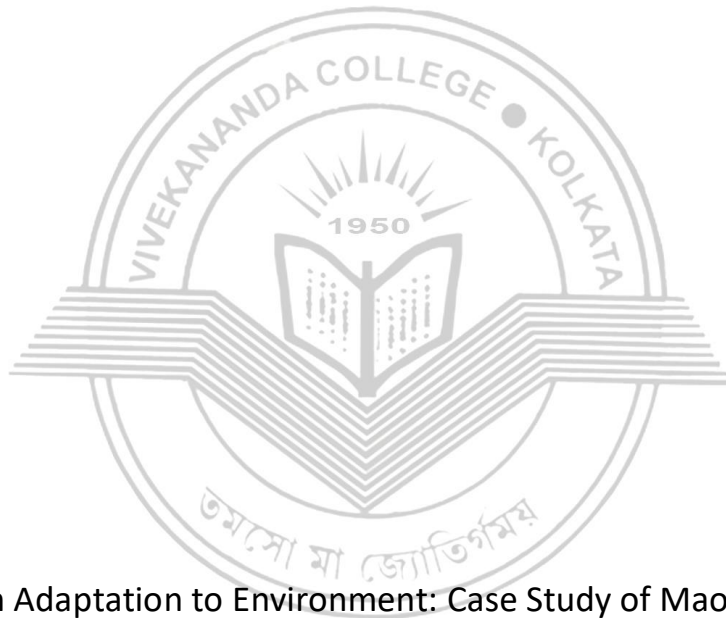


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# **MAORI TRIBE**

**PRONUNCIATION:** MOW-ree

**LOCATION:** New Zealand

**POPULATION:** Approximately 525,000

**LANGUAGE:** Maori; English

**RELIGION:** Christianity; traditional Maori, based on ancestor worship

## **1 • INTRODUCTION**

The ancestors of the present-day Maori created an outpost of Polynesian culture on the North and South islands of New Zealand. They remained relatively isolated from external contact until 1769. In that year, English navigator and explorer Captain James Cook (1728–79) initiated a permanent European presence in New Zealand. As a result, Maori culture would be dramatically changed in less than a century.

In 1840, some 500 Maori chiefs signed the so-called Treaty of Waitangi with the British government. The treaty promised the Maoris that they would keep their lands and property and have equal treatment under the law as British subjects. However, the British later seized Maori lands and made the people move to reservations. As a result of war and disease, the Maori population fell drastically by 1896. Since World War II (1939–45), the government's policies have been more favorable to the Maoris. In recent years, the government of New Zealand has acknowledged its responsibility to the Maoris after a series of protests and court rulings. In October 1996, the government agreed to a settlement with the Maoris that included land and cash worth \$117 million, with the Maoris regaining some traditional fishing rights. The Maori have been striving to revive aspects of their traditional culture, reclaim artifacts of their cultural history from foreign museums, and regain their ancestral homelands.

As of 1997, the Maori of New Zealand numbered close to 525,000 people, or about 15 percent of New Zealand's total population. The term "Maori" refers to a number of different tribal and subtribal groups that view themselves and each other as very distinct.

## **2 • LOCATION**

The islands of New Zealand are the present day homeland of the Maori. New Zealand consists of two islands: the North Island and the South Island. The North Island is hilly with areas of flat, rolling terrain. The South Island is larger and more mountainous. Prior to the arrival of humans, both islands were densely forested.

Archaeologists refer to two branches of Maori: the archaic, and the traditional. The archaic Maori were probably the original inhabitants of New Zealand. They relied on the moa, a large, flightless bird that they hunted into extinction. Their culture dates back to around AD 1000. The traditional Maori are believed to have migrated to the North Island around the fourteenth century. The original homeland of the traditional

Maori was in the Society Islands of Polynesia. Maori migrants left there to escape warfare and the demands of excessive *tribute* (taxes).

### 3 • LANGUAGE

Maori belongs to the Tahitic branch of the Eastern Polynesian language group. (Eastern Polynesian is, in turn, a branch of the larger Austronesian language family.) Prior to European colonization of New Zealand, there were two distinct Maori dialects: North Island Maori; and South Island Maori, which is now extinct. The Maori of today speak English. Preschools that offer instruction in Maori language have sprung up all over the country at a rapid rate as a result of Maori activism.

### 4 • FOLKLORE

Traditional Maori folklore describes an original couple, *Rangi* (sky) and *Papa* (earth). These two were locked in sexual union until the god Tane was able to push them apart and provide for the creation of human life. Maori folklore focuses on oppositions between pairs, such as earth and sky, life and death, and male and female.

### 5 • RELIGION

Like other New Zealanders, many Maori today are Christian (primarily Anglican, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic). Before contact with outside cultures, Maori religion was based on the important concepts of *mana* and *tapu*. Mana is an impersonal force that can be both inherited and acquired by individuals in the course of their lives. Tapu refers to sacredness that was assigned by status at birth. There was a direct relation between the two: chiefs with the most mana were also the most tapu. The English word "taboo" derives from this general Polynesian word and concept of a mysterious superhuman force. Ancestor worship was important in traditional religion.

### 6 • MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Christian Maori celebrate the major Christian holidays as do other New Zealanders. Holidays as Westerners view them did not exist in Maori society before contact with other cultures. Rituals were performed according to the religious calendar and the harvest and collection of foodstuffs.

A controversial New Zealand national holiday for the Maori is Waitangi Day (February 6). This holiday commemorates the 1840 signing of the treaty that was supposed to guarantee their rights and privileges. In 1994, Maori radicals disrupted the Waitangi Day national celebration, forcing the government to cancel the festivities.

### 7 • RITES OF PASSAGE

Modern Maori rites of passage are similar to those of other New Zealanders. Specific Maori traditions are still practiced at certain events. At weddings, for example, a relative of the groom traditionally challenges the father of the bride to a fight. The bride's father then approaches the challenger and is instead warmly greeted.

The Maori once practiced what anthropologists call "secondary burial." When a person died, the body would be laid out on ceremonial mats for viewing by relatives and other members of the village. After a few days, the body was wrapped in mats and placed in a cave or a tree, or buried in the ground. After one year had passed, the body was

removed from the primary burial and the bones were cleaned and painted with red ochre (a pigment). These remains were taken from village to village for a second period of mourning. Following that, the bones were buried in a sacred place.

## 8 • RELATIONSHIPS

Maoris today, like other New Zealanders, typically address each other informally and emphasize friendliness in relationships. Maori customs—practices before the Maoris came into contact with other cultures—were taken less seriously by the 1990s.

One such Maori custom, called *hakari* (feasting), was an important aspect of Maori culture. The Maori feasts brought together a number of different families and other social groups. A man of status would provide food and gifts for those who attended. In the end, he and his family would be left with very little in the way of material possessions or reserves of food. However, his status would have been increased enormously.

Premarital sexual relationships were considered normal for Maori adolescents. Both males and females were expected to have a series of private relationships before they married. When Maori females became sexually active, they were to publicly acknowledge this so that they could become tattooed. Tattooing marked their ritual and public passage into adulthood. It was also considered extremely attractive and erotic.

The Maoris have a traditional greeting, called *hongi*, in which they touch faces so that their noses are pressed together. It is believed that their spirits mingle through this gesture.

## 9 • LIVING CONDITIONS

Today, 80 percent of the Maori live in the urban areas of New Zealand. However, until the 1920s, they lived almost entirely in rural areas. Maori housing today therefore typically reflects that of other urban New Zealanders.

Traditionally, Maoris in coastal areas relied on travel by canoes. These included single-hulled canoes as well as large double-hulled canoes. *Waka taua* were large Maori war canoes that were powered by both sail and paddles. As with other New Zealanders, travel today is by modern road, rail, water, and air transport.

## 10 • FAMILY LIFE

Since most Maoris live in urban industrialized areas, family life is similar to that of other urban New Zealanders. Inter-marriage between Maoris and *Pakehas* (the Maori term for whites) is common. Most Maoris have Pakeha cousins or other Pakeha relatives. Maori households may include relatives besides the nuclear family, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts.

The system of referring to members of the immediate and extended family in Maori culture differs from that found in American culture. In the Maori system, a person's brothers, as well as the male cousins on both the mother's and father's side, would all be called "brother." Similarly, a person's sister, as well as all female cousins, would be called "sister."

## 11 • CLOTHING

Maoris typically wear modern Western-style clothing. However, they still wear their traditional clothing for special occasions. Traditional Maori clothing was some of the most elaborate in Polynesia. Intricately decorated cloaks were an important item of dress for individuals of high status within Maori society.

Tattooing among the Maori was highly developed and extremely symbolic. Maori facial tattoos were created by two methods. One was by piercing and pigmenting the skin with a tattooing comb. The other was by creating permanent grooves in the face with a chisel-like instrument. Male facial tattooing, called *ta moko*, was done in stages in a male's life through adulthood. Females were also tattooed in Maori society. Female facial tattooing was known as *ta ngutu*. Designs were placed on the chin and lips. There is a growing revival of this art among younger Maori women nowadays.

## 12 • FOOD

Maoris typically eat the same kinds of foods as other New Zealanders. Breakfast consists of eggs, sasage, and bacon. Lunch may be a meat pie or sandwich. Dinner is a full meal with a meat dish as the main course. The traditional Polynesian foodstuffs of taro (a starchy root), yams, and breadfruit were not well adapted for cultivation on the temperate islands of New Zealand.

The most famous Maori culinary tradition is the *hangi*. The *hangi* is a feast that may only be prepared in the regions of the country where there are hot springs. A pit is dug in the ground and filled with rocks. Meat and vegetables are placed on top of the rocks in the pit. The food is left to steam for several hours.

## 13 • EDUCATION

Public education has now become the norm for most urban Maori. A number of pre-schools based on Maori cultural education have also been established throughout New Zealand. Education is state-supported and required in New Zealand between the ages of six and fifteen. Students planning to attend one of the country's six universities continue their secondary education until the age of seventeen or eighteen. At that time, they take university qualifying exams.

## 14 • CULTURAL HERITAGE

The *haka* dance of the Maori is one of the best-known cultural traditions of Polynesia. These dances are accompanied by song and body percussion created by clapping hands, stomping feet, and slapping thighs. There is a leader and a chorus that responds to the leader's lead vocal line. The dance itself involves energetic postures representing warlike and aggressive poses.

Maori chanting follows very strict rules for performance, rhythmic structure, and continuity. To break a chant in midstream is to invite disaster or even death for a community. These chants often tell of genealogies (family lines) or the exploits of ancestors.

## 15 • EMPLOYMENT

Maoris today work at the same types of jobs and professions found in any urbanized industrial economy. About two-thirds are engaged in the service sector (jobs that directly serve the public).

Traditional Maori culture developed a high degree of specialized labor. Artisans such as tattoo artists, canoe builders, house builders, and carvers were all classified as *tohunga* in Maori. This title implies a quality of sacredness and translates best into English as "priest." These artisans paid homage to the gods of their various occupations. They were initiated into their crafts through a series of rituals. All artisans were descended from chiefly lines in traditional Maori society.

## 16 • SPORTS

New Zealand, like its neighbour Australia, has rugby and cricket as its national sports. Maori boys and men participate in and follow rugby competitions in New Zealand. Traditional competitions among men in Maori society stressed aggressiveness; they provided practice for real-life conflicts.

## 17 • RECREATION

The modern Maori have become consumers of video, television, and film. As well, they have also become producers of their own stories in these media. Traditional storytelling and dance performance have been preserved by the Maori in this manner, serving both as cultural archives and as entertainment.

## 18 • CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

The New Zealand Maori are accomplished artists in a number of media. Collectors and the general public are most familiar with Maori carving and sculpture. They also have a tradition of figurative painting dating back to the late nineteenth century. Maori sub-tribes each have their own unique artistic styles.

Traditionally, large meeting houses of the Maori were decorated with elaborately carved facades containing figures of their ancestors. The entire structure was conceived as a representation of an ancestor.

## 19 • SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The vast majority of all contemporary Maori are urban dwellers. The Maori continue to suffer the social problems that accompany urban life in conditions of poverty. In some urban areas, Maori unemployment rates exceed 50 percent. The film *Once Were Warriors* (1994) provides a Maori perspective on the social problems of alcoholism, domestic violence, and under-employment or unemployment.

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