

The history of the NZ beach holiday

Jesse Mulligan, 31 January 2019

New Zealand has 15,000kms of beach and it is hugely varied. Historian Grant Morris of Victoria University looks back at when a beach holiday became the norm and why some beaches become so famous at the expense of all the others.

1

“You can also look at different eras of our beach holiday traditions, it hasn’t all been the same over time.”

Morris says New Zealand’s earliest beach culture was Maori where the sea had fundamental importance in terms of food, leisure and travel.

“That’s a beach culture that has developed over hundreds of years.”

2

In the late 19th Century, the British had developed a beach-going culture around the establishment of large piers and promenades in places like Brighton and Blackpool.

However, Morris says, the beach was somewhere British went to, but did not go in. “The water was there, but it wasn’t necessarily something you’d engage with. The kids might go for a paddle, but that might be it.”

“So that tradition, in terms of recreation – mainly for the European and particularly British immigrants was how our beach were often treated. When we get into the late 19th and early 20th century, you also get the popularity of the beach as a place to go for a picnic. Still it’s this idea that you go to the beach, you dress up, but you don’t necessarily go any further.”

3

“There were reasons to go to the beach apart from actually going in the water, and that’s very different to our modern iconic beach holiday at Whangamata or Piha that we tend to think about today.”

After World War II, attitudes to outdoor activities became more relaxed while transport and transport networks began to expand leading Kiwis to beaches which were more difficult to get to. Beach etiquette went from picnics to BBQs and from formal swimwear to shorts and bikinis. The activities at the beach changed too, Morris says.

4

Morris says, in Britain, a tan would typically be associated with the working class because they’re more likely to work outdoors.

Beach culture underwent another significant change in the late 20th Century when it became a place to drink and party and – briefly – riot. New Year periods in Whangamata, Wainui and Mt Maunganui became out-of-control parties for teenagers and ushered in a series of draconian drinking by-laws for the areas. It was a very different situation from 100 years ago, Morris says.

5

As for the future, Morris says beach culture will change again as New Zealand becomes more diverse and different cultures treat beaches in different ways. Another factor will be climate change which will have a profound effect on our beaches and coastlines.

Put these paragraphs into the correct pace in the text. There is one extra paragraph that you do not need.

A

“Swimming and surfing became much more popular and, of course, sunbathing. Sunbathing is part of a culture change as well, not just in New Zealand but in other places, where to have tanned skin is sought after rather than something that would potentially mark you out as being a particular class.”

B

When settlers and immigrants arrived in New Zealand, the beach played a vital role in terms of travel and exports. Immigrants from Europe, and particularly England, also brought with them their own beach traditions.

C

Compared with British beaches New Zealand has more to offer in terms of varied activities, so beach experiences have developed significantly in the last century.

D

Beaches' popularity has come and gone like the tides with the rise of automobiles too. Where once city beaches were prime destinations, Kiwis now relish the harder-to-access beaches that they can road-trip to. Another factor was the rise of the bach. Rather than a simple day-trip, Kiwis found a way to stay at their favourite beaches.

E

“I think New Zealand has developed something which is quite distinct, and it's been the combination of a number of different cultures,” he told Jesse Mulligan.

F

Morris says evidence of this can be seen in early photos of New Zealand beach 'resorts'. The British tradition can also be seen in the naming of beaches, such as New Brighton in Christchurch.