

Beautiful scenery, top-class sporting activities and friendly locals characterise New Zealand, and language travellers have a wealth of opportunities available for getting to know the country. JANE VERNON SMITH reports.

Many factors influence why international students choose to study in New Zealand. “[The country] has a great reputation around the world as a clean, green and safe country to visit, and rightly so!” claims Tricia Lund-Jackson, of Queenstown-based ABC College of English. “New Zealanders are friendly and welcoming by nature with a great ‘can do’ attitude.” They are also, according to Geoff Butler of Mount Maunganui Language Centre in Mount Maunganui, quite open people, which, he says, students find refreshing. “Kiwis are genuinely interested in people from other countries and often go out of their way to show visitors a good time,” he remarks.

According to Gus Fahy of Language Schools New Zealand in Christchurch, New Zealand’s reputation for safety is the main attraction for international students. “Students and their families don’t want to get in trouble while they are in a foreign country. New Zealand is one of the safest English-speaking countries in the world. That means [they] can focus on studying [and] have more opportunities for getting out in the community to experience the culture and the language,” he explains.

For Butler, ease of access is also a major factor in New Zealand’s appeal. “It’s so easy to move around and access nearly any activity here, which appeals to students,” he says. New Zealand is also well served in terms of international air services. There are major international airports at Auckland on the North Island and Christchurch on the South Island, and limited international services are also available from airports at five other locations around the country.

His own school, at Mount Maunganui on the North Island is a two-and-a-half hour drive from the airport at Auckland, and, as he notes, “popular sightseeing destinations, such as Coromandel and Rotorua, are easily accessible from the school by car or tour buses, such as Kiwi Experience.” Furthermore, for students who wish to take a trip to Australia or the Pacific Islands, Hamilton Airport offers access to these destinations and is reachable by car in one-and-a-half-hours from Mount Manganui Language Centre, he comments.

New Zealand's friendly welcome



Within the immediate vicinity is “a great mix of beach resort and small city living”. This means that students can swim in the sea after school, then go out at night and enjoy the excellent nightlife, as Butler points out. Because of the school’s proximity to the coast, students are able to

relax on the beach after classes or at lunch-time, and enjoy the abundant seafood. “They [also] love the fact that it’s just a short bicycle ride by the seaside from their homestay to

school,” he comments. Mount Maunganui beach is very safe, and has excellent waves for beginner-to-intermediate level surfers in the summer. Not surprisingly, therefore, surfing is the most popular activity among students, according to Butler, whose English plus surfing programme is one of the school’s most sought after courses. Another popular activity is blo-karting. A blo kart, Butler explains,



All Blacks rugby team
New Zealanders are fiercely proud of their national rugby team, known as the All Blacks, which has a formidable reputation worldwide. Students have the opportunity to play rugby and many other sports while in the country

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PHOTOGRAPHS: TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

is a type of land yacht that was invented in Mount Maunganui, and is now exported all over the world. Here, there is a dedicated track, "and students love it," he says.

An alternative destination that also combines a coastal location with the advantages of a small city is Napier. Situated on the east coast, Napier is at the centre of the Hawke's Bay district, which "is loved for its sunny climate, fabulous beaches, sheltered coastal plains and long-established vineyards", says Kurt Schmidli, Marketing Manager at Napier-based New Horizon College of English. The Hawke's Bay vineyards are all within a short distance of the city, and more than 30 are open to the public for wine-tasting, while many also operate cafés and restaurants. In addition, Schmidli points out that Napier offers excellent Mediterranean food, making it a great place to enjoy food and fine wine.

In addition to winery tours, popular activities include hikes along the coast and to the nearby mountains, "as these activities are off-the-beaten track and offer some spectacular sights". Meanwhile, most popular sports are available, and it is easy to take weekend trips to other North Island cities. Bus services run frequently, connecting Napier with the rest of the North Island, and Auckland and Wellington are less than one hour away by direct air link. Direct flights are also available to Christchurch on the South Island.

Another small city, with a reputation for its friendliness to visitors, is Rotorua. Centrally located on the North Island, it is one of New Zealand's leading tourist destinations. Rotorua's unique geothermal features and 16 beautiful lakes are high on its list of attractions, together with the fact that the area is at the heart of New Zealand's Maori culture.

The emphasis here is on the outdoors, and students can choose from numerous excursions and visits. As Chris Leckie, Principal of Rotorua English Language Academy, highlights, Rotorua is full of great opportunities for bush walks. "We often take students out to see some of Rotorua's natural beauty, whether it be a walk around one of the lakes, in the Redwood Forest, or perhaps somewhere a bit more mysterious." Also not to be missed is a trip to Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland, the country's most colourful and diverse geothermal area, featuring huge volcanic craters and cascading limestone terraces. Those interested in Maori culture will also want to experience a traditional Maori concert at Te Puia, where they can learn about Maori crafts, and perhaps try their hand at paddling a traditional Maori canoe, or 'waka', with the help of a guide in traditional Maori dress.

Moving now to the South Island, the largest city here is Christchurch. Although not big by international standards, it is, nevertheless, a good-sized city, while still retaining the feel of a small town, according to Fahy of local language school Language Schools New Zealand. The cost of living here is more reasonable than in other New Zealand cities, he notes, and Christchurch offers all the facilities to be expected of a city, including many parks, art galleries, theatres and libraries. The school itself is centrally located, next to a park, just a few minutes walk from the Cathedral Square. "It is a very beautiful, quiet and peaceful area," comments Fahy.

As Fahy observes, it is important for students to be able to get around easily and feel independent, so the city's excellent bus service is much appreciated. "Students can go almost anywhere in Christchurch, from the beach to the hills, by bus, and it doesn't cost them >>>



The Camelot River

The Camelot River lies in New Zealand's largest national park, Fiordland, and is a paradise for kayakers. Paddlers can choose to test the deep waters of the fiords or relax on the slow and winding rivers, with either option allowing for unsurpassable scenic views



"Many times our school has come across people (mostly Japanese) who arrive in New Zealand never having seen or heard of Vegemite [a spread made with yeast extract that is popular in Australia and New Zealand] before. It just looks like chocolate spread, so they put heaps of it on toast. Then its strong flavour gives them a shock when they have a bite! It's a kind of flavour that you don't come across in Japan, and I don't think many Japanese would appreciate [trying] Vegemite by accident!"
Gus Fahy, Language Schools New Zealand, Christchurch

Agent viewpoint



"[Our students] choose New Zealand when we explain the quality of the teachers and school staff members, the safe environment and good reputation of the homestay. Many older people specifically prefer to go to New Zealand, but for the young people, New Zealand is still not that popular yet. It needs to be promoted more. [Once there, students] enjoy the 'real Kiwi outdoor lifestyle', such as barbecues and bush walking."

Miyoko Urasawa, Inter Support, Japan



"Everyone comments on how easy the life is and how easy it is to settle in and make friends. There's a great sense of trepidation in travelling to the other side of the world, and people are often impressed by the

ease they have in starting their new life – a transition strongly facilitated by the school. That welcome, and willingness to help students, is something they appreciate greatly. And, of course, despite coming from a beautiful, mountainous area, the 'space' of Queenstown (i.e. comparatively, there's no one there) and its beauty are always appreciated."

Denis Baker, Aventure Linguistique, Switzerland



"New Zealand's relaxed and beautiful natural environment is a key attraction, together with a reputation for friendliness towards foreign students. It is very easy to get around and see both islands, and enjoy the very different scenery. Activities and sports are extremely common and there is always something to do. The low cost of living also makes it a good place to complete long-term studies on a budget."

Martijn Dijksterhuis, StudyDIY, Taiwan

more than NZ\$4 (US\$3) a day, if they have a bus card," he notes. In addition to independent exploration of the area, students can also take advantage of the various activities offered by the school, including horse riding, jet boating, ski trips and canoeing. The latter is very popular in summer, according to Fahy, "because students enjoy the scenery around the river and have lots of fun". Rugby

lovers will want to take the opportunity of seeing the local rugby team, which Fahy claims is "the best team in New Zealand", while there are many events with broad appeal, including the

World Buskers' Festival in January, and the flower festival in February.

To the southwest of the island, on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, lies the town of Queenstown. The self-styled "adventure capital of the world", Queenstown claims some of the world's most beautiful natural scenery and, as Lund-Jackson of ABC College of English highlights, "The majestic mountains, crystal-clear lakes, river and air provide the perfect playground for the adventure enthusiast; from bungy jumping to wine trails, jet boating, tramping, skiing and snow-boarding." Furthermore, "with lively, sophisticated cafés/bars and nightlife, excellent shopping, Queenstown has all the facilities of a big city, as well as the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of a small town."

Tamami Osawa of nearby Queenstown Language School also points out the many places nearby that are "well worth visiting in terms of untouched nature" – for example the fiords of Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, Wanaka – a centre for watersports on Wanaka Lake – and Te Anau. Students at ABC College can even enjoy some spectacular panoramic views of Lake Wakatipu and the surrounding mountains from their classrooms.

Great natural beauty in the raw, a plethora of outdoor pursuits, and a friendly, welcoming environment – all that sums up the experience awaiting international students in New Zealand.

Mitre Peak, Milford Sound

This iconic peak is one of New Zealand's most stirring and, in fact, most photographed sights. It lies on the south shore of Milford Sound and stands at a sheer 1,695 metres above the water



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