

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand has a rich and fascinating history, reflecting our Maori heritage dating back 700 years and European settlement in the late 18th century.

Maori were the first to arrive in New Zealand, journeying in canoes from Hawaiki about 1,000 years ago where they set up a thriving tribal society that thrived for hundreds of years. The Maoris named the new land *Aotearoa*, meaning “Land of the Long White Cloud”, a name that still seems appropriate today. They survived by hunting and farming and later by trading with the European settlers. The Maoris were skilled fishermen, as well as expert sailors.

A Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman, was the first European to sight the country in 1642 and named the two islands Nieuw Zeeland, after the Dutch province of the same name but it was the British who made New Zealand part of their empire thanks to Captain James Cook in the 18th century. There were fightings between the Maoris and the Dutch and between the Maoris and the British too.

In 1840, the [Treaty of Waitangi](#) was signed, an agreement between the British Crown and Maori. It established British law in New Zealand, while at the same time guaranteeing Maori authority over their land and culture. The following year New Zealand officially became a British colony and the New Zealand Constitution Act was established in 1852. The Treaty is considered New Zealand’s founding document. The grounds and the building where the treaty was signed have been preserved and, today, the Waitangi Historic Reserve is a popular tourist attraction. The original Treaty itself can be seen at the [New Zealand Archives](#) in Wellington.

New Zealand declared independence from the UK in 1907, although the country remained a part of the British Empire and New Zealanders fought alongside the British in both world wars. Today, New Zealand is an independent nation within the British Commonwealth. The British Union Jack appears on the country’s flag and an image of the Queen can still be seen on some banknotes.

People from all over the world visit this remote nation to experience its history and a taste of its unique culture. Amazing Maori historic sites such as the village of Tamaki and taonga (treasures) are a contrast to many beautiful colonial buildings. A walk around any New Zealand city today shows what a culturally diverse and fascinating country we have become.

<http://www.newzealand.com/int/history/>