eyes, lips, teeth, mouth and tongue-shaped spearhead. The weapon is often named after an ancestor. The short clubs were crafted from wood, stone (including pounamu) or whalebone. This deadly weapon was used for in-fighting, close-quarters combat. The weapon was usually tucked into the warrior's belt and often hidden from sight with a cloak.

Interesting Fact

Taumatawhakatangihangakōauauotamateaturipūkakapikimaungahoronukupōkaiwhenuakit anatahu is the longest place name in the world with 85 letters. It is pronounced as follows: Tow-mah-tah-fah-kah-tah-ngee-hah-ngaah-koh-ah-oo-ah-oo-oh-Tah-mah-tay-ah-two-rhee-pooh-kah-kah-pee-kee-mow-ngaah-hor-roh-noo-koo-pōh-kah-e-feh-noo-ah-key-tah-nah-tah-who. It is the Māori name for a hill, 305 metres high, overlooking Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. The name translates roughly as “the summit where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, the slider, the climber of mountains, the land-swallower who travelled about, playing his flute to his loved one” (*www.newzealand.com*).