**The Land of the Long White Cloud**

Imagine a place where the constellations of stars above your head are different from those that you have ever seen, where the night sky can glow with strange swirling lights, and where the cold of winter comes when summer arrives in Russia. Imagine a place where there are volcanoes, rivers of ice and hot lakes of extraordinary colours, and where forests are full of strange trees. This land is place of earthquakes and living dinosaurs, where the people were once fierce warriors who worshipped mysterious spirits. This place is not from a fairy tale – it is New Zealand.

New Zealand has another name, “the land of the long white cloud”. The first **Maori** settled in New Zealand about a thousand years ago. They came from Polynesia and were excellent sailors and fierce warriors. When the Dutch explorer **Abel Tasman** came to New Zealand in 1642, Maori warriors fought off his sailors and he was unable to land. It was Abel Tasman who gave the country its present name. ***Zeeland*** means “Sea Land” in Dutch. But the Dutch never settled there. The English explorer **James Cook** claimed New Zealand for Britain.

When Captain Cook and his men landed in New Zealand in 1642, they saw a group of tall, strong people with brown skin and tattooed bodies. They were good hunters and fierce warriors, but they were also warm-hearted and friendly. They lived in wooden houses and had wooden boats, and they often cut beautiful shapes into the wood they work with. They caught birds and fish and grew sweet potatoes for food. The Maori of those times had no written language, so all their traditions were handed down orally. They used songs, dances, and carvings to tell stories of the past that held lessons for the young.

Captain Cook created a friendly relationship with the “natives”, but it didn’t last long. When the British came, many Maori people died in fierce battles over land. **The Pakeha** (the Maori name for white people) also brought guns, strong drinks, cigarettes, and diseases that were new to the Maori. They killed all the whales and seals and tried to collect the heads of Maori chiefs. All of these things brought terrible trouble to the Maori, and many of them died. By 1900 the future seemed hopeless, but after a while the population slowly began to grow again.

Today, most Maori people have adopted the lifestyle of the Pakeha – they live in regular houses, do regular jobs, and dress in regular clothes. At the same time, Maori culture is very strong. Many schools teach in the Maori language and train the children in the ways of their ancestors. The Maori people are passionate, humble, warm-hearted, and friendly – but also fierce when they need to be.

New Zealanders are very warm-hearted and hospitable, but don’t be surprised if you are greeted with **a Hongi** – the traditional Maori pressing of noses.