



Australia and New Zealand

CULTURE

The Maori People of New Zealand

Maori warden Peter Waldron is a descendent of the original settlers of New Zealand. In this reading he explains his role of warden and tells about the culture of his people. He also touches on the challenge of living as a Maori in New Zealand's society.

The Maori warden movement evolved from [grew out of] a desire to promote law and order within the Maori community in a way that was acceptable to their culture. It was also part of a repeated effort by Maoris to control their own destiny. Our Maori society has traditionally been a communal one, with authority being exercised by the tribal elders. Offenders were dealt with by people who knew and cared for them, and were respected by them. Maori wardens are not policemen. The only power they have is the respect, called *Mana*, that their community has for them. It is a voluntary job, but it is considered a great honor to be elected as a warden. We work within our community to promote law and order by treating the causes of disorder, rather than by disciplining offenders.

There are 290,000 Maoris in New Zealand. Over the years most have settled in the cities. The Maori word for the white man is *Pakeha*. Our furniture and houses are of *Pakeha* design, but the Maori values are retained within our homes. We place great importance on family ties, including those with our ancestors who have passed on. We are much closer to the earth and nature than our *Pakeha* counterparts. Different families have traditionally held special skills, as orators [story tellers], healers, or planters. These skills are handed down through generations, and held with great pride by the families.

The place where Maoris feel their culture the strongest is on a *Marae*. Each community has its own *Marae*—an area of land containing a meeting house. A *Marae* is a sacred place; there are many traditions to be observed by locals and visitors, but there is a strong sense of belonging for all Maoris. Some *Maraes* are simple buildings, others richly decorated with carvings. The traditions are more important than the surroundings. *Maraes* are used for meetings, weddings, and all social occasions, but priority is always given to a *Tangi*.

We believe that when one of our people dies, their spirit rests in the body for three days before making the journey to their spiritual homeland. During this time the person lies in rest at the *Marae*, and is kept company by loved ones. It's a time for grieving, but it's also a time to express many other emotions, to tell stories, and to come to terms with the loss. A *Tangi* is a very moving experience; it brings out our feelings as Maoris, and as a community of caring people; it is our way of saying goodbye to a loved one, within our own traditions and culture. . . .

We all live and work in a *Pakeha* world. The old Maori lifestyle was doomed by the onslaught of *Pakeha* technology, but Maoris are becoming more and more aware of the spiritual values of their culture. They see that these values can be transplanted into a *Pakeha* environment. There is a regeneration [rebirth] of Maoridom, which is being seen in a more positive light by both Maori and *Pakeha*. I see our culture as playing an increasingly important role in New Zealand society in future years.

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From "A tangi is a very moving experience" (retitled "The Maori People of New Zealand") from *We Live in New Zealand* by John Ball. Copyright ©1982 by **Hodder and Stoughton Limited**. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Understanding What You Read After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. Who are the Maori? What values and attitudes are important in Maori culture?

2. How are Maori wardens like police officers? How do they differ from police officers?

3. What is a *Marae* and what function does it serve?

4. Why do the Maoris feel that their culture is threatened? How do *Maraes* and the warden movement help the Maoris to keep their culture strong?

Activity

Design a bumper sticker to increase public awareness of Maori culture in New Zealand. Include an image and a "catchy" slogan on your bumper sticker.