
I. THE COUNTRY

Geography and Climate

New Zealand is situated in the southwest Pacific Ocean, just west of the international dateline. It is some 1 600 km (994 miles) from Australia, 9 000 km (5 593 miles) from Tokyo and Singapore and slightly more than 11 000 km (6 835 miles) from Vancouver. New Zealand has a combined land area of 260 000 km² (100 393 square miles). The coastline is 6 400 km (3 978 miles) long, indented with numerous bays and coves.

New Zealand is made up of two main islands: North Island which is 114 687 km² (44 284 square miles) and South Island which is 150 460 km² (58 097 square miles), as well as Stewart Island, the Chatham Islands and a few smaller islands. The two main islands are separated by Cook's Strait and are each less than 450 km (280 miles) at their widest point, with a chain of mountains running through each one. The rivers are short and turbulent and the amount of land available for cultivation is limited. Pasture land, however, is ideally suited to grazing.

The climate in the extreme north is subtropical, while in the arid portion of South Island, it is almost continental. The major cities are subject to strong westerly winds. Other factors which influence the climate of New Zealand are its position in the midst of a vast ocean, its shape and topography. Summers are rarely uncomfortably hot and winters, except in the far south, are usually short and mild. Generally, sunshine and rainfall are spread evenly throughout the year.

New Zealand's climate is similar to that of the Pacific Coast between Los Angeles and Vancouver, with much the same seasonal variations.

History and Form of Government

New Zealand was discovered in 1642 by the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman and was inhabited solely by Maoris (the original Polynesian indigenous race). It was not until 1769 that detailed exploration was begun by Captain Cook, with the first European settlers arriving in 1792.

Whaling stations were organized along the coast, but permanent settlement was not established until 1840 on the