

# TRAVEL & ADVENTURE



## DJIBOUTI



□ The Djiboutian flag.

**Local country name:** Jibuti

**Previous names:** French Territory of the Afars and Issas, French Somaliland

**Location:** East Africa, bordering Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia

**Area:** 23,000sq km (ten times bigger than the Whangarei District)

**Population:** 490,000

**Capital:** Djibouti

**Form of government:** republic

**Independence:** 1977 from France

**GDP/capita:** \$2000 (NZ's \$33,000)

**Life expectancy:** 43 years (For NZers: 79 years)

**Religions:** Muslim (94%)

**Official languages:** French and Arabic (but Somali and Afar more widely spoken)

**National food:** cabri farci (stuffed kid)

**Greeting:** mahishe ('hello' in Afar)



□ A Djiboutian girl on a historic postcard.

### SURPRISING FACTS:

■ Djibouti is tiny, drought-ridden and has no natural resources. However, it does have a free-trade zone and a very strategic location at the mouth of the Red Sea, next to the world's busiest shipping lanes and close to Arabian oilfields.

■ Djibouti hosts the only US military base in sub-Saharan Africa and is a front-line state in the "war on terrorism".

■ Just 0.04% of Djibouti is suitable for growing crops. Most food is imported.

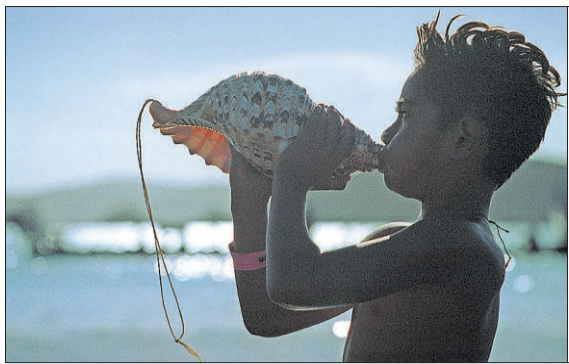
■ Unemployment is at least 50%.

■ Lake Assal (155m below sea level) is the lowest point in Africa.

■ Many Afar nomads still file their front teeth into scary-looking points.



□ Djibouti is home to the only US military base in sub-Saharan Africa.



□ Boy and conch, Waitangi Day 2005. — PICTURE / William Pearce

Scotsman **Willy Pearce** first came to New Zealand almost four years ago for a New Year's party. He explains why he's still here, what he loves and what still confounds him about his new home.

**I** FIRST arrived in New Zealand in December 2002. Descending into Queenstown airport even through the valium and vodka haze the beauty of the environment slapped me in the face like a scenic wet fish.

I had arrived with my friend, Stig, from Edinburgh via London, Singapore and Christchurch. We had decided to pop over to the other side of the world to spend New Year with another friend from Edinburgh who was currently living in Wanaka, having been dragged kicking and screaming from his grotty little tenement flat to this central Otago wonderland by his Kiwi girlfriend.

We had allowed him to spend a peaceful first Christmas with his in-laws before descending for three weeks of mayhem the day before New Year.

**M**y first experience of New Zealand was one of the best it has to offer. I will never forget the final approach to Queenstown airport, one of the most exhilarating and finest in the world, and our drive over the Crown Range and more importantly waking up the next day, opening the curtains to the view over lake Wanaka to the Aspiring Range, all lovely and white in the distance and feeling the heat of the sun on my face.

We had left behind a cold, damp and windy Scotland and arrived in an Alpine masterpiece in mid summer, hot, dry and incredibly breathtaking. Needless to say we both got badly sunburnt that first day and learned a valuable lesson.

We spent the next three weeks on a drunken tiki tour of the country, finally flying out of Auckland after writing off one rental car rally driving around the Otago Peninsula and burning out the electrics on another trying to keep our beer nice and cold.

**T**he overriding feeling that I came away with after that trip was that I wanted to return. I had met up with some people who worked in the same industry as me and I had discovered that there were no union restrictions preventing me from joining them.

I was also aware that there were huge areas of the country that I hadn't seen.

So after a couple of weeks' reflection I bought a working holiday visa and a one-way ticket. Ten months later I had packed up my belongings, rented out my flat in Edinburgh, said my goodbyes, packed my clapper board in my backpack and was boarding the plane. Twenty-four hours later I was in Auckland.

It was December 3, 2003 when I arrived, summer had broken and everyone was winding down for Christmas. I had left Scotland in a similar state of festive foreplay but the

difference couldn't be more apparent.

Everyone here was looking happy, running around in boardies and jandals, having drinks in the sun, planning barbecues and generally looking forward to the summer.

The people I had left behind had already resigned themselves to a long, cold and wet winter and their mood reflected that.

I had no plan as such and I had no idea what was going to happen but I did know that basically anything was possible.

I was starting with a blank canvas and was curious to discover what masterpiece I was going to create. So I bought a car and hit the road.

**A**s I moved around I began to learn more and more about my surroundings and slowly began to realise that New Zealand is considerably more than just a pretty place to visit.

I mean people live here, OK maybe not for as long as they have been living in Europe but nonetheless people call these islands home, and how lucky they are!

Never mind the fact that they seem to have an unnecessary interest in a game called rugby and call the beautiful game by its Sunday name, they are very lucky people.

This is a land of amazing opportunity, fresh, young, unspoiled and blessed with an incomparable position of firmly holding up a middle digit to Uncle Sam — a position which I find incredibly admirable for a minnow like New Zealand.

Your attitude of "Well, we survived on a number-eight wire before, we

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□ Autumn morning at Rangitane, Kerikeri Inlet. — PICTURE / William Pearce

# More than just a pretty place ...

### Picture POSTCARD



**Jean Edwards** of Onerahi sent in this lovely shot of the sun rising over Mission Beach, Australia, taken just before she went for a dawn swim.

Jean and her husband Ted returned recently from a five-week holiday in Northern Queensland, where the highlights included visiting their son Terry; a stay in Cooktown, with its Wild West charm; and Mission Beach, where cassowaries wander the roads.

Jean says she and Ted have done quite a bit of travel — as well as living in Britain for four years — but they're starting to slow down a little now they're both in their 80s.

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## NZ — the cheeky younger brother



Toyota trapped by tide, Ninety Mile Beach.

— PICTURE / William Pearce



Matukituki River. — PICTURE / William Pearce



LEFT: Bra fence, Cardrona. — PICTURE / William Pearce

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can do it again. You can take your nuclear powered ships and your millions of dollars of aid and stick them. We've got chocolate fish!" is perhaps a tad irrational but it scores highly in my book.

New Zealand is like the cheeky younger brother, trying to punch outside its weight and having balls the size of moa eggs.

New Zealand, or Aotearoa as I quickly learned on my travels, is also in an incredibly privileged evolutionary position. It is the only country on earth which has recorded evidence of its accent forming.

From the early days of Irish, Scottish, Maori, English, etc, it only took two generations for the Kiwi accent to develop. And it's all on tape.

How cool is that?

Here's a country which is so young and developing so quickly that evolution can be counted in generations rather than millennia. As the Kiwi accent continues to develop with more and more Maori words used and the vowels all blending into one EEEEEEE sound, what you are creating is a new language. It's not English, it's Kiwi!

It applies to genetics also, with the huge intermingling of bloodlines that has been happening here ever since the first Europeans set foot on these islands. A new breed of person is being created, the New Zealander.

It's inevitable and should be embraced and you should all be very proud of it.

Instead you persist with this "Us and Them" attitude that I find very confusing. For a forward thinking, civilised country in the 21st century

there is no place for separatism.

This country abounds in wonderful things to do and as I travelled I tried to make the point of partaking in something new each day.

Obviously there are only so many things to be done but the philosophy worked for a few months. Of the typically Kiwi things I did, top of the list for complete ridiculousness but unbelievable fun is Zorbing.

The man who thought this up deserves a medal. The story goes that he stumbled upon it while trying to develop a method for walking over water, now either he had a Jesus complex or he couldn't afford a boat.

Either way what he came up with is easily one of the funniest things I have ever done and somehow seems as Kiwi as pineapple lumps.

I implore you all to give it a go if you haven't already and I recommend the "Wet Zorb" above all others.

Obviously rolling down a hill in a giant rubber ball is not alone as a home grown activity, jumping off a bridge towards a raging torrent with an elastic band attached to your ankle being the most famous one, but what is it about New Zealanders that makes them think up these bizarre things? Is it boredom? Surely not when there are a multitude of more conventional pastimes available.

No, I believe it is in the Kiwi nature to invent — look at Bert Munro or Richard Pearse, men who refused to accept that we either couldn't drive unfeasibly fast or take to the air with wings and went and did something about it.

It is an amazing trait and I find it very contagious. The possibilities for

just giving something a go here are incredible and should always be encouraged.

As well as having an abundance of leisure activities you are blessed with having some of the most breathtaking scenery, two of the best dive sites, the Poor Knights and the Rainbow Warrior, and some of the best game fishing around. There was a reason that Zane Grey came over here, he was onto something.

As I grew to know New Zealand better I admired the balance that seemed to exist between capitalism and conservation. DOC offices everywhere and strictly enforced fishing quotas. The Marine Reserves and the offshore bird sanctuaries. The strict baggage checks at airports and vigilance in eradicating foreign bodies from the ecosystem.

It is all very commendable and to be

encouraged, we all want to protect New Zealand and keep it as unique as it always has been.

This is a very special country and should be kept that way. However there are a few things which have recently left me scratching my head in complete confusion and dismay, such as the proposed 15 storey development right here in the Bay Of Islands. It seems that money does in fact talk.

I get equally confounded by the continuing development of the remotest parts of the Far North — beautiful waterfront land being subdivided and sold off to foreign investors.

And who actually needs nine snapper a day? I mean come on, wake up before it's too late and there is nothing New left in New Zealand.

I'm sorry but as you may be able to guess I feel quite strongly about this, the last thing I want is for this country to end up like Scotland, with no fisheries to speak of anymore or like the Gold Coast, where the development has hidden the beauty that was there in the first place. Come on New Zealand, it's up to you!

Nearly four years after arriving here I am, sitting in the Bay Of Islands, writing this, still trying to make sense of this strangely wonderful country.

The sense of possibility I had in that first week in Auckland still remains, this country has an ability to bring out the Bert Munro in us all.

However, elements of Kiwi society remain that I find hard to grasp. Such as how can people turn an otherwise perfectly good stretch of road into a grade five off road track under the pretence of repairing whatever insignificant fault there was in the first place. I mean, it must make complete sense to you all that one tiny crack in the tarmac will require 10 miles each side of it to be bulldozed into a scene reminiscent of the Battle of the Somme but to me it seems a bit over the top.

I can, however, live with it, just as I have managed to live with the fact that what we regard as a good catch in Scotland is regarded as too small for bait over here.

It seems that for every confounding and confusing ying there always seems to be an equal and opposite incredibly amazing yang that keeps the balance. Which is just as well really.

Willy Pearce is a photographer and film camera assistant living in Paihia.

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