

Indigenous peoples - 1

New Zealand's Maori people have inhabited the country since around the 13th century, originally travelling great distances by canoe from eastern Polynesia. The country is referred to as Aotearoa in the Maori language.

Although most of the Maori people in New Zealand no longer live 'traditionally', Maori culture is still very strong. Much work has been done to preserve the language, with Te Reo Maori schools, TV and radio stations and websites being established to ensure the language continues.

Maraes are dotted around the country. A marae is a place of cultural significance where meetings, funerals, weddings and any other important business of the iwi (tribe) takes place. The meeting house is called a wharenui (wh is pronounced f) and the eating house is called the wharekai. The wharenui is often decorated with traditional carvings and paintings.

Ta moko is the traditional Maori practice of tattooing, which reflects a person's whakapapa (ancestry).



Orang Asli, meaning 'original people' in Malay, is the name used to describe the original inhabitants of peninsular Malaysia. There are 19 distinct Orang Asli groups; each has its own languages and cultural practices.

Anthropologists (people who study the origin and development of humanity) have identified three groups of Orang Asli peoples who share similar languages and physical characteristics. They are the Negritos, the Senoi and the Aboriginal Malays.

The Mah Meri (Senoi) people use elaborately carved wooden masks in their ritual dance ceremonies to honour their ancestors.

A small number of Orang Asli people still live a semi-nomadic life, taking advantage of the seasonal supplies of the forest. The Batek (Negrito) people, who live in the forests of the state of Pahang, are one such group. The men hunt monkeys, wild boar and other small animals using blowguns made from bamboo which shoot darts poisoned with toxic sap.



Mah Meri wooden mask

The Omo River Valley in Ethiopia is home to eight tribes who still live mainly traditional lives. The Mursi, Suri and Ne'en tribes all have similar cultural practices and languages and are called 'Surma people' as a group.

Tribes' livelihoods depend on their cattle herds, and on the annual floods which enable them to grow crops.

Men are known for their stick fighting, where they battle with long and dangerous sticks until there is only one winner. The people also use paints, plants and other items to decorate their bodies. Women wear lip plates, which can reach up to 12 centimetres in diameter. Surma people also cut their skin to leave decorative scars. For the men, this scarification is symbolic, with scars representing the warrior status of the wearer.

Because of the traditional practices of the people of the Omo Valley, tourism is popular in the region. A dam being built upriver has some people concerned for the welfare of the Omo Valley tribes, as the people's water supply may be affected.



First Nations is used in Canada to describe the indigenous groups that have lived there since before European settlement. There are three groups of First Nations peoples in Canada: they are the Inuit people; the Métis; and the North American Indian people. Inuit people come from the Arctic regions of Canada, Alaska and Greenland. Métis are people who are descendants of First Nations and European unions which were common at the height of the North American fur trade in the 18th and 19th centuries.

North American Indian people (or Native Americans) come from across the USA and Canada and from hundreds of different tribes which anthropologists have organised into 10 different cultural regions. In these 10 regions the peoples shared similar languages, customs and beliefs.

Many First Nations people of North America still incorporate traditional practices into their lives.

Some Inuit people still hunt seals and caribou. Other groups maintain cultural practices such as feast day celebrations with traditional costumes, dances and rituals.

