

New Zealand's wide appeal



One of the most geographically isolated countries in the world, New Zealand offers language travellers an endless range of exciting experiences. GILLIAN EVANS finds out more about this fascinating destination.

According to Tricia Lund-Jackson, Principal of ABC College of English in Queenstown, there are two things that often surprise first-time visitors to New Zealand: the clean air and the friendly locals. These factors, coupled with the fact that New Zealand has awe-inspiring natural beauty in its vast mountains and lakes, plenty of language learning opportunities and offers good value for money, make it a highly desirable language travel destination.

New Zealand's reputation for being a natural wonderland is well known, thanks in part to the fact that its stunning scenery formed the backdrop to the film *Lord of the Rings*. Mountains, hills, lakes and rivers dominate the South Island landscape, while the North Island has a concentration of volcanic and thermal activity. The largest city on the South Island, Christchurch, is ideally placed for enjoying many of the area's natural assets. "Christchurch enjoys an enviable location on the ocean shore, but [is] only two hours away from world-class ski fields," states Robert Zuch, Director of Aspiring Language Institute in Christchurch. "[It is] surrounded by volcanic hills ideal for mountain biking and hiking; [has a] large estuary suitable for windsurfing, kite surfing and sailing; and a spa resort [with hot springs is] only one hour away from downtown."

Christchurch itself is known as the Garden City, owing to its many parks and gardens. "It is an exciting, clean, green city of gardens, shopping, restaurants, and culture," exclaims Beth Knowles, Sales Manager at Christchurch College of English. She adds that many famous tourist sites and activities are easily accessible.

"Within a two-hour drive of Christchurch International Airport you can ski, play golf, bungee jump, go rafting, mountain biking, wind-surfing, whale watching, and visit world-class wineries and gardens."

To be right at the heart of adventure activities, Queenstown is an ideal location. Dubbed "Adventure Capital of the World", Queenstown is one of New Zealand's top ski resorts, bordering Lake Wakatipu. "The magnificent mountains, crystal clear waters of the lakes and rivers, and clean mountain air provide the perfect playground for outdoor enthusiasts," says Lund-Jackson.

For a taste of New Zealand city life, cosmopolitan Auckland or the country's capital, Wellington, both on the North Island, are ideal choices, offering shops, cafés, bars and restaurants as well as many cultural

"While walking in Queenstown, one of our Thai students was approached by a group of tourists from Thailand who asked him for directions to the Skyline Gondola. He told them where to go and when he finished, he said he couldn't understand why they just stood there staring at him with odd expressions on their faces. He then realised that he had automatically replied and given them directions in English!"

Tricia Lund-Jackson,
ABC College of English,
Queenstown

Wellington

The city was originally known as Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui, meaning the head of Maui's fish. Maori legend says that a fish caught by the navigator Maui became the North Island





Mount Taranaki on the north island is the most climbed mountain in New Zealand

activities. At Massey University English Language Centre, which has campuses in both of these cities as well as the lively student town of Palmerston North, students are involved in varied activities. "At our Wellington campus, students have met the Hurricanes Rugby Team, undertaken a self-defence class, visited the Colonial Cottage Museum, joined in a tree planting ceremony at our university, joined in an anti-racism march, watched the Royal New Zealand ballet company practise, and played lots of sport and board games as well as cooking Kiwi-style and learning Kiwi songs," reports Dianne Fountaine-Cody.

Private language schools also encourage students to take part in community events. "We help students to find volunteer work or join local clubs that cater to their interests," says Geoff Butler at Mount Maunganui Language Centre, located on a thin stretch of land surrounded by the sea. According to Butler, you can walk "from a chic downtown restaurant, along the beach, around a mountain and back in the space of about one hour". He adds, "Our students love the fact that they can eat their lunch on the beach, maybe have a swim in the sea, and be back in time for afternoon class."

Whakarewarewa thermal reserve

New Zealand's position on the Pacific Rim of Fire means that geothermal activity, such as these bubbling mud pools near Rotorua, are popular attractions



Another relaxed coastal town, on the Coromandel Peninsula just north of Mount Maunganui, is Whitianga, home to Coromandel Outdoor Language Centre. "The Coromandel Peninsula is a holiday area for New Zealand city dwellers," informs Maurice Kirby at the centre. "It has

magnificent beaches, a mountain range covered in native bush, and is popular with surfers, and people who enjoy fishing, sailing, kayaking, diving and other marine activities." As well as the usual (for New Zealand) adventure activities, the centre also offers more unusual activities such as a trip to Hot Water Beach to dig in the sand and make a hot pool.

A centre for thermal activity in New Zealand is Rotorua, New Zealand's most popular tourist destination. "Rotorua

is unique," states Chris Leckie at the Rotorua English Language Academy. "We have world-

famous thermal attractions, 16 lakes within half an hour of the city, forests, a wide range of

recreational, sightseeing and sporting activities; [and] we are within one hour's drive of world-class surfing beaches and the cities of Taupo, Hamilton, Tauranga and Whakatane." The town's biggest attraction is undoubtedly its plentiful thermal activity. "We have wonderful hot water spas where you can relax and have therapeutic massages and mud baths," elaborates Leckie.

While New Zealand's natural assets certainly draw students from all over the world, the other appeal of the country is the friendliness of the people themselves. "Perhaps due to our geographical isolation, Kiwis are generally quite curious people, and so they like to interact with people from other cultures and find out how they live," says Butler. "I think students like the fact that local people are interested in them."

Consequently, host family accommodation is a highly popular choice at New Zealand schools, and Zuch says this type of lodging helps students to get involved with local life. "Too often new students – and any new agents – think that homestay is just a form of accommodation, like flatting or staying in a motel, while we consider it a prime vehicle for community integration," he asserts.

Given the range of attractive destinations in New Zealand, the hardest thing for students to work out is where to study. But even this has been made easy by the accommodating New Zealanders, with some schools joining forces with their counterparts in other locations to offer students multi-location language stays. For example, Coromandel Outdoor Language Centre has this year launched a new course for mature students in collaboration with Dominion English School, which has centres in Auckland and Christchurch, to offer a programme of study at each location.



All Blacks rugby team

New Zealand's rugby team has a formidable reputation worldwide and the sport is a national obsession for many. A traditional Maori Haka or dance is performed by the players before games



Agent viewpoint

"[New Zealand] is outstanding in terms of offering a wide range of leisure facilities for outdoor activities, and compared with other native English-speaking countries, it is affordable. The three most popular cities [for our students] are Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington. Each city offers its own unique surprises. Christchurch, for example, is known as "the garden city" because there are gardens everywhere. Auckland offers world-class opportunities for learning and a high

quality of living. For those who enjoy a capital city lifestyle, Wellington is the best place for studying because of its fantastic shopping, art, culture, fashion and quality education institutes."

Sermchart (Sam) Sindhubodee, NZ Study Co, Thailand



"One of the most common reasons for choosing New Zealand is the fact that students wish to explore this beautiful country, which is so well known for its spectacular and unspoilt

natural environment. It's combining an adventure holiday with education. Also, the prices of the language courses are really encouraging. What is more, a number of visa procedures that had applied to Poles ceased to operate in April 2005, which has had a positive influence on the number of enquiries. Lastly, the country is known for very friendly host families."

Magda Szajbe, JDJ Bachalski, Poland

"Language schools in New Zealand offer very good value for money, as



they are mostly small-to medium-sized and can give a lot of personal care and attention. We send students to all cities in New Zealand – Auckland, Christchurch, Queenstown, Dunedin, Napier, Coromandel, Nelson, etc. We send quite a few students to the smaller towns, as they offer good nationality mixtures and host families within walking distance to the school."

Martijn Dijksterhuis, StudyDIY, Taiwan