**POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ZEALAND**

**New Zealand’s Population Distribution**

Population distribution refers to how people are spread throughout a country. By world standards, New Zealand is a **sparsely** populated country- only 16.2 people per square kilometre.

According to the 2006 census, New Zealand’s population is unevenly distributed:

* 75% of New Zealanders live in the main lowland areas.
* 76% of New Zealanders live in the North Island.
* 52% live in the four northern regions: Northland, Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.
* 86% of New Zealanders live in urban areas compared to just over 40% in the 19th century.
* One third lived in Auckland.
* New Zealand’s population tends to be **clustered** in areas with favorable physical characteristics:

**Factors influencing New Zealand’s population distribution**

**Natural Factors**

Landforms

Relief: flat or gently sloping land. Roads and railways are easier and cheaper to build which makes these areas more **accessible.**

* The Southern Alps and mountainous eastern north island are sparsely populated as they are too cold and too steep to farm.

The alluvial plains and lowlands of both islands are well watered by rivers.They contain most of New Zealand’s farms, factories, roads, railways and urban areas. 75% of New Zealand’s population is located on 14 lowlands: Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Poverty Bay, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Manawatu, Wairarapa, Tasman Bay, Wairau, Canterbury, Otago, Soutland, West Coast.

* New Zealand’s first towns developed by natural, sheltered deep-water harbours. Some have grown into large cities.

Distance from the sea

The 2006 census showed 65% of New Zealanders lived within 5km of the coast. In early times, the main form of transport was by ship so settlers established communities close to the coast. Of New Zealand’s ten largest cities only Rotorua, Hamilton and Palmerston North are not **port** cities. When inland roads and railways were built, coastal communities continued to grow because they became market centres and places to export and import goods and services.

Climate

NZ lies between latitudes 34°S an 47 °S, thus its annual temperatures fall from north to south. People are drawn to warner areas. Over half the population and most Maori live in the top third of the North Island.

Temperature: between 10-30 degrees

Rainfall between 500mm and 3000mm

* Lowlands east of the mountains in both islands have hotter summers, colder winters, less rain and more sun. These conditions suit intensive horticulture, arable crops and intensive pastoral farming and so they support New Zealand’s highest rural population densities as well as many cities. Retirees and tourists are attracted to Nelson Tauranga, and the Hawkes Bay.
* Lowlands west of the mountains in both islands have milder wetter climates. These favour intensive pastoral farming and moderat rural population densities. E.g. Taranaki
* New Zealand’s mountains have harsh climates that discourage permanent settlement. There are few people living there except for a few areas of great scenic beauty, like Queenstown and Wanaka in the South Island Lakes district.

Soil fertility

New Zealand has numerous coastal lowlands and several inland plains which contain soils suitable for agriculture. The Hauraki Plains, Manawatu lowlands and the Canterbury Plains for examples contain rich alluvial soils which are ideal farming and the growing of food crops. These areas have dense populations. The rest of New Zealand generally has infertile soils. There are some areas of fertile volcanic soils. E.g. Pukekohe. But areas like Rotorua and Taupo need fertilizers such as phosphates, sulphur, potash and cobalt to improve the soils. The population in these areas is less dense. Soils in mountainous areas are thin and infertile.

Minerals

Coal and gold deposits attracted industry and settlement in areas such as Huntly, Otago, Waihi and the South Island’s West Coast.

**Cultural factors**

Why the South Island attracted early settlers and then lost them to the North Island.

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| **Between 1865-1890 more people lived in the South Island.** | **More people lived in the North Island in the 20th century.** |
| Large grassy plains for farming, and easy road and railway construction. | The New Zealand Land Wars were over and farmers could buy North Island land. |
| East coast climates suited non-perishable grain and wool production for export. | The South Island Gold Rush was over. |
| Gold attracted people to Central Otago and the West Coast until about the 1890s. | North Island forests were cleared and replaced with farms. |
| There were land wars in the North Island. | Perishable farm products could be exported on refrigerated ships, and mild, moist North Island climates suited meat and dairy production. |
| There were few Maori and it was not so difficult to acquire land. | Pine forests were planted in the central North Island. |
| North Island forests and swamp made farming and road building difficult. | Auckland developed as New Zealand’s main port and industrial area. |
|  | Immigrants preferred the North Island because most cities and jobs were there. |

History

An established city that has developed good transport, communication and business links will keep attracting future population after the original business focus has changed. For example, Wanganui was established as an important port but now ranks port activities as non-essential to the city’s development.

Location

The location of New Zealand’s towns relates strongly to the availability of transport. Many port settlements have grown into modern towns, such as Auckland, Christchurch, Dundein, Wellington, Greymouth, Napier, Gisborne, Tautanga, Whangarei, New Plymouth and Wanganui. Over time port towns were linked by roads and railways. New settlements like Palmerston North, Gealdine, Hamilton and Fairlie developed where these inland transport routes intersected.

Family

Family members often settle and work in similar areas. Significant numbers of Maori have strong traditional ties with the land.

Age

People’s needs change with age and this may affect where they choose to live. Students congregate in city centres close to universities and polytecnics. Working age people congregate in cities because jobs are available. Retirees live in suburbs with good public transport facilities, hospitals, retirement homes and family connections. Some congregate in places like Nelson, Hawkes Bay, the Bay of Plenty or the Kapiti Coast, all of which cater well for the elderly.

Ethnicity and culture

Ethnicity refers to people’s racial origins. Although Europeans are located throughout New Zealand, other ethnic groups are more concentrated. 90% of Maori live in the North Island. Rural Maori tend to live in or close to their own tribal areas, which means that most live in the northern half of the North Island. The majority live in cities and towns, and half live in Auckland.

Other ethnic minority groups are concentrated in the Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch. Most immigrant move directly to the largest cities, because others like them are already there.

* Auckland and Wellington have the most Pacific Islanders.
* Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch have the largest Chinese and Indian communities. In Auckland Howick, Botany Downs and the North Shore have the largest Chinese communities.
* Howick and the North Shore have the most South Africans and Koreans.
* Ethnic groups tend to cluster inside cities. In Auckland the largest Pacific Island communities are in South Auckand and in Wellington they are in the Hutt Valley and Porirua-Waitangarua.