All praise is due to Almighty ALLAH, the Sustainer, Nourisher and Cherisher of the Universe. Peace, Blessings and Salutations be upon our Beloved Master and Leader, Nabi Muhammad Mustaphaﷺ.

Alhamdulillah, we visited New Zealand thrice: in 2013, 2015 and November 2016, before visas were required. Two visits were in Ramadhan.

General information

It is a beautiful, lush country comprising the North and South Islands, separated by the 22 km wide Cook Strait, and 600 smaller islands. Protected parkland and marine reserves make up more than a third of its area. Its weather is generally temperate but varies from the subtropical north to the alpine areas.

Its nearest neighbours are Australia, Fiji, Norfolk Island and Tonga.

The Western world considers it to be a young country as Europeans began settling there only 160 years ago. However, the Polynesian Maori were its original inhabitants and still comprise about 15% of the population.
Abel Tasman, a Dutch explorer, was the first European who reached it in 1642 and named it ‘Nieuw Zeeland’. He was followed by British explorer, Captain James Cook, who mapped the islands in 1769. By the 19th century, other Europeans had arrived and the country was eventually colonised by the British, who granted it independence in 1907.

Today, it is described as ‘a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system’. Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State and is represented by the Governor-General in New Zealand.

Until 1974, a ‘Whites Only’ immigration policy was implemented but, since then, others have been allowed to study, work and settle there.

The small Muslim population, comprising 50 nationalities, numbers about 55 000, 40 000 of whom live in Auckland. The rest live in major towns such as Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

New Zealanders are also called ‘Kwis’ after their native bird which is small, flightless, having hair-like feathers, a long beak, strong legs and no tail.

Economic activity

The population is outnumbered by sheep. At that time (2016) they had 40 million sheep so, we coined the expression “one man, ten sheep” from the popular slogan, “one man, one vote”.

In 1982, there were 22 sheep for every inhabitant, the highest it has ever been. Now (2019), that ratio has dropped to an average of 5,6 sheep per inhabitant, due to farmers turning to the more lucrative dairy farming industry. The population has also increased due to immigration.

Many of us know about the Muslim contribution to science but not to animal husbandry, except, perhaps, for horse-breeding. Interestingly though, historians, scientists and others have found that when the Muslim Moors entered Al Andalus (Spain) in the 8th century, they either introduced new agricultural practices or improved upon existing ones.

This was true of sheep-breeding as well. A fine-wool sheep breed – later called the Merino – was introduced by the Beni-Merines, a Muslim Berber tribe from North Africa. The Moors refined the stock through cross-breeding.

Today, it is one of the most popular meat and wool breeds internationally and has also been used as a parent breed for many other varieties such as the South African Afrino and New Zealand Corriedale.

So, SubhanAllah, we can say that when the Muslim Berber commander, Tariq bin Ziyad, entered Spain in 711 CE, it signified the beginning of such great achievements that the world is still benefiting from them today, Alhamdulillah.

One of the country’s most highly-prized exports is manuka honey which is produced from manuka bushes pollinated by European bees.

It is said to have tremendous health and medicinal benefits.
The Muslim community

I presented daily programmes and special Ramadhan broadcasts for a non-Muslim radio station, pro bono at their request, solely for the pleasure of Almighty Allah Ta'ala. These programmes are still being aired, Alhamdulillah.

MashAllah, we had lectures in various masajid, including Masjid-e-Umar, where Moulana Muhammad Patel was based. The masjid served as the hub of Deeni activity in Auckland.

I met a brother, Muhammad Musa, registered as M Moses, who was recorded as the first Indian to have been born in New Zealand. He and Ahmad Bhamji – Baboobhai – were the two main people involved in the work of Deen there.

Many other masajid, Islamic centres and musallahs have been established: about 35 in Auckland and surrounding areas, and another 30 spread throughout the country, especially in large towns.

Most cities and towns had Muslim sections in local cemeteries.

Currently, there are three Muslim schools in Auckland, and each masjid runs madressah classes up to Hafith levels. Many students prefer to pursue higher Islamic studies in South Africa or England although some Aalim courses are offered locally.

Their history, briefly, according to Baboobhai (and the Muslim directory website):

1. The first Muslims came from China in 1874 and worked in the Otago goldfields as labourers.
2. Indians from Gujarat state came in early 1900 as traders.
3. Mohamed Ibrahim Mussa was the first Muslim of Indian origin to be born there in 1935.
4. The first Muslim organisation, formed in 1950, was the New Zealand Muslim Association.
5. Twelve people offered the first Eid salaat on the premises of an Auckland shop.
6. The first Islamic centre was established in Auckland in 1956.
7. The first Imam in 1960 was Moulana Saed Ahmed Patel from India.
8. The first purpose-built masjid was the Jamia Masjid in Ponsonby, Auckland, built in 1979.

Some main towns: North Island

Auckland: population ± 1,5 million

Known as the ‘City of Sails’, it has two harbours and is semi-urban, semi-marine. As the economic hub of the country, it is also very congested and expensive. It has a humid climate and offers visitors a variety of outdoor activities.

In 2016, the NZ dollar was quite strong as ± R212 could be exchanged for NZ $1.

On a lighter note, I saw a suburb there named Papatoetoe, and pronounced it as ‘Papa Tutu’. Amid much laughter, the brothers corrected me and said it was ‘Papa toy toy’, a Maori word.
Hamilton: population ± 230 000

New Zealand’s longest river, the Waikato, flows for 16 km through it. It is the largest inland city and the agricultural hub. The Southern Hemisphere’s biggest agricultural trade show is held nearby, annually, at Mystery Creek.

The country’s chief economic activity, dairy farming, is centred in the Waikato region.

Popular tourist attractions include Hamilton Gardens, Hamilton Zoo, the Waikato Museum and the Hamilton Astronomical Society Observatory.

Wellington: population ± 490 000

Alhamdulillah, we visited family in this city, the world’s southernmost capital city and centre of government. We saw that their home had cracked walls – a common feature in many homes – because of frequent seismic activity.

Wellington is the country’s culinary hub and has many award-winning restaurants. It is also the cultural capital, having several museums and art galleries.

It has been nicknamed ‘Windy Wellington’ because of strong winds that blow from the Cook Strait over the southern coast.

South Island

Christchurch: population ± 700 000

It is the largest South Island city and, officially, the country’s oldest established one. Situated in the Canterbury region, it is known as the ‘Garden City’ because of its verdant landscape.

Hagley Park (used for sports) and the expansive Christchurch Botanic Gardens are situated in the city centre.

Christchurch suffered several ruinous earthquakes, the more recent of which were in:

2010: Darfield, on the outskirts; magnitude 7.1. No dead but several injured. Widespread damage.
2011: Magnitude 6.3. 185 dead. Catastrophic impact on people and environment.

Its economy is based on agribusiness, manufacturing and tourism. Researchers, adventurers and others regard it as one of five ‘Gateways to Antarctica’.
Dunedin: population ± 120 000

This is the second largest South Island city and is situated at the head of Otago Harbour. It has several tertiary institutions including the oldest, University of Otago, and therefore, a large student population. Ecotourism is very popular.

Queenstown: population ± 23 000

Also situated in the Otago region and surrounded by mountains, it is known as the ‘Adventure Capital of the World’ since it offers ‘adrenalin-pumping’ activities such as bungee jumping and white water rafting.

We flew to the summit of the snow-covered Southern Alps by helicopter. The view was magnificent. This is one of the most scenic cities in the world.

Arrowtown is about 20 km away. The town was established as a result of the Otago Gold Rush in the 1860s which also attracted Chinese Muslim immigrants. Their small homes can still be seen today. MashAllah, we visited the settlement but, sadly, there was no masjid or madressah.

Their primary aim was not to spread Islam. Nevertheless, Islam reached New Zealand through them.

Addressing the brothers there, I appealed to them to protect this heritage, seeing that it was the birthplace of Islam in the country.

Geological tourism

New Zealand is situated within the Pacific Ring of Fire, a horseshoe-shaped area characterised by high volcanic and seismic activity. While this means that it is prone to tremors and quakes, it has also created geothermal pools and hot springs.

We visited the Maruia Hot Springs which overlooks the Maruia River. It was a wonderfully rejuvenating experience in a serene setting, Alhamdulillah.

Generally, I had good impressions of the country. Many Muslim South Africans and Afrikaner farmers have settled there due to the favourable conditions. People were extremely hospitable to us during our visits. They were also very law-abiding so one would hardly hear of crimes or accidents.

The government seemed to be very just and concerned about the welfare of its citizens.
Islamically, though, there was much room for improvement as one would not find a masjid or madressah wherever one visited. Shias and Qadianis were also trying to make inroads there so, that was another area of concern.

CHRISTCHURCH MASSACRE: 8 Rajab 1440 ~ 15 March 2019

While compiling this article, we received the distressing news of terrorist attacks in Christchurch, at two masajid.

Yusuf Ali, from Markaz Sahaba Radio, interviewed Muhammad Moses about the incident. Mr Moses is based in Auckland, 900 kms (1½ hours) away from Christchurch.

He mentioned that 10,000 Muslims lived in Christchurch and that there were three masajid in the area.

The first attack had occurred at Masjid Al Noor, the main masjid, which had a congregation of about 500 musallis – men, women and children.

The attacker had arrived in an arms-laden vehicle at Jumu’ah time, when some musallis were entering the masjid and others were inside, engaged in athkaar.

He was dressed in military-style clothes and also wore a helmet and goggles. A camera was mounted on the helmet to live-stream the 17-minute massacre on social media, making it seem like a video game.

After cowardly mowing down the musallis, the terrorist returned to collect another weapon from his vehicle and proceeded to shoot the victims again.

He then travelled 7 kms away to the smaller Linwood Islamic Centre where he launched a second assault. After killing some people outside the masjid, he was prevented from entering by the heroic actions of a musalli there and fled the scene.

The murderer had intended to attack Ashburton Masjid as well and indicated that he had planned everything well in advance.

The total numbers of casualties were 50 dead and 48 injured, some critically. The youngest victim was three and the oldest, 77.

Some of them had been living in New Zealand for decades while others had immigrated recently or had simply been visiting relatives. All had been described as good, selfless and caring.

When police arrived, they defused Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) attached to cars in the parking area at Masjid-i-Noor.

The government’s initial response was to close all masajid.
However, after Muslims held discussions, it was agreed that the other masajid would remain open, subject to conditions. Armed police were deployed around masajid.

No cars were allowed to park in the masjid grounds for fear of more bombs being placed. People arriving at the masjid had to be identified before being allowed to enter.

In less than an hour, authorities had detained the shooter. He was identified as Australian-born White supremacist, Brenton Tarrant, whose actions were described as ‘anti-immigrant’, although they were obviously Islamophobic.

Three others, including a woman, were also arrested. Five more were being sought.

As the shocking news spread, and for days after, New Zealanders from all backgrounds continued to express overwhelming empathy, sympathy and love for the Muslim community in various ways as they distanced themselves from the terrorist, his right-wing network and their warped ideology.

To her credit, the Prime Minister, Jacinda Arden, issued strong statements condemning the attack and acted swiftly to ban MSSAs – Military-Style Semi-Automatic weapons, of the kind the terrorist used. She also initiated a high-level investigation and took other measures to reassure the Muslim community that they would be protected and that justice would be done.

Internationally, the majority of governments and people expressed their support for the victims’ families and the broader Muslim community. However, in the UK, 600 Islamophobic attacks were reported in the week after the event.
Despite this, the atrocity heightened awareness of Islam and Muslims. Several people — in New Zealand and elsewhere — accepted Islam as a result, Alhamduillah. The athaan was given in public places and, for the first time, the Qur’an was recited in New Zealand’s parliament.

The massacre also led governments, police and security services, the media and society, in general, to examine their roles in practising, promoting or condoning Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism.

We make du’a that more good arises as a result of this barbaric act, Aameen.

We also make du’a that Almighty Allah Jalla wa Ala forgive and accept the 50 shuhada and grant sabr to their families in this trying time. May Almighty Allah Ta’ala make their sacrifice a means of hidayat for all, Aameen. May Allahu Ta’ala guide and protect all Ulama-i-Haqq, Imams, trustees and musallis and protect our institutions, Aameen.

REFERENCES
7. https://www.iwto.org/history-sheep
9. Manuka honey https://www.flickr.com/photos/155456283@N02/35107875001
11. NZ Muslim history: https://muslimdirectory.co.nz/history-islam-nz/
18. Queenstown bungee jumping: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ledge_Bungy,_Queenstown,_New_Zealand_01.jpg
20. Arrowtown: https://www.flickr.com/photos/volvob12b/22284780322
22. Yusuf Alli interview: https://iono.fm/e/666034
24. Linwood Islamic Centre: Google Maps