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New Zealand

AN ISLAND JOURNEY

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PIHA BEACH, on Auckland's west coast, is especially popular with surfers.
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Haere Mai

Welcome to New Zealand

IN NO OTHER COUNTRY is there such a diversity of landscapes as in New Zealand: rainforests, long sandy beaches, rocky coastal cliffs, active volcanoes, rolling rural landscapes, glaciers and geysers. To many it seems to be a paradise in the South Pacific Ocean. But where should the history of this paradise start? Should it begin about 160 million years ago, as Zealandia began to form? Or should it start with the present, with earthquakes, to show that this process is still taking place and both islands are constantly subject to change? Or with the Maori creation myth? In fact this legend begins with dramatic forces similar to those of the tectonic plates on which New Zealand lies.

Rangi (Ranginui, the sky father) and Papa (Papatuanuku, the earth mother) were embraced so tightly that their sons had to grow up in darkness. One day the fiercest child, Tumatauenga, suggested they banish the parents in order to finally reach the light. However, Tane, god of the forests, proposed an alternative; to push the parents apart from each other. Only after lying on the ground and using his strong legs to push against them, did he manage to separate the surprised parents and free the children. When Tawhirimatea, god of the winds, became aware of how upset his parents were, he moved up to his father in the sky and swore to cause trouble for his brothers by fathering many children; the wind, the fog and the hail.

In February 2012 we were arriving from above too. As our plane came in to land from Sydney, it circled over the city of Christchurch and briefly revealed a glimpse into the heart of the city. From a bird's-eye view its square grid of streets looked like decaying teeth, with the ruins of some high buildings in the middle of flattened sections.

A few hundred metres outside of the city centre everything seemed deceptively normal, but in the fenced-off city centre, former glass facades were boarded up with temporary chipboard where windows had blown out. Fluttering curtains on the tenth floor appeared to wave in surrender. There was no birdsong to hear, only diesel engines and jackhammers. An elderly lady was standing at the fence with her husband and talking with sadness of 'our broken-hearted city'. Then she stared back again at the diggers in the 'red zone', the cordoned-off city centre of Christchurch, which used to be the economic hub of the South Island.

On 22 February 2011, at 12.51 p.m., Christchurch was knocked down by a magnitude 6.3 earthquake. A few months earlier, in September 2010, the city had been rocked by a bigger 7.1 earthquake. On 11 March 2011 an earthquake 100 times stronger had its epicentre off the coast of Japan, but the Christchurch earthquake in February had an epicentre that was only was 10 kilometres southeast of the city and only 5 kilometres deep. Its impact was as destructive as any in New Zealand's living memory: 185 people were killed, with 115 victims in the six-storey CTV building, home of the local television station, when it collapsed. Thousands of houses had to be demolished where the land was badly affected by liquefaction.

By the next day workers had already begun to flatten out the roads rippled by the earthquake. Following an appeal over the radio, hundreds of farmers came into the city on their tractors to help with the clean-up. They were instantly named the 'Farmy Army'. Overnight a student volunteer army was also formed, armed with shovels to clear the worst-hit areas. The new City Art Gallery was chosen as the Civil Defence headquarters: the glass façade of the gallery, several storeys high, had survived the earthquake unbroken. For several months, the desks of people managing the recovery were based right next to classics of modern art. The city's newspaper,

SAND DUNES at Whararíki Beach, at the northern tip of the South Island.

The Press, released emergency plans with information about which supermarkets were open, which schools were closed (or used as emergency accommodation) and where residents could get drinking water. Under the city, many water supply and sewage pipes had been destroyed in the earthquake, and the power was also out over most of the city. But the people of Christchurch calmly put up tents in their front gardens and dug holes in the backyard as emergency toilets.

Six months after the February quake the city and its citizens were on the mend. Optimism was spreading, and some shops had reopened in the city centre. People became less and less worried by the daily aftershocks – until 23 December 2011 when more buildings were brought down by another earthquake with a magnitude of 5.9. By now, the emergency powers running the city had decided to turn the Central Business District into a fenced-off ghost town. Eighty per cent of the CBD buildings will eventually be demolished, and the rebuilding of the city will probably take decades. A year after the catastrophe, citizens, local council and central government still argue about the rebuild, about what shape the 'new' Christchurch should take. Two thirds of Christchurch residents want to stay, though some New Zealanders wonder whether the city should be rebuilt at another location. A vibrant container village near the CBD with cafés and shops is an indicator of the will to stay in Christchurch. Nevertheless, in 2011 nearly 40,000 of the 380,000 citizens left the destroyed city.

Why are there so many earthquakes in New Zealand? The reason lies deep below the surface of the earth and dates back to when New Zealand was connected to the super-continent Gondwana, which included what would become South America, Africa, Antarctica, Australia and India. About 150 million years ago Gondwana started to break up and new continental plates developed. One of these plates was Zealandia, which gradually split from Antarctica and Australia. 60 million years ago Zealandia stopped drifting away, but steadily sank and was almost completely submerged about 25 million years ago. Only a few islands remained above the sea surface until the land steadily rose again. Zealandia now straddles the South Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Basin, with 90 per cent of the plate covered by water: New Zealand is the largest area above sea level. Today the two main islands, along with Stewart Island, cover a length of nearly 1600 kilometres.

The ongoing drift of the continents would not be a problem, except the 'Shaky Isles', as Kiwis jokily call them, sit directly above two colliding continental plates. The Indo-Australian plate south of Cook Strait is pushing 4 centimetres a year above the Pacific plate further to the north. North of Marlborough a fault line runs straight through Cook Strait, Wellington and the Wairarapa region. Another fault line is situated about 80 kilometres off the coast as far north as Hawke Bay. Both plates are extremely tightly wedged around New Zealand, and the built-up tension is released about every 500 to 2500 years as the plates lurch past each other.

Long ago, when Zealandia was still connected to Gondwana, there already existed a range of flora and fauna. Zealandia then became isolated, a kind of Noah's Ark with unique birds and plants – and one without land mammals, with the exception of a few species of bats. Many of the endemic plants of New Zealand are from the age when it was linked to Gondwana, but some of the birds have more mysterious origins. Did the ancestors of the kiwi and moa, which both belong to the family of the flightless ratites, descend from similar birds on the 'ark' of Gondwana, or did they migrate much later? It is possible that they came from Australia, and some scientists who have analysed moa and kiwi DNA point to similarities with DNA from the Australian emu. Or could kiwi have flown here millions of years ago and then, with a lack of natural enemies, lost the ability to fly?

Eighty-five per cent of all plants in New Zealand are endemic. The two main tree families are conifers (Podocarps) and southern beeches (Nothofagus). Some of the New Zealand podocarps have scale-like leaves and seeds reminiscent of conifers such as cypress from the Northern Hemisphere. The most common beech is the silver beech; an evergreen beech that is distinguished from its Northern Hemisphere counterparts by its toothed leaves. Tree species such as these must have survived only on a few islands during the last ice age, 10,000 years ago, when the ice sheet nearly covered the mainland completely. Today these tree species are the equivalent of 'living dinosaurs' and are now protected in large parts of New Zealand from a late intruder more devastating than the ice-age glaciers – man.

The first people arrived in this plant and bird paradise comparatively recently making this the last major land mass on earth to be settled. Maori legends and oral history are understandably short on exact dates, but archaeologists using radiocarbon analysis have dated the first settlement by Polynesians at around 1300 A.D. Maori mythology recounts that seven canoes came from the legendary Hawaiki. Even today, all Maori trace their family tree back to these canoes.

The term 'canoe' in the context of Polynesian migration is rather misleading. Four hundred years before the first Europeans visited New Zealand, the direct ancestors of the Maori arrived in stately double-hulled boats – some even longer than the 33-metre *Endeavour* of Captain James Cook. Historians speak of several immigration waves through to the 15th century. In their boats the Polynesians brought dogs (kuri) and bush rats (kiore) to the land they named Aotearoa – the 'Land of the Long White Cloud'. This quickly led to massive changes in the natural order of this formerly isolated paradise. The newcomers soon populated the coastal areas of the islands and lived on a diet of native fish, shellfish, birds and berries. But the biggest item on the menu was the giant flightless bird, the moa, which they hunted to extinction.

Despite this, the core of Maori belief systems is that the environment is related to the spiritual world. Sky and mountains, day and night – all the elements and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits, a life force known as mauri. It is little wonder then that, with so many characters and names, the myths of the Maori are complex and sometimes confusing to outsiders.

The tribes (iwi) and families (hapu) surrounded their villages with ramparts and palisades for protection. These were called pa and were usually situated on easily defendable hills. At the centre of these settlements was the meeting house (whare runanga or whare whakairo) situated on the assembly space (the marae). Whare

ONE OF THE three Emerald Lakes that walkers pass as they descend from Red Crater on Mt Tongariro.

whakairo are elaborately decorated buildings symbolising the body of the tribe's ancestors, which is carved into the building's structure. The figure on the gable end represents the head, with an unfolding genealogy on the backbone of the ridge beam, and the rafters. The bigger the fortified pa, the greater the power and prestige (mana) a chief or tribe had.

Maori had no private ownership of land, but iwi and hapu had territorial claims to their area (rohe). Frequent wars to reinforce these claims became a significant aspect of tribal life. At other times, war was used to respond to insults from a neighbouring tribe. Prisoners were regularly used as slaves or, less commonly, were ritually eaten to enhance a chief's mana. As long as these wars were fought with weapons such as clubs and spears, the conflict was relatively inconsequential. Only when the European settlers supplied the northern tribes with firearms was carnage unleashed on a grand scale, with some warriors venturing south in order to settle old scores. This had a huge effect on the population of Maori, with alcohol, infectious diseases and the colonial wars further adding to this decline. By 1900, the number of Maori had fallen from an estimated 140,000 inhabitants at the arrival of Europeans to just 40,000.

MAORI WAKA (CANOES) are richly decorated. These men are paddling their waka during a ceremony at a traditional gathering.

Until the 17th century, these 'undiscovered' islands in the southern hemisphere remained unknown to Europeans. In 1643, the Dutchman Abel Janszoon Tasman came in search of the legendary southern continent. After the discovery of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), he arrived with his two ships on 13 December at another land mass. He assumed it was associated with a South American continent and called it Staten Landt. Later, other sailors demonstrated that there was no such connection and instead christened the island New Zealand. This name was also retained by the British when in 1769 James Cook 'discovered' the same lands – over 120 years after Tasman's journey. He first landed his ship HMS *Endeavour* just south of what is now Gisborne in Poverty Bay. The natives called these newcomers 'pakeha' – a short form of pakepakeha which literally means 'white skin'. Today, according to historian Michael King, 'it simply denotes people and influences that derive originally from Europe but which are no longer ''European''.' The indigenous people already here adopted the name of their language to refer to themselves, meaning 'original' or 'authentic', as opposed to the 'different' Europeans.

After the British government had established Australia as a penal colony in the late 18th century, traders, sealers and whalers moved on to explore the promise of unknown New Zealand across the Tasman Sea. The harvesting of flax soon evolved into a thriving industry for the early traders. At that time both Pakeha and Maori profited from trade, and clothing, pots, alcohol and guns were exchanged with Maori for food. In the wake of the traders came the missionaries, with Samuel Marsden founding the first Anglican church in Russell in 1814. While the home-grown spirituality of the Maori and the monotheistic religion of the new settlers were far apart, many Maori eventually converted to the new Christian faith, sometimes mixing it with traditional beliefs. 'Going missionary' they called it, and maybe after the numerous tribal wars and the devastating epidemics, the hope of eternal life seemed attractive at the time. Perhaps also the desire to read and write, using the Bible as a basis for learning, was attractive. For chiefs, learning these new skills led to an increase in prestige or mana.

In 1840, just 2000 European settlers lived in New Zealand. The extensive harbour in the Bay of Islands had numerous small settlements, but Kororareka – later renamed Russell – was the largest settlement and briefly the new colony's capital. The Maori tribes were initially enthusiastic about the new arrivals but as the influx accelerated tensions began to rise. There was disagreement among the tribes as to how to resolve the situation. Was resistance against the powerful firearms at all possible? Or was commercial and peaceful co-existence a better option? On 6 February 1840, several hundred Maori gathered at the British residence at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands. Representatives of the Crown were on one side: William Hobson, as 'a chief from the Queen', along with his officers in dress uniforms, the head negotiator James Busby and the high clergy of the missions. On the other side were the Maori chiefs in the best of their newly acquired European clothes and traditional feather cloaks. In this group were both supporters and opponents of a treaty.

Hone Heke, the same person who later cut down the flagpole at Kororareka in protest at the influx of settlers, was eventually the first of 40 chiefs to sign what became known as the Treaty of Waitangi, using the symbol of his facial tattoo (moko) on the document. The contract was the birth of a partnership between the British Crown and Maori, but it was worded in such a way as to have slightly different meanings in English and Maori. Not all Maori concepts were easily translated into English and vice versa. Most importantly, the concept of 'sovereignty', that had now been ceded to the Queen, was understood differently by Maori. 'Government' had been translated by the word kawanatanga, which roughly means 'governor' and Maori assumed that regional command would still remain with them. But the British had no intention of agreeing to this autonomy. The Treaty promised Maori 'full ownership of the lands, forests and fisheries' that were still in their possession. That could have been a good foundation for the new relationship. In reality, the British did not stick to the deal, with the effect that the Treaty only slowed the land grab as the pressure of new waves of settlers transformed the originally peaceful trade between Maori and Pakeha into conflict and war. Despite its different interpretations and expectations, the Treaty became the founding document of New Zealand as a British colony.

Hone Heke, initially a staunch supporter of the Treaty of Waitangi, soon lost faith in it. Other chiefs became increasingly aware that by selling land they were also selling their power, often for a couple of guns and some nails. Ten years after the Treaty was signed, the pressure from settlers for Maori to sell more and more land became increasingly unbearable.

By the 1850s, in response to attempts by the colonial government to pit local tribes against each other, many of the upper North Island tribes got together to elect their own king. The birth of the 'King Movement' was designed to provide a counterbalance to the increasing dominance of Pakeha. The British governor saw this, and the increasing refusal of Maori to sell land, as open rebellion against the authority of the colonial government.

With support from Britain, he raised an army and invaded the Waikato. The defeat of the Maori warrior Rewi Maniapoto at Orakau (1864) ended the 10-year resistance of the 'King Movement' against the heavily armed forces of the Crown, and many Maori withdrew with their king into more rugged land to the south, which is still called the King Country today. Maori land in the Waikato was confiscated and distributed by the government to soldiers and settlers. By 1860 the number of European settlers already exceeded the Maori population, and by 1892, two-thirds of the North Island was owned by European immigrants. They settled in the new colony, but still reserved the term 'home' for England or the country of their birth. They built in the Victorian English style, planted willows and poplars, brought birds such as sparrows, blackbirds and crows into the country, and populated their new rural landscape with horses, sheep and dairy cattle. Deer, goats and rabbits were all introduced for hunting. The rabbits quickly bred out of control and, in an ill-fated attempt to control them, the farmers introduced stoats, which proved to be disastrous for the native wildlife.

After gold was discovered in 1861, the country began to be industrialised, and this process was principally funded by the issuing of government bonds. Railways, dams and telegraph lines were built, creating the infrastructure for a rapidly growing economy. New Zealand's rise on the world market began with an economic crisis in the distant markets of Europe following the collapse of a major London bank. The price of New Zealand's wheat and wool plummeted. The catalyst that led New Zealand out of this seemingly hopeless impasse was the SS *Dunedin*. The ship left Port Chalmers in February 1882, with its revolutionary new refrigerated hold loaded with frozen meat and headed for London. The quality of the still-frozen meat convinced people of the economic viability of this new shipping method. That was the starting point for a prosperous meat industry, which would make New Zealand the third richest country per capita in the world by the mid-1950s. The Kiwis developed a mythology that they really did live in 'God's Own Country' or the vernacular 'Godzone'. It could seemingly not get better, at least not for the Pakeha. The vast majority of Maori still lived at that time in rural areas, far away from prosperity, in often deplorable conditions.

Before the First World War, few New Zealanders had the opportunity to leave their country and travel abroad. When war broke out, men rushed in droves to sign up as soldiers and looked forward to the promise of adventure in Europe. The cost to New Zealand's manpower was huge, as testified by the numerous stone war memorials in even the smallest townships, recording the names of those lost. As a dutiful member of the British Empire, in the two world wars New Zealand lost more soldiers in proportion to its total population than 'Mother England'.

In 1972 New Zealand faced another crisis. Britain joined the European Community and New Zealand's privileged access to these markets was gone forever. Until the 1960s, 55 per cent of the exports from the 'farm in the Pacific' went to the United Kingdom, which had now abandoned the Kiwis and forged a new relationship with France, Germany and Italy. A decade later, however, New Zealand had recovered, and its people had shaken off the image of a 'backwater nation'. They even stood up to their biggest ally, the United States, and refused its nuclear-powered warships access to their ports. With the Constitution Act in 1986 the New Zealand Parliament finally severed the bond to the British Parliament, and the island nation gained full legal independence.

Perhaps ironically, the New Zealanders gave themselves the name of a half-blind, rotund, and flightless nocturnal bird. However this is interpreted, one thing is for certain, like the kiwi bird, the people have never stood still. The cliché of 'a land of sheep' is long gone. In the 1980s, sheep numbers peaked at nearly 70 million; now there is less than half that number. Today, only the finest Merino wool has a chance on the world market, although there is still some other wool production for carpets. In the last 15 years, many sheep have been replaced with dairy cows, with other grazing land converted to alternative uses such as vineyards. New Zealand, along with Australian agriculture, sought new markets, especially among its Asian neighbours. Since the pioneering days, New Zealanders have relied primarily on their adaptability to survive, a quality that has shaped this nation.

The idea of egalitarianism has always been central to the philosophy of New Zealanders. In the isolation of the South Pacific, the immigrants developed a more egalitarian society than the class system of the countries they had left behind. It is no coincidence that this nation of 'do-it-yourself' types was among the first to introduce compulsory education for children of all ethnic groups in 1877; granted the right to vote to all adult men (Pakeha and Maori), in 1879; and 14 years later, in 1893, extended this right to women, making New Zealand the first country in the world with a universal suffrage. Earlier than many other countries, progressive social laws were also adopted. Even in times of economic crisis it has shown that the social climate of New Zealand is milder than its European counterparts. The New Zealand school system allows equal education for everyone and regularly ranks in the PISA top 10. (The Programme for International Student Assessment is an international study that assesses key areas of knowledge and skills in nearly 70 countries.)

In recent decades, divisions between Maori and Pakeha have resurfaced, often as the social problems of Maori and Pacific Island immigrants have grown acute. The 1980s began with an unprecedented revival of the Maori language and the growing support of Maori traditions as the social climate became more liberal. In 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal was set up to clarify land rights and investigate breaches of the Treaty. This coincided with the rebirth of Maori traditions (Maoritanga) and a reawakening of Maori culture. Maori who had flocked from the rural areas to cities since the 1950s also sought renewed self-determination. During these years of urbanisation they also fought to preserve their language. The first pre-school kohanga reo ('language nest') was opened in Wellington in 1982, and Maori children were encouraged for the first time to officially learn their language. Unfortunately, in earlier times this was forbidden in schools under the threat of corporal punishment. By the early 1990s there were over 800 kohanga reo for almost 14,000 children. But will the language survive? Despite these efforts, and even after Maori was made the second official language in 1987, there is today only a small percentage of people fluent in te reo (the Maori language).

VIEW FROM WILMOT PASS in Fiordland to Doubtful Sound, filled with morning cloud. This is one of the few fiords that can be reached by road.

AGAINST THE IMPOSING backdrop of the Southern Alps, the Fox Glacier extends from an altitude of 2600 metres down to the lowland plains near the coast.

It is not surprising that with the strengthening of self-determination came loud calls to redress grievances over earlier rights. More recently, debates have taken place about the foreshore and seabed of New Zealand's coast, over which the Crown claimed administrative rights, although Maori felt they had never surrendered their rights to this. 'Honour the Treaty!' is the byword for many Maori, and in an effort to claim their historical ancestral rights cases were taken to the Waitangi Tribunal. Test cases brought to the Tribunal include Marlborough Sounds and Ninety Mile Beach where evidence stretched back into the 18th century. The government argued that beaches and sea should not belong to one ethnic group but are the property of the whole of New Zealand. In 2004 the government decided that the disputed areas belonged to the Crown, and thus to the public, but that Maori can exert their traditional guardianship role. The debate has become increasingly emotional and can be very confusing to those not familiar with this aspect of New Zealand society.

Michael King, one of New Zealand's foremost historians, advocated strongly for unity before he died, while at the same time articulating that both Pakeha and Maori needed to hold on to and respect their own cultures. For Aotearoa is home to both peoples, and it is a small country that needs both peoples' loyalty and dedication to prosper. He went on to say: 'The fact that one group has been here longer than others does not make its members "more" New Zealand than later arrivals, nor give them the right to exclude others from participation in the national life.' One of the last things he wrote reflected that only through the mutual, deep understanding of their different origins could there be the beginnings of a common national identity.

In the 21st century, New Zealanders' support for the monarchy and the Royal Family is wavering, even though Queen Elizabeth II is still the head of state, and clearly much respected. But for how much longer? The question of whether New Zealand should become a republic is often raised, but there are many constitutional issues that would need to be worked through, not the least of which is that the Treaty of Waitangi was signed with the Crown. But even though it is regularly debated and many people think a republic will come eventually, it is not a dominating issue. This also says something about the laid-back nature of New Zealanders: 'She'll be right! It will work out OK in the end.'

► **THE DISTINCTIVE COLOUR** of the Champagne Pool at Wai-o-tapu, near Rotorua, is due to minerals precipitated from the 75˚C geothermal lake.

► ► **THE STEEP BANKS** of the Whanganui River are cloaked in tree ferns. The longest navigable river in New Zealand has carved deep canyons through the soft sandstone of this hilly landscape.

The East Coast

Between Mountains and Sea

Kaikoura, Christchurch, Banks Peninsula,
Dunedin, Otago Peninsula, The Catlins,
Stewart Island

A VIEW FROM the grassy volcanic slopes of Banks Peninsula down to Akaroa Harbour. An isolated tree stump in the pasture is evidence that the peninsula was once covered in thick forest.

ON THE JOURNEY FROM THE MYTHICAL PACIFIC home of Hawaiki, the crew of the sailing waka (canoe) Araiteuru finally arrived in the land of the long white cloud. In search of a new home and a place to settle, they paddled further south. As a precaution, they had brought kumara from their homeland, a type of sweet potato that needed sun and warmth to grow. The waka crew also brought along the karakia (incantations) and tikanga (customs) associated with planting crops successfully. According to Maori legend, as the boat sailed along the east coast there was a terrible storm. Terrified, some of the crew jumped from the canoe and swam towards land, where the castaways were immediately turned to stone. The remaining crew was barely enough to steer the boat, and the storm drove it further south. Some of the food baskets were swept overboard and washed ashore, where they too turned to stone. The petrified baskets, known today as the Moeraki Boulders, are still exposed at low tide, scattered over a sandy beach near Oamaru. Finally, the crew lost control of their waka, which foundered at the mouth of the Waihemo (Shag) River at Shag Point, between Oamaru and Dunedin. The hull of the canoe was turned into a reef just offshore and the highest part of the reef is named after Hipo, the navigator of the waka. The remaining 150 castaways migrated inland and their names are preserved locally at places like Matakaea, Puketapu and Hikaroroa. Such traditional stories represent a link between the natural world and the present day, reinforcing modern tribal identity with these places and preserving the links between the generations. Even though this story tells of how the kumara first came to Aotearoa, today no kumara grows south of Banks Peninsula.

THE JETTY AT AKAROA on Banks Peninsula. Akaroa is the oldest township in the Canterbury region, founded in 1840 by French settlers. The French names of some streets and families today are reminders of an era when the South Island nearly became a French colony.

The history of Banks Peninsula, near Christchurch, encapsulates some important episodes in the settlement of New Zealand. Banks Peninsula was discovered by Captain James Cook in 1770 on his first circumnavigation of New Zealand, and he named it after Joseph Banks, the wealthy botanist on his ship. However, Cook did not realise the geographical feature was attached to the mainland, and recorded it as an island in his maps of New Zealand.

The peninsula is a land of opposites. On the winding Summit Road, which runs along the crest of an exposed tussock ridge, the landscape is windswept and occasionally cold coastal fog wraps itself over the tops. In contrast, a few hundred metres further down, holiday-makers in T-shirts enjoy their lattés in one of the many street-side cafés in the village of Akaroa. Sheep and cows graze on the steep, grassy slopes and at first glance this appears as a picturesque rural landscape. The idyllic view disguises the peninsula's origins: before the arrival of the first humans, this old volcanic landscape was covered in dense forest teeming with birdlife. The forest of the Canterbury Plains had already succumbed to the burning carried out by early Maori in their hunt for moa, but no sooner had the new settlers arrived on the peninsula than they set about burning and clearing the remaining forest. Within decades the forest on the hills was felled and in 1890, after only 50 years, a mere 600 hectares of virgin forest remained.

Around the early 1900s, there were enough cattle on Banks Peninsula to supply eight co-operative dairy factories with milk. One of these factories was situated at the end of a narrow, winding road at Okains Bay. Here, Murray Thacker, a descendant of Irish settlers who were among the first to farm in this area, founded the Maori and Colonial Museum in 1977. In several barns and pioneer cabins he has assembled a nationally acclaimed collection of art treasures and everyday objects from Maori and European settlers. In the centre of the museum is a whare, a traditional Maori meeting house, and two imposing old waka, or Maori canoes. Waitangi Day, on 6 February, is often celebrated here, symbolically at the site where in 1840 the local Ngai Tahu iwi signed the Treaty with representatives of the British Crown. The formal proceedings start with a powhiri, a welcome to visitors onto the marae by members of the local tribe. A highlight is the enormous hangi, a method of cooking a feast in an earth oven pit. The fire is lit the night before to heat river stones on embers, and early the next morning huge wire baskets filled with beef and pork, poultry and sweet potatoes are lowered into the pit filled with glowing embers and sand in wet sacks. The baskets are completely wrapped in smoke-tight covers, buried under soil and left to steam. Around noon, after five hours of cooking time, as many as 600 people line up to exchange their vouchers for a paper plate piled with delicate, smoky-tasting meat and vegetables.

Profits fell rapidly with the deregulation of the farming industry in the 1980s, and farmers on the peninsula began looking for alternative ways to make a living. Some farmers near Akaroa saw the opportunities for tramping, as Kiwis call hiking, on their private land, and developed the four-day Banks Peninsula track. Starting at Onuku Farm, high above the harbour of Akaroa, the trail leads to a windswept cliff, then traverses through secluded coves to finish in a magnificent regenerating forest at Hinewai. It's not just the landscape that makes this walk so attractive, it's also the stylish accommodation in the old farmhouses, where time seems to have stood still. There is not always electricity, and at one overnight stop the outdoor bath is heated with a fire underneath. Some farmhouses are decorated with driftwood and old building materials.

Formerly, a detour to the port of Lyttelton would have been a must for any traveller returning from Akaroa to Christchurch. But the small town was struck especially hard by the February 2011 earthquake. Nearly 80 per cent of the main street of Lyttelton, with its many small shops and cafés as well as a cinema and a few hotels, has been demolished and most of the main street is still in ruins. The reconstruction will take years.

In 1848 the chief surveyor Joseph Thomas proposed to the Crown that Lyttelton be made the capital of the new province on account of its deep harbour. The area, however, was too hilly for farming and not suited for the development of the square grid street plan the settlers from England planned to build in Canterbury. The London initiators of the Canterbury Association, E. G. Wakefield and J. R. Godley, decided on the sandy plains near the Avon River. An Anglican city was planned for the capital of a new Canterbury (named after the diocese in England), and was given the name Christchurch, after the town it was modelled on in Oxford, England.

In 1850, 3549 immigrants arrived on the first four ships chartered for the voyage by the Canterbury Association. All the 'pilgrims' carried a reference from their local pastor in their luggage, which certified them as 'ordinary, hard-working and honest'. Four hundred of the settlers were wealthy enough to have bought land in the new settlement, while the rest would look for work as labourers and servants. Christchurch was to be a copy of English society complete with its class divisions, despite the hopes for a classless new society. The reality for all the settlers, however, was that the new land was no place for gentleman farmers, and the pioneers who cleared the bush lived for years in rough-hewn cabins. The dream of an idyllic church-based settlement was hard won, as over the years Christchurch has worked hard to be 'more English than England' with its well-kept parks, neo-Gothic architecture and its river punts working the Avon River. But much of this is in the past: the English character all but laid to rest by the earthquake that destroyed so much of the neo-Gothic heritage of

THE RICH CULTURE of the Maori is expressed in their intricate carvings. In the meeting house at Okains Bay the impressive wooden figures represent the ancestors of local Maori.