

Six Ways to Experience Māori Culture

The culture of the Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, is part of everyday life here, a rich thread in the tapestry of the country's past, present, and future.

"Although our culture is ever moving, our history is set," says Mori Rapana, Māori cultural manager at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. "In order to understand the present, you have to start with the past. This is where we came from. This is how we got here. This is why we came here."

To experience just a fraction of this cultural wealth, visit these places to get a taste of traditional Māori culture.

Waitangi Treaty Grounds

Located in the Bay of Islands, this is the birthplace of modern New Zealand. The Waitangi Treaty was written and signed 178 years ago by the Māori and the British, who wanted to work together and provide a sustainable future for New Zealand. The Waitangi Treaty Grounds feature an extensive museum, guided tours with a direct descendant of Māori who signed the treaty, and cultural performances.

Waipoua Forest

Located on the west coast of the North Island, Waipoua is the most significant **kauri(1)** forest in New Zealand. It is home to Tāne Mahuta, the "lord of the forest," a **167-foot-tall(2)** kauri tree with a girth of 45 feet, and the largest living tree in New Zealand. The 2,000-year-old tree is an important part of the Māori creation story, and Māori still visit Waipoua to receive Tāne Mahuta's blessing. "This is a very spiritual place. It has mana [power], and people feel that when they come to visit," says Bill Matthews, a tour guide.

Lake Taupo

The Māori carvings at Lake Taupo, in central North Island, were created in the late 1970s and represent the passing of skills from one generation to the other. Master carver Matahi Whakataka-Brightwell spent 10 years training with Māori elders before he began these carvings—one of which is 46 feet tall.

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Far from being a stuffy, stodgy museum experience, Wellington's Te Papa is vibrant and interactive, with an impressive collection housing more than 500,000 artifacts. Māori culture features prominently, from artwork, to a marae (meeting house), to a waka (large canoe-like watercraft). Guided tours are available, and general admission is free.

Hokitika

Located on the West Coast of the South Island, Hokitika was well known among Māori as a place of pounamu, also known as greenstone, a nephrite jade valued for its durability and beauty. Traditionally, Māori carve pounamu into tools, weapons, and ornaments, and Hokitika is a place to find the work of master carvers.

(1) Kauri: an ancient tree (2)one foot = 30.5 cm