

North Island

The **North Island** (co-officially *Te Ika-a-Māui*^[a] from Māori) is one of the two main islands of New Zealand, separated from the larger but less populous South Island by Cook Strait. With an area of 113,729 km² (43,911 sq mi),^[1] it is the world's 14th-largest island, constituting 43% of New Zealand's land area. It has a population of 4,067,400 (June 2025),^[2] which is 76% of New Zealand's residents,^[3] making it the most populous island in Polynesia and the 28th-most-populous island in the world.

There are twelve main urban areas are in the North Island. From north to south, they are Whangārei, Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Rotorua, Gisborne, New Plymouth, Napier, Hastings, Whanganui, Palmerston North, and New Zealand's capital city Wellington, which is located at the south-west tip of the island.

Naming and usage

The island has been known in English as the North Island for many years. The official Māori name for it, *Te Ika-a-Māui* ("the fish of Māui"), also has official recognition but it remains seldom used by most residents.^[4] Other Māori names include *Te Ahi no Māui* ("the fire of Māui", as first recorded by Captain James Cook in 1770) and *Aotearoa* ("land of the long white cloud"), which is more frequently applied to New Zealand as a whole.^[5] On some 19th-century maps, the North Island was named *New Ulster* (named after Ulster province in northern Ireland), which was also a province of New Zealand that included the North Island.^[6]

In 2009 the New Zealand Geographic Board found that, along with the South Island, the North Island had no official name.^[6] After a public consultation, the board officially named it *North Island* or *Te Ika-a-Māui* in October 2013.^[7] The official Māori name was chosen on the basis that it was "most common and consistent usage in oral tradition by Māori living on the island".^[5]

North Island

Te Ika-a-Māui (Māori)



Satellite photo, 2002



Location within Oceania

Geography	
Location	Oceania
Coordinates	39°S 176°E﻿ / ﻿39°S 176°E﻿ / ﻿

In prose, the two main islands of New Zealand are usually called *the North Island* and *the South Island*, including the definite article "the."^[8] Maps, headings, tables, and adjectival expressions use *North Island* without "the". It is also normal to use the preposition *in* rather than *on*, for example "Hamilton is in the North Island", "my mother lives in the North Island".^[9]

Māori mythology

According to Māori mythology, the North and South Islands of New Zealand arose through the actions of the demigod Māui. Māui and his brothers were fishing from their canoe (the South Island) when he caught a great fish and pulled it right up from the sea. While he was not looking, his brothers fought over the fish and chopped it up. This great fish became the North Island, and thus a Māori name for the North Island is Te Ika-a-Māui ("The Fish of Māui").^[10] The mountains and valleys are believed to have been formed as a result of Māui's brothers' hacking at the fish.

During Captain James Cook's voyage between 1769 and 1770, Tahitian navigator Tupaia accompanied the circumnavigation of New Zealand. The maps described the North Island as "Ea Heinom Auwe" and "Aeheinomowe", which recognises the "Fish of Māui" element. Names of certain tribes like Muaūpoko (*mua upoko* "front of the head") and Muriwhenua (*muri whenua*, "backland") also reflect the locations of their settlement in this "fish" as well as levels of seniority between tribes.^[11]

Another Māori name that was given to the North Island, but is now used less commonly, is Aotearoa. Use of Aotearoa to describe the North Island fell out of favour in the early 20th century, and it is now a collective Māori name for New Zealand as a whole.^{[12][13]}

Geography

During the Last Glacial Period when sea levels were over 100 metres lower than present day levels, the North and South islands were connected by a vast coastal plain which formed at the South Taranaki Bight.^[14] During this period, most of the North Island was covered in thorn scrubland and forest, while the modern-day Northland Peninsula was a subtropical rainforest.^[15] Sea levels began to rise 7,000 years ago, eventually separating the islands and linking the Cook Strait to the Tasman Sea.^[14]

Archipelago	New Zealand
Major islands	North Island
Area	113,729 km ² (43,911 sq mi)
Area rank	14th
Highest elevation	2,797 m (9177 ft)
Highest point	<u>Mount Ruapehu</u>
Administration	
New Zealand	
Regions	9
Territorial authorities	43
Largest settlement	<u>Auckland</u> (pop. 1,547,200)
Demographics	
Demonym	North Islander
Population	4,067,400 (June 2025)
Pop. density	35.8/km ² (92.7/sq mi)
Ethnic groups	<u>European</u> (63.1%), <u>Māori</u> (19.8%), <u>Asian</u> (19.3%), <u>Pacific peoples</u> (10.6%)



Egmont National Park



Bays and coastal features

- [Bay of Islands](#)
- [Bay of Plenty](#)
- [Hauraki Gulf](#)
- [Firth of Thames](#)
- [Hawke Bay](#)
- [Ninety Mile Beach](#)
- [North Taranaki Bight](#)
- [South Taranaki Bight](#)



[Tongariro National Park](#)



Lakes and rivers

- [Lake Taupō](#)
- [Waikato River](#)
- [Whanganui River](#)

Capes and peninsulas

- [Coromandel Peninsula](#)
- [Northland Peninsula](#)
- [Cape Palliser](#)
- [Cape Reinga](#)
- [East Cape](#)
- [North Cape](#)



[Mount Ruapehu](#), the highest point on the North Island



Forests and national parks

- [Egmont National Park](#)
- [Tongariro National Park](#)
- [Waipoua Kauri Forest](#)
- [Whanganui National Park](#)
- and many [forest parks of New Zealand](#)



View of [Mount Taranaki](#) from [New Plymouth](#)



Volcanology

- [Auckland Volcanic Field](#)
- [Mount Ruapehu](#)
- [Mount Taranaki](#) (*Taranaki Maunga*)
- [Mount Tarawera](#)
- [Whakaari / White Island](#)
- [North Island Volcanic Plateau](#)

Other

- [Waitomo Caves](#)
- [Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu](#)

Demographics

The North Island has an estimated population of 4,067,400 as of June 2025.^[2]

The North Island had a population of 3,808,005 at the [2023 New Zealand census](#), an increase of 213,453 people (5.9%) since the 2018 census, and an increase of 570,957 people (17.6%) since the [2013 census](#). Of the total population, 733,893 people (19.3%) were aged under 15 years, 743,154 (19.5%) were 15 to 29, 1,721,427 (45.2%) were 30 to 64, and 609,534 (16.0%) were 65 or older.^[16]

Ever since the conclusion of the [Otago gold rush](#) in the 1860s, New Zealand's European population growth has experienced a steady '[Northern drift](#)' as population centres in the North Island have grown faster than those of New Zealand's South Island. This population trend has continued into the twenty-first century, but at a much slower rate. While the North Island's population continues to grow faster than the South Island, this is solely due to the North Island having higher natural increase (i.e. births minus deaths) and international migration; since the late 1980s, the internal migration flow has been from the North Island to the South Island.^[17] In the year to June 2020, the North Island gained 21,950 people from natural increase and 62,710 people from international migration, while losing 3,570 people from internal migration.^[18]

Culture and identity

At the 2023 census, 63.1% of North Islanders identified as [European](#) ([Pākehā](#)), 19.8% as [Māori](#), 10.6% as [Pacific peoples](#), 19.3% as [Asian](#), 1.9% as [Middle Eastern/Latin American/African](#), and 1.1% as other ethnicities. Percentages add to more than 100% as people can identify with more than one ethnicity.^[16]

Māori form the majority in three districts of the North Island: [Kawerau](#) (63.2%), [Ōpōtiki](#) (66.2%) and [Wairoa](#) (68.5%). Europeans formed the plurality in the Auckland region (49.8%) and are the majority in the remaining 39 districts.^[16]

The proportion of North Islanders born overseas at the 2018 census were 29.3%. The most common foreign countries of birth were England (15.4% of overseas-born residents), Mainland China (11.3%), India (10.1%), South Africa (5.9%), Australia (5.5%) and Samoa (5.3%).^[19]

Cities and towns

The North Island has a larger population than the South Island, with the country's largest city, Auckland, and the capital, Wellington, accounting for nearly half of it. The [Golden Triangle](#) enclosed by Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga contains nearly half New Zealand's population and a similar proportion of its economic activity.

There are 30 urban areas in the North Island with a population of 10,000 or more:

Name	Population (June 2025) ^[2]	% of island
<u>Auckland</u>	1,547,200	38.0%
<u>Wellington</u>	209,800	5.2%
<u>Hamilton</u>	192,100	4.7%
<u>Tauranga</u>	160,900	4.0%
<u>Lower Hutt</u>	113,200	2.8%
<u>Palmerston North</u>	81,200	2.0%
<u>Napier</u>	66,400	1.6%
<u>Porirua</u>	60,100	1.5%
<u>Hibiscus Coast</u>	67,800	1.7%
<u>New Plymouth</u>	60,200	1.5%
<u>Rotorua</u>	58,500	1.4%
<u>Whangārei</u>	56,100	1.4%
<u>Hastings</u>	49,800	1.2%
<u>Upper Hutt</u>	44,500	1.1%
<u>Whanganui</u>	42,800	1.1%
<u>Gisborne</u>	38,100	0.9%
<u>Paraparaumu</u>	29,900	0.7%
<u>Pukekohe</u>	28,800	0.7%
<u>Taupō</u>	27,000	0.7%
<u>Masterton</u>	22,600	0.6%
<u>Cambridge</u>	22,700	0.6%
<u>Levin</u>	20,500	0.5%
<u>Feilding</u>	17,650	0.4%
<u>Whakatāne</u>	16,950	0.4%
<u>Havelock North</u>	15,000	0.4%
<u>Tokoroa</u>	14,500	0.4%
<u>Waikanae</u>	13,600	0.3%
<u>Te Awamutu</u>	13,950	0.3%
<u>Hāwera</u>	10,700	0.3%
<u>Te Puke</u>	10,400	0.3%



View of Auckland CBD, the largest city by urban area and population in the country



Wellington CBD, the capital and third most populous city in New Zealand



Hamilton

Economy

The sub-national GDP of the North Island was estimated at NZ\$ 282.355 billion in 2021 (78% of New Zealand's national GDP).^[20]

Transport

Air

North Island is served by these main airports:

- Auckland Airport is the largest and busiest airport in the New Zealand, handling 18.9 million passengers in the calendar year 2025, including 8.5 million domestic, and 10.4 million international.^[21]
- Wellington Airport is the third busiest airport in New Zealand after Auckland and Christchurch, handling a total of 3,455,858 passengers in the year ending June 2022, and the third busiest in terms of aircraft movements.^[22]

There are also smaller airports in the island such as Kerikeri Airport, Gisborne Airport, Hamilton Airport, Hawke's Bay Airport, New Plymouth Airport, Palmerston North Airport, Rotorua Airport, Taupō Airport, and Tauranga Airport.

Governance

Regions

Nine local government regions cover the North Island and its adjacent islands and territorial waters.

- Northland
- Auckland
- Waikato
- Bay of Plenty
- Gisborne
- Taranaki
- Manawatū-Whanganui
- Hawke's Bay Region
- Wellington Region

See also

- List of islands of New Zealand



View of Mount Maunganui a suburb of Tauranga, the fifth most populous city in New Zealand



Map of the North Island showing some of its cities

Notes

- a. Māori pronunciation: [tɛ ike ɐ mɑːui], lit. 'the fish of Māui'

References

1. "Quick Facts – Land and Environment : Geography – Physical Features" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130408074526/http://www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/web/nzstories.nsf/092edeb76ed5aa6bcc256afe0081d84e/54e50d25aff60a7bcc256b1e007adcb6?OpenDocument>). Statistics New Zealand. 2000. Archived from the original (<http://www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/web/nzstories.nsf/092edeb76ed5aa6bcc256afe0081d84e/54e50d25aff60a7bcc256b1e007adcb6?OpenDocument>) on 8 April 2013. Retrieved 13 August 2012.
2. "Subnational population estimates - Aotearoa Data Explorer" (https://explore.data.stats.govt.nz/?fs%5b0%5d=Society%2C1%7CPopulation%20estimates%23CAT_POPULATION_ESTIMATES%23%7CSubnational%20population%20estimates%23CAT_SUBNATIONAL_POPULATION_ESTIMATES%23&pg=0&bp=true&snb=10&isAvailabilityDisabled=false). Statistics New Zealand. Retrieved 29 October 2025.
3. "77% of NZers live in North Island" (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/342419/77-percent-of-nzers-live-in-north-island>). *RNZ*. 26 October 2017. Retrieved 19 November 2021.
4. "Place name consultation - Te Ika-a-Māui" (<https://www.linz.govt.nz/consultations/te-ika-maui>). Toitū Te Whenua. 4 April 2013. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20240713144246/https://www.linz.govt.nz/consultations/te-ika-maui>) from the original on 13 July 2024. Retrieved 13 July 2024.
5. "New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa proposals to assign alternative official geographic names for New Zealand's two main islands: summary of submissions and the Board's decision" (https://www.linz.govt.nz/sites/default/files/consult/nzgb_ministers-report_alternative-names-two-main-islands_20130820.pdf) (PDF). New Zealand Geographic Board. 20 August 2013. p. 3. Retrieved 11 February 2025.



Territorial authorities of the North Island

6. "The New Zealand Geographic Board Considers North and South Island Names" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130214154742/http://www.linz.govt.nz/placenames/about-geographic-board/nzgb-news-notice/2009/0421-alternative-maori-names>). Land Information New Zealand. 21 April 2009. Archived from the original (<http://www.linz.govt.nz/placenames/about-geographic-board/nzgb-news-notice/2009/0421-alternative-maori-names>) on 14 February 2013. Retrieved 28 November 2012.
7. "Two official options for NZ island names" (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11138153). *The New Zealand Herald*. 10 October 2013. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20190629171040/https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11138153) from the original on 29 June 2019. Retrieved 10 October 2013.
8. Daly, Michael (16 October 2017). "Why Kiwis sometimes use 'the' in front of some place names" (<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/97800760/why-kiwis-sometimes-use-the-in-front-of-some-place-names>). Stuff. Retrieved 15 July 2026.
9. "Guardian style guide: N" (<https://www.theguardian.com/guardian-style-guide-n>). *The Guardian*. 17 March 2021. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20140121124004/http://www.theguardian.com/styleguide/n>) from the original on 21 January 2014. Retrieved 15 July 2026.
10. "1000 Māori place names" (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-language-week/1000-maori-place-names>). New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage. 6 August 2019. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200106171905/https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/maori-language-week/1000-maori-place-names>) from the original on 6 January 2020. Retrieved 27 December 2019.
11. Anderson, Atholl; Binney, Judith; Harris, Aroha (2015). *Tangata Whenua: A History* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=NS7xCgAAQBAJ&dq=tuki+map+cook&pg=PA97>). Bridget Williams Books. pp. 97–8. ISBN 978-0-908321-54-4.
12. "Ngāi Tahu leader: Let's not rush name change" (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/452781/ngai-tahu-leader-let-s-not-rush-name-change>). RNZ. 2 October 2021. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20211112184828/https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/452781/ngai-tahu-leader-let-s-not-rush-name-change>) from the original on 12 November 2021. Retrieved 26 September 2022.
13. McLintock, Alexander Hare; James Oakley Wilson, D. S. C.; Taonga, New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu. "AOTEAROA" (<https://teara.govt.nz/en/1966/aotearoa>). *An encyclopaedia of New Zealand, edited by A. H. McLintock, 1966*. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200503192156/https://teara.govt.nz/en/1966/aotearoa>) from the original on 3 May 2020. Retrieved 19 November 2021.
14. "Estuary origins" (<https://niwa.co.nz/te-kuwaha/tools-and-resources/ng%C4%81-waihotanga-iho-the-estuary-monitoring-toolkit-for-iwi/estuary-origins>). NIWA. National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research. 6 June 2017. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20211102223327/https://niwa.co.nz/te-kuwaha/tools-and-resources/ng%C4%81-waihotanga-iho-the-estuary-monitoring-toolkit-for-iwi/estuary-origins>) from the original on 2 November 2021. Retrieved 3 November 2021.
15. Ray, N.; Adams, J.M. (2001). "A GIS-based Vegetation Map of the World at the Last Glacial Maximum (25,000–15,000 BP)" (<https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue11/2/toc.html>). *Internet Archaeology*. **11** (11). doi:10.11141/ia.11.2 (<https://doi.org/10.11141%2Fia.11.2>). Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20220121014907/https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue11/2/toc.html>) from the original on 21 January 2022. Retrieved 12 February 2022.
16. "2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts | Stats NZ" (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>). *www.stats.govt.nz*. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20240605165521/https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>) from the original on 5 June 2024. Retrieved 4 June 2024.

17. "New Zealand's population is drifting north" (https://web.archive.org/web/20150126205920/http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/mythbusters/the-drift-north.aspx). 26 January 2015. Archived from the original (http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/mythbusters/the-drift-north.aspx) on 26 January 2015. Retrieved 22 February 2021.
18. "Subnational population component changes and median age (RC, TA), at 30 June 2018–20 (2020 boundaries)" (<http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7510>). *nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz*. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210222073909/http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE7510>) from the original on 22 February 2021. Retrieved 18 February 2021.
19. "Birthplace (detailed), for the census usually resident population count, 2006, 2013, and 2018 Censuses (RC, TA, SA2, DHB)" (<http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE8279>). *nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz*. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20230602205127/http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLECODE8279>) from the original on 2 June 2023. Retrieved 18 February 2021.
20. "Regional gross domestic product: Year ended March 2022" (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/regional-gross-domestic-product-year-ended-march-2022/>). Statistics New Zealand. 24 March 2023. Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20240515075122/https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/regional-gross-domestic-product-year-ended-march-2022/>) from the original on 15 May 2024. Retrieved 4 April 2023.
21. "AIA Monthly Traffic Update December 2025" (https://corporate.aucklandairport.co.nz/content/dam/aia/files/corporate/monthly_traffic_reports/2025/dec/MTU_Month_December_2025_Final.pdf) (PDF). Auckland Airport. 22 January 2026. Retrieved 25 March 2026.
22. "Domestic and International Aircraft Movements by Calendar Year" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20230416120255/https://www.airways.co.nz/assets/Movements2206-Stats.pdf>) (PDF). Airways New Zealand. Archived from the original (<https://www.airways.co.nz/assets/Movements2206-Stats.pdf>) (PDF) on 16 April 2023. Retrieved 25 March 2026.

External links

-  Media related to [North Island, New Zealand](#) at Wikimedia Commons
 -  [North Island](#) travel guide from Wikivoyage
-

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=North_Island&oldid=1364177567"