



8 Tribes: the hidden classes of New Zealand

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Know Your Tribes!





The North Shore Tribe - Achieving

The ambitious, hard-working, heavily-mortgaged inhabitants of the great suburban jungle for whom looking good and keeping up appearances are fundamentally important. They survive in the jungle by constantly moving ahead, up through the ranks of job, car, house, street and suburb.

Found in: Commuter suburbs, gathering in offices, gyms and shopping malls.

Distinguishing Characteristics: New cars, new toys, long commutes, tropical resort holidays, stress-related health issues.

The North Shore tribe is populated by self-made men and women – self-starters with large doses of ambition, aspiration, perseverance and achievement. There's a simple and powerful philosophy underpinning this set of tribal values: you work out how the system operates, work hard, climb the ladder and enjoy the rewards at the top – the nice house, the nice car, the overseas holidays.

The North Shore tribe dominates many parts of New Zealand society, just as its counterparts do around the world. It's a core part of the "mainstream", the economically energetic class that drives our urban consumer economy and is so prized by our agenda-setting media networks and advertisers.

Money defines life for the North Shore tribe. It's the factor by which value judgments are made. Something is valuable or worthless according to its cost. Earning a decent income, striving to become comfortably wealthy and moving up the status ladder is the unquestioned point of life.

Living in a way that expresses your success is natural. Your suburb, house, car, clothes and holidays all have status implications, and in the North Shore tribe, you should always go for the best your money - or your credit cards - can buy.



The Grey Lynn Tribe - Intellectual

The highly educated intelligentsia who value ideas above material things and intellectualise every element of their lives. Their most prized possession is a painting by the artist of the moment, they frequent film festivals, feel guilty about discussing property values and deep down are uneasy about their passion for reality television.

Found in: Suddenly fashionable ex-working class suburbs. Large groups will gather at bohemian inner city cafes, intellectual bookshops, ethnic cultural events and film festivals.

Distinguishing characteristics: Prefers to be “challenged” than entertained, seeks out authentic experiences, blushes when talking about property values.

The Grey Lynn tribe is made up of intellectuals who value ideas more than things. They are well-educated, highly principled, socially aware, culturally sophisticated people. They believe in collective social responsibility, and that individuals should make a difference by making the world a better place.

This tribe is relatively influential within New Zealand. It might not control the big business decisions, but it plays a big part in government – both Parliament and the Public Service are Grey Lynn tribe-dominated institutions. In the private sector, Grey Lynn tribe members are often educators or work in the creative industries.

The Grey Lynn tribe is made up of relatively affluent people with high-paying knowledge-worker jobs. Affluence allows them to live in comfort and to access things they love – art, travel, a vibrant social life, well-made things. But it’s sometimes hard to reconcile your level of affluence with your principles – having so much when the world is a mess. The Grey Lynn tribe’s solution is to seek out authenticity and to craft a life that makes a difference.



The Balclutha Tribe - Staunch

The tribal mind of the Kiwi heartland, the provincial conservatives, who see themselves as a source of stability and commonsense, bearers of on-going connection with the land – solid, reliable and down to earth, but deceptively smart and just quietly, very competitive.

Found in: Towns with a single main street and muddy utes. Gathers in clubrooms, memorial halls and at the Cossie Club

Distinguishing characteristics: down-to-earthness, talks of weather, moans about the government.

The Balclutha tribe is New Zealand's heartland tribe, populated by down-to-earth, practical, conservative people from the provinces. If you ask New Zealander about the "typical kiwi", chances are they'll describe Balclutha tribal characteristics – hard-working, understated, resourceful, hospitable, deceptively smart.

The Balclutha tribe has a strong hold on our self-image as Kiwis. Balclutha tribal archetypes dominate the picture our culture makers feed to us of New Zealanders. The strong, humble All Black archetype is pure Balclutha. Our most famous advertising stories are Balclutha stories: the Speights shepherds, the Mainland cheese old blokes, and Toyota's "bugger"-cursing farmer.

It's a can-do, self-reliant tribe. Members of the Balclutha tribe, male and female, are expected to be resilient and tough; making do with what they've got and solving their own problems, hard working and never flashy.



The Remuera Tribe -Entitled

The round-vowelled children of privilege for whom breeding is the greatest virtue, manners really do make a difference, money is great if it's old but crass if it's new, and what school you went to defines the rest of your life.

Found in: Leafy enclaves of the elite old city suburbs and in leafy corners of provincial towns with old sheep-grazier traditions

Distinguishing Characteristics: Posh voice, meticulous manners.

The Remuera tribe is New Zealand's self-declared upper class, people with an acute awareness of a social hierarchy and an untroubled sense of entitlement to a place at its top. Like the class-obsessed English culture it emulates, the Remuera tribe works hard to preserve its position of privilege. Central to this process is a life lived to strict set of social rules and behaviours through which one declares belonging to the Remuera tribe.

The modern world hasn't been overly kind to the Remuera tribe, and numbers of the pure Remuera tribal strain are dwindling. Control of the corporate world and bureaucracy have been ceded to the North Shore and Grey Lynn tribes. But even though many pure-bred Remuera tribe children grow up and join the North Shore, Grey Lynn or Raglan tribes, most still show their roots with manners and affectations they just can't bring themselves to shake off.

Affluence is at the base of this tribe, and like its English model, it values old money highest. Just getting rich won't buy you entrance into the Remuera tribe. First, there's a complex social dance to learn. Central to this process is a life lived to strict set of social rules and manners through which one declares that you belong to the Remuera tribe. Then there's a good generation of living-by-the rules before you can truly join the Establishment.



The Papatoetoe Tribe - Unpretentious

Urban working people who hate “wankers” and define themselves by their unwillingness to think of themselves as better than their mates - or anyone else for that matter – descended from the classic “state house and jug of beer” Kiwis.

Found in Suburbs and towns with concentrations of car-yards, supermarkets and sports grounds.

Distinguishing Characteristics: shift work, blue overalls, budgets.

The Papatoetoe tribe is the home of the Kiwi working man and woman whose approach to life is characterised by down-to-earth common sense, a focus on essentials, pride in physical achievement and a deep mistrust of intellectualism. Or as someone from Papatoetoe tribe might put it, “no frills, no wankers, get on with it and don’t get up yourself”.

Though this tribe is no longer as prevalent or as powerful as it once was, it has had a significant effect on the values and attitudes of many New Zealanders. Many Papatoetoe tribal attitudes have their origins in classic industrial-age, blue-collar values: hard work, solidarity with the workers and distrust of the bosses and educated types. That was the era of the state house, flagon of beer and an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work.

In some key attitudes, the Papatoetoe tribe is closely related to the provincial heartland Balclutha tribe. The elements of shared character are particularly strong around egalitarianism, appreciation of hard work and the down-to-earth mistrust of intellectualism.



The Otara Tribe - Community

Urban, often immigrant, often Polynesian, community-minded people where family is paramount and Church is likely to play a central social role, or if not Church then another club-based group. The sense of belonging and support structures are very strong as is the pressure to 'do the right thing' and uphold appearances.

Found in: Areas with concentrations of churches and state housing.

Distinguishing characteristics: large social gatherings, infectious laughter, wearing of flowers, men in skirts.

The Otara tribe is made up of ethnic minorities, often immigrants, whose lives centre on family and a community of people from the old countries or tribal areas.

It contains a broad spectrum of ethnic groups, many of which are Pacific Islanders or Maori from traditional backgrounds, but also includes people from other developing countries. Older people have told us that this tribal portrait could also apply to working class Catholics of the previous generation. What unites the diverse ethnic groups of the Otara Tribe is their common quest to blend their traditional social values with those of the twenty-first century consumer society in which they now are embedded.

At its base there is a clear conflict between two quite different world views, between the traditional values of church, clan or village, and the materialist values of progress, acquisition and individuality. Money opens the door to far greater well-being for yourself and your family, but the costs of transition are many and subtle.

Life in the Otara tribe is about being part of a community and working to sustain that group. Community members celebrate the good times together and help each other out when times are tough. They congregate together at the beach, church, marae feast, market, or sports and cultural events. Status comes from family position and is expressed in your contribution to the community. Giving establishes your worth. Life is lived to a strong moral code, more often than not based on strong spiritual belief.



The Raglan Tribe - Free-Spirited

The independent spirits who value the ability to live a life according to their own priorities, not as part of the common consumer herd. They tend to be highly sensate and internally focussed – hedonists, or spiritual journeyers, or fitness fanatics or adrenaline junkies. Many Kiwis join the Raglan tribe for three weeks at Christmas.

Found in: Laid-back suburbs on the wild side of town, or small settlements in beautiful places.

Distinguishing characteristics: old station wagons, stacks of firewood, mismatched possessions.

Whether they've been spat out of it, left it on their own terms, or just never got the point of it, Raglan tribe members don't belong to the mainstream. This tribe is far more contented when it feels it has flexibility and autonomy.

The key word for the Raglan tribe is freedom; its icons are the adventurer and the artist. Raglan tribe members want to create and control their own destiny. Their approach to authority is not so much defiance as indifference. They need to do what they need to do and if the rules don't fit then the rules are wrong.

The need to be free can express itself as a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and many of our most distinctive off-beat business success stories appear to have been driven by entrepreneurs with the Raglan spirit. These are the mavericks of New Zealand society – the people who did what the others only dreamed of.

The Raglan tribe seeks pleasure through experiences rather than things. Often members see accumulated possessions as a barrier or hindrance to doing what you want to do. They attach profound meaning to their experiences, whether they involve something creative or physically demanding or intensely emotional. In fact, they'll shy away from anything that doesn't hold their interest or whet their appetite for living. As workers, members of the Raglan tribe are better off without a boss. They're natural self-employed contractors, free-agent artisans and business owners.



The Cuba St Tribe - Avant-Garde

Members of the urban avant-garde who constantly seek out the cutting edge of cool, regard new, original and unique as the greatest virtues and fear being labelled 'mainstream' more than anything else. If you're a student of mass culture, watch these people to see the direction that herd will move in next.

Found in: Bohemian zones in central areas of main cities, at the coolest gigs, at art schools and universities.

Distinguishing characteristics: looks extreme, likes looking extreme.

The Cuba Street tribe is the avant-garde tribe – the cutting edge of society where trends are made and people live highly creative, rebellious lives. Members of the Cuba Street tribe are the weird ones whose shocking undertakings appal the mainstream, but also fascinate them, and more than likely are the harbingers of the next big shift in what's acceptable in society.

Cuba Street tribe members are the masters of the new. They're the culture makers, and in today's rapidly changing world, that gives this tribe an almost shaman-like aspect. Business, obsessed with "creativity" and "innovation", loves the creative originality of the Cuba Street tribe. They know that the trends come out of the Cuba Street tribe, and so they've embraced it into their heart. These people from the weird side are earning big money as designers, IT techno-wizards and marketing geniuses.

The Cuba Street tribe shares some signature attitudes with the Raglan tribe – most notably in relation to its rejection of the mainstream and the status they draw from their experiences. However, the Cuba Street tribe is unique in the energy it brings to defining itself themselves, an urbanity and focus on the new, and a thirst for experimentation. There's also the question of age. To get beyond 40 and remain a member of the Cuba Street tribe is a rare achievement. But that's prime territory for the Raglan Tribe