



A Maori craftsman carries on the woodcarving tradition of his ancestors.

MICKY JONES

Sailing is islanders' first love

It is 16 days until the first day of spring. A water skier swings past the giant Maori canoe, parked on the shore of the Bay of Islands at the northern end of the North Island.

A few miles south, the sailboats cover the harbor at Auckland, City of Sails. The tiny blue penguins come out of the sea at Wellington only by night, but the sign is there at all times to warn motorists: Don't run over the penguins.

On the South Island, the gardens at Christchurch are yellow with daffodils. There are fuzzy fawns in the deer farms, just beyond the fence from the cattle herds. New born lambs dot the pastures like globs of white wool, wobbling across spring-green grass and up the steep foothills of the Southern Alps.

How steep are the pastures of New Zealand? If you buy a leg of lamb, buy the downhill leg, it's longer.

There are 60 million sheep and only three million people in New Zealand, many of them sheep farmers, so you can be sure they are talking about the spring weather this week.

But most of all, they are talking about the America Cup challenge Sept. 7-11 in San Diego. They were talking about it last September, when most Americans hadn't yet heard that New Zealander Michael Fay had challenged American Dennis Connor to a rerun.

NEW ZEALANDERS love to sail. The country consists of two narrow islands running northeast to southwest for 1,000 miles, plus a few other islands scattered about the South Pacific. It's difficult to be more than 100 miles from the sea, so the kiwis spend a lot of time on the water.

To get the picture: Take a strip of the United States from Detroit to Jacksonville, Fla., divide it in two, turn it upside down, and surround it by water. It is warm, almost tropical, at the north end of the volcanic north island; cold, pointing to the Antarctic, at the south end of the mountainous South Island. Mostly mellow in between.

There were no mammals and no people here until the Maoris paddled out of Polynesia with rats aboard their giant canoes 12 centuries ago and named the place, Aotearoa, "Land of the Long White Cloud." Captain James Cook brought a



few pigs that went wild. The whalers, seal hunters and, eventually, the settlers brought the rest, including deer, dogs, cats, rabbits, sheep, all those animals that make an Englishman feel at home. Most of them went wild, making New Zealand a hunter's paradise in 1988.

The mammal immigration wasn't so good for the flightless kiwi and moa birds, who never learned to fly because they didn't have any ground enemies. The Maori killed off all the giant moas for food. The ground animals have now made the kiwi almost extinct, although you can still see them in protected situations.

If you tour New Zealand, you will probably fly United, Air New Zealand or Continental airlines into Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, and drive to the geysers and hot volcanic pools around Rotorua, where Maori culture is a major tourist attraction.

MOST TOURS go from there to Christchurch on the South Island and on to the popular city of Queenstown, with day tours into Milford Sound. This is one of the most beautiful areas in the world and has lots of interesting side trips, like flying to the Tasman Glacier at Mount Cook, or heli-skiing in the New Zealand Alps.

New Zealander John Anderson founded Contiki Tours, which specializes in tours for 18- to 35-year-old travelers worldwide, so you can easily drive the country on your own in a rental car or a motor home (they call them caravans). There are many caravan parks, mostly in grassy fields.

The gorgeous national parks are environmentally protected, so people camp near the entrances unless they go in on foot.

Most motels in New Zealand have kitchens. Farm stays are very popular. THC Hotels, run by the New Zealand government, are adequate to good; the THC resorts are best and chain hotels are available in many places.

Sampling 'kiwi' life in the Southern Alps

Tourists tip pints, tell tales at tavern

By Iris Sanderson Jones
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QUEENSTOWN, N.Z.: They are all here, jammed against the old wooden bar and around the tables. The Shotover jet boat drivers, the girls who work in the Mount Cook Airline office, the guides who lead track tours to Milford Sound, the skiers trusting their luck to the melting spring slopes of The Remarkables.

It's like this year round at Elchardt's Tavern on the waterfront of Queenstown, the tourist center of the South Island. The gold miners gathered in this tavern a century ago to brag about their strikes, when the Shotover River was the richest gold mine in the world.

Now, tourists from New Zealand, Australia and the United States belly up to the bar, swapping tales about hiking the Milford Track or outlasting the last weary dancer at the Penthouse, the disco upstairs.

Aussies used to be 50 percent of the New Zealand tourist trade, and you can still hear their "G'day mate," but the rest of the world is here now, too. American tourists have increased 20 percent. Airplane safety regulations are spoken in English and Japanese.

Albert Elchardt built his hotel in 1871 after winning a gold nugget in a raffle at the infamous Royal Oak Hotel in nearby Arrowtown. You can still wander the restored Arrowtown streets, and you'll find the crazy, wonderful Royal Oak Hotel.

THE ELCHARDT was the heart of Queenstown during all those years when no roads ran into the mountains and everything came

by steamship down Lake Wakatipu. The TSS Earnslaw, Lady of the Lake, is the only old coal-burning steamship left now, and most of the beer drinkers here and in the lounge bar across the hall have ridden her into Frankton Arm or across the lake to Mount Nicholas Sheep Station to see the sheep shearing.

Streets of smart shops surround the tavern door now, selling Paua shells, carved Maori clubs, greenstone jewelry and expensive hand-knitted designer sweaters to the skiers who pay the rent in the winter months of July and August and to the summer crowds of December and January.

It takes a while to get used to hearing a Kiwi say things like "the best time to come is in the autumn months of April and May," but this is the southern hemisphere and seasons are reversed.

New Zealand has the best helicopter skiing in the world. We really loved taking the fixed-wing ski planes to Tasman Glacier on Mount Cook and skiing down! I had met Bev and Tom Kauza of Bloomfield Hills standing on the 7,000-foot Tasman Glacier, amid the mountain grandeur of Mount Cook National Park on my way to Queenstown. Mount Cook between Queenstown and Christchurch, is the highest peak in New Zealand at 12,349 feet. They were touring the South Pacific.

Most of the tourists on Mount Cook were on either the South Pacific tour, with quick stops at Auckland, Rotorua on the North Island, Queenstown, Christchurch and Milford Sound on the South Island, or they came to have a



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Sheep are a common sight in New Zealand, way or another, involved in the raising of the where a majority of the residents are, in one animals.

longer, more strenuous vacation, especially on the Milford Track, known to hiking insiders as one of the finest walking tracks in the world.

YOU HAVE to reserve months ahead to be either an independent "freedom walker" or to join the five-day, four-night escorted tour from Te Anau near Fiordland National Park to Milford Sound.

You cruise to the head of Lake Te Anau and do the first flat mile of the track, climb steep switch-back trails to the 3,400-foot McKinnon Pass, across the high plateau grass and on through Arthur Valley and around Lake Ada to Milford Sound. Definitely not for strollers like me.

That's the hard way to get to Milford Sound, the only way for

centuries except the way that Captain Cook came — by sea. Most of us go in by car or bus through the magnificent scenery of Fiordland National Park. Any way you go it's worth the effort to stand at the heart of the sound and see the glaciated peaks drop into the fiord or to cruise the sound to the edge of the Tasman Sea.

You can take a tour or a seaplane to Milford Sound from Queenstown. There are several other tracks out of the Queenstown, but most of us are content to exercise our elbows at Elchardt's Tavern or down the street in Queenstown Bar, eat pizza between the stone walls of The Cow or eat Mutton Bird at Roaring Megs, ride the gondola car up the steep slope to Bob's Peak for a top-of-the-world view of town,

visit the beautiful public gardens overlooking the harbor and town; or play golf on one of the two peninsulas jutting into the lake.

DRIVING downhill to the dock and watching the red boats leaving their wake between gorge walls, you might think about enjoying a view of the adjoining mountains, but the time you have rounded the first curve of river you know better.

The guides, who wrap you in orange life vests and hoods that tie up around your head, are trained to accentuate the experience, so when the jet boat takes off from the dock and heads toward the sharp edge of the nearest rock wall at 50 miles per hour, you scream with fear and delight, just like you do when you take that first long drop on a roller coaster.

North island place for culture

The best place to experience Maori life and culture is in the town of Rotorua on the North Island, especially at the Whakarewarewa Thermal Reserve.

You can tour the New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute and a complete Maori village, set in a thermal plain full of hot springs, steam and geysers.

Traditional Maori carvings are created for viewing and for sale and can be seen in use on the grounds. Several thermal spas are worth day trips out of the town.

Some Rotorua hotels offer the Haka, a Maori feast and concert. You will be introduced to the dances so reminiscent of South Pacific life, the dance postures in which the tongue is used to express hostility or friendliness and the gentle sense of humor of the Maori.