


New Zealand ([/njuːˈziːlənd/](#)  listen); Māori: **Aotearoa** [[aɔˈtɛaɾɔa](#)]) is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. The country geographically comprises two main landmasses—the North Island (or *Te Ika-a-Māui*), and the South Island (or *Te Waipounamu*)—and around 600 smaller islands. New Zealand is situated some 1,500 kilometres (900 mi) east of Australia across the Tasman Sea and roughly 1,000 kilometres (600 mi) south of the Pacific island areas of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Tonga. Because of its remoteness, it was one of the last lands to be settled by humans. During its long period of isolation, New Zealand developed a distinct biodiversity of animal, fungal and plant life. The country's varied topography and its sharp mountain peaks, such as the Southern Alps, owe much to the tectonic uplift of land and volcanic eruptions caused by the fact that New Zealand is located along the fault of two tectonic plates. New Zealand's capital city is Wellington, while its most populous city is Auckland.

Sometime between 1250 and 1300, Polynesians settled in the islands that later were named New Zealand and developed a distinctive Māori culture. In 1642, Dutch explorer Abel Tasman became the first European to sight New Zealand. In 1840, representatives of Britain and Māori chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which declared British sovereignty over the islands. In 1841, New Zealand became a colony within the British Empire and in 1907 it became a Dominion. In 1947 it became a fully independent country, but the head of state was still the British monarch. Today, the majority of New Zealand's population of 4.7 million is of European descent; the indigenous Māori are the largest minority, followed by Asians and Pacific Islanders. Reflecting this, New Zealand's culture is mainly derived from Māori and early British settlers, with recent broadening arising from increased immigration. The official languages are English, Māori and New Zealand Sign Language, with English predominant.

New Zealand is a developed country and ranks highly in international comparisons of national performance, such as health, education, economic freedom and quality of life. Since the 1980s, New Zealand has transformed from an agrarian, regulated economy to a diverse market economy. Nationally, legislative authority is vested in an elected, unicameral Parliament, while executive political power is exercised by the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister, who is currently Jacinda Ardern. Queen Elizabeth II is the country's head of state and is represented by a governor-general, currently Dame Patsy Reddy. In addition, New Zealand is organised into 11 regional councils and 67 territorial authorities for local government purposes. The Realm of New Zealand also includes Tokelau (a dependent territory); the Cook Islands and Niue (self-governing states in free association with New Zealand); and the Ross Dependency, which is New Zealand's territorial claim in Antarctica. New Zealand is a member of the ASEAN Plus mechanism, United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, ANZUS, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Pacific Islands Forum, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.