

Culture Wise NEW ZEALAND

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

Graeme Chesters & John Irvine





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**NEW
ZEALAND**

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& Business Etiquette

by

Graeme Chesters

&

John Irvine



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WHAT READERS & REVIEWERS HAVE

'If you need to find out how France works, then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.'

Living France

'It's everything you always wanted to ask, but didn't for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.'

Swiss News

'Rarely has a 'survival guide' contained such useful advice. This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. In a word, if you're planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.'

American Citizens Abroad

'Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's *Living and Working in France* is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. This book is absolutely indispensable.'

The Riviera Reporter

'A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.'

Reader

'In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.'

The Recorder

'The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer, and save time and money in the process.'

American Club of Zurich

SAID ABOUT SURVIVAL BOOKS

‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

Reader

‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT – follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.’

Living France

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life. I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the do’s and don’ts for a foreigner in Switzerland. Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole book is laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

Reader

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

Everything Spain

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

ICI (Switzerland) AG



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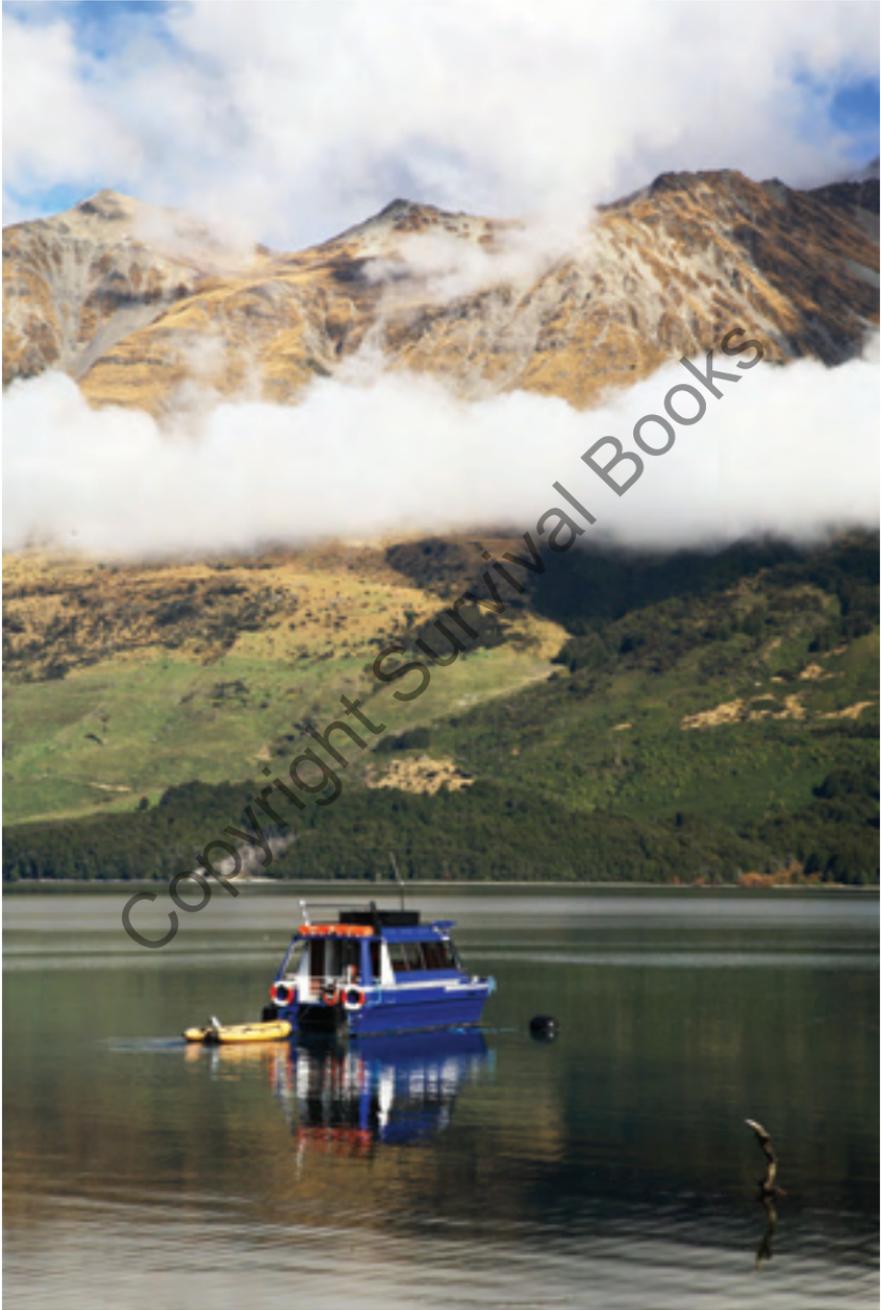
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Land of the long white cloud

INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to New Zealand or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise New Zealand* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Culture Wise New Zealand is essential reading for anyone planning to visit New Zealand, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance their understanding of New Zealand and New Zealanders. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and New Zealand is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the New Zealand way of doing things, whether it's sculling a few stubbies with your bros after a day's hard yakka, feasting on greasies or savs and pavs after tramping to Erewhon and back, or enjoying a few sickies at your bach or crib.

A period spent in New Zealand is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in New Zealand and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

Good luck!

Graeme Chesters & John Irvine
July 2007



1.

A CHANGE OF CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad has never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. However, although globalisation means the world has in effect ‘shrunk’, each country is still a world of its own with a unique culture.

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons that are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause because non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example, your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic conditions, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

NEW ZEALAND IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently, you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly

foreign despite the cosy familiarity engendered by cinema, television and books. New Zealand is perceived by many foreigners – particularly the British – as an easy option because of the English language, its traditional links with the UK, multicultural society and well-established foreign communities in the major cities.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

However, when you move to New Zealand you'll need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges, which may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment, which can be overwhelming – and all this before you even encounter the local culture. In your home country, you may have left a job where you were the boss, were extremely competent and knew everyone. In New Zealand, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your English isn't fluent) and won't know any of your colleagues. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Even if you move to a major city, many things that you're used to and take for granted in your home country may be unavailable in New Zealand; for example, certain kinds of food, opportunities to practise your favourite hobby or sport, and books and television programmes in your mother tongue. This lack of home comforts can wear you down, and you will also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives who you could rely on for help and support. In New Zealand there's no such network, which can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in New Zealand and what you will be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are it will enhance your enjoyment and may save you from a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in New Zealand, perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently, **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'

James A. Michener (American writer)

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country, or even when moving to a new environment in their home country (where the culture and in some cases language





may vary considerably by region or social class). Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a fish out of water.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse. It involves the thousand and one clues to behaviour in everyday situations, such as when to shake hands and what to say when you meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use a cash machine or the telephone; when to accept or refuse invitations; and whether to take statements seriously. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired over a lifetime and are as much a part

of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs.

Our peace of mind and social efficiency depend on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological and are caused by the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded by cultural differences in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references.

You may also have physical symptoms, including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (colds and headaches) and more serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

Clifton Fadiman (American writer)

Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The stages vary, as do the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks after arrival

(although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the usual pressures of life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty.

The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).

Paris Syndrome

Every year, a dozen or so Japanese tourists have to be repatriated from the French capital after falling prey to what has become known as 'Paris Syndrome'. This is what some polite Japanese tourists suffer when they discover that Parisians can be rude or that the city doesn't meet their expectations. The experience can be so stressful that they suffer a nervous breakdown and need to be hospitalised or repatriated under medical

2. The second (rejection or distress) stage is often completely opposite to the first and is essentially negative and a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off and you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except, of course, that life is nothing like anything you've previously experienced.

This can happen after only a few weeks and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion brought on by a change



of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish is an important symptom of this stage. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered.

3. The third stage is often known as the 'flight' stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most

difficult to cope with. During this period, you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people.

You may experience difficulties such as not being understood or feelings of discontent, impatience, frustration, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you're trying to adapt to a new culture that's very different from that of your home country, and they're exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country. You focus exclusively on the negative aspects, refusing to acknowledge any positive points. You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this and may respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you.

There may be problems with the language, your house, job or children's school, transportation ... even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with problems,

The transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult one and takes time to complete. During this process, strong feelings of dissatisfaction may emerge. The period of readjustment can last six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) those who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.

and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to these problems only makes matter worse. They try to help but they just don't understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic.

4. The fourth stage (recovery or autonomy) is when you begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. **The environment doesn't change – what changes is your attitude towards it.** You become more competent with the language and you feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country and can function without feeling anxiety. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues and you won't understand everything people say, particularly colloquialisms and idioms. Nevertheless, you have largely adjusted to the new culture and start to feel more at home. You're now familiar with the country and your place in it, and begin to realise that it has its good as well as bad points.



5. The fifth stage is termed ‘reverse culture shock’ and occurs when you return to your home country. You may find that many things have changed (you will also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you’ve been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and the circumstances, and everyone reacts differently to them. Some stages last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others.

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there’s no escaping the phenomenon;

‘The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land.’

G. K. Chesterton (English writer)

however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably and there are a number of things you can do before leaving home:

- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is to have a positive attitude towards New Zealand, whether you’re visiting or planning to live there. If you aren’t looking forward to a trip or relocation, you should question why you’re going. There’s no surer guarantee of unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you. It’s important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals’ feelings and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible. This will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they

Auckland at dusk



have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by your behaviour.

'Travellers never think that
THEY are the foreigners.'

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about New Zealand before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise. Reading up on New Zealand and its culture before you leave home will help you become familiar with the local customs and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You will be aware of many of the differences in New Zealand and be better prepared to deal with them.

This will help you avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights and will reduce the chances of you offending the locals due to cultural misunderstandings. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope.

There are literally hundreds of publications about New Zealand as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see the **Appendices**). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in

New Zealand who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also virtual notice boards on many websites where you can post messages or ask questions.



- **Visit New Zealand first** – If you're planning to live or work in New Zealand for a number of years or even permanently, it's important to visit first to see whether you would enjoy living there and could cope with the culture before making the leap. Before you go, try to find someone in your area who has visited New Zealand and talk about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before buying a home and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you've made the right decision.
- **Learn English** – As well as a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will be the most decisive factor in combating culture shock and enjoying your time in New Zealand. The ability to speak English and understand the local vernacular (see **Chapter**

5) isn't just a practical and useful tool (one that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc.) but the key to understanding New Zealand and its culture. If you can speak English, even at a basic level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened. Obviously not everyone is a linguist and learning English can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance virtually anyone can learn enough English to participate in the local culture.

Look upon a period spent in New Zealand as an opportunity to **redefine your life objectives** and learn and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.

- **Be proactive** – Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or a sporting activity. There are often plenty of



local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, join an arts club, learn to cook local dishes, taste wine, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll meet new people and make friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club, perhaps because your English isn't good enough, you can participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the major cities.

- **Talk to other expatriates** – Although they may deny it, many expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even if they cannot give you any advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that it gets better over time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.
- **Keep in touch with home** – Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.
- **Be happy** – Don't rely on others to make you happy or you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are things in life that you can change and if you need them to change, you must do it yourself. You have little or no

'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

control over most daily events and moaning about them will only make you unhappy. So be your own best friend and nurture your capacity for happiness.

FAMILIES

Family life may be completely different in New Zealand from what you're used to, and relationships can become strained under the stress of culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller) and the climate may differ dramatically from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can and explain to your children the changes they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

Culture shock can affect non-working spouses and children more than working spouses. The husband (it's usually the husband) has his work to occupy him and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in an environment that differs considerably from what she's

used to. She will find herself alone more often, a solitude intensified by the fact that there are no relatives or friends nearby.

However, if you're aware that this may arise beforehand, you can act on it and reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, because the success of a family relocation depends on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital, so make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should be raised and, if possible, answered, particularly when asked by children.

However difficult the situation may appear at the beginning, it helps to bear in mind that it's by no means unique, and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.



MULTICULTURALISM

New Zealand isn't a multicultural society in the same way that Australia, Canada and the UK are, and has never seen itself as one. However, with the influx of foreigners in recent years, particularly Asians, New Zealand has become more multicultural (to the horror of some and the delight of others) and foreigners have enriched its way of life, adding to its range of foods and restaurants, religions, businesses and ideas.

Multiculturalism

Coined in Canada in the '70s, multiculturalism is the term used for an ideology advocating that immigrants integrate into society while retaining and valuing the most important elements of their own culture, including speaking their own language and teaching it to their children.

Although newcomers to New Zealand are expected to embrace New Zealand's culture and values, they are also encouraged to maintain

ties with their homeland and its culture, rather than abandon them. Most ethnic groups in New Zealand have clubs and societies to which newcomers are warmly welcomed, and marriage between ethnic groups – indigenous and non-indigenous – is common, and the country has a low level of inter-ethnic conflict and high levels of cooperation.

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted only in order to help you prepare and adjust to a new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere (even in your home country) the most important thing is to be considerate, kind,



open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in New Zealand – or any other country. Treat New Zealand and its people with respect and they will reciprocate.

The majority of people who have emigrated to New Zealand would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent in New Zealand is a wonderful

way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager.

‘Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore.

Dream. Discover.

Mark Twain (American writer)





2.

WHO ARE THE NEW ZEALANDERS?

New Zealand was the last country in the world to be settled when the Maori arrived from Polynesia around 800 years ago (and Europeans in the 18th century). However, it has come a long way in a relatively short time and today is one of the most civilised countries in the world with an enviable lifestyle.

Migrants have been drawn to New Zealand for over 200 years – mostly from the UK, and many New Zealanders still identify culturally with their British heritage. In recent decades, there has been an influx of migrants from other regions, mainly Asia and the Pacific Islands, with the result that the country has become increasingly multicultural.

Although New Zealand is far from perfect in regard to its race relations, it has done far better than any other country that has been colonised, including Australia, Canada, South Africa and the USA. The various nationalities generally manage to live, work and play together in harmony, and have enriched the country with their culture, customs and etiquette.

It's an egalitarian country and a land of equal opportunity for all, whatever, your colour, race or gender – the top three posts in the land are held by women – but it's also a masculine country, where men needed to be tough to survive in the rugged and unforgiving landscape.

New Zealand has a strong liberal, puritan tradition that aspired to

'If it would not look too much like showing off, I would tell the reader where New Zealand is.'

Mark Twain (American writer)

fairness, where the greater good prevails over individual ambition. It remains a beacon of social progress, and was the first country to give both men (1867) and women (1893) the vote, and the first with old-age pensions (1898), labour arbitration (1894) and a widow's pension (1911).

The country attracts an increasing number of visitors each year who come to experience the bush, the wildlife and the high country sheep stations; the geysers, mudpools, mountains and lakes; the Maori heritage, rugby and bungee jumping; the vineyards, wine and seafood; the film-sets and spectacular unspoilt