

New Zealand, 'Kiwi Speak': Are they speaking English?

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Diane Covington-Carter

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Yes, they speak English in New Zealand, a relief for many American travelers. But many of their words differ from our American usage. Here are a few examples to get you started. (American versions in parentheses.)

New Zealanders are a friendly lot and sincerely want you to enjoy your holiday (vacation). When you land they will greet you bright smiles and g'day mate (hello there).

At the airport baggage claim, the sign will warn you to be sure to 'uplift the correct baggage' (grab the right suitcase).

You hire (rent) a car and put your luggage into the boot (trunk). If the car is questionable, you'd better check under the bonnet (hood) and make sure you don't mistake the release for the bonnet for the release for the boot. Check that your windscreen (windshield) is clean.

You will be sitting on the right hand side of the car to drive. If you have hired a stick shift car, you will be shifting with your left hand, which can feel strange.

When you drive out of the car park (parking lot), make sure you drive on the left, pronounced 'liff'. This can feel very weird at first and is not recommended when you have just arrived after a long flight and are jet-lagged.

At some point you will need to fill your car up with petrol (gasoline). At roundabouts, be sure to give way (yield) and then go left, so that you don't have a collision.

When you get hungry, you could stop for some take away (take out) food. Be sure to throw your rubbish (trash) into the rubbish bin (trash can). When you go to the supermarket, you will put your groceries into a trolley (shopping cart) and then queue up (line up) to pay.

If they think you've done something worthwhile, they'll say 'good on you' (good for you).

If you are feeling crook, (under the weather), you'll stop in at the chemist (pharmacy). If you get a scrape, you'll need to ask for a plaster (Band-Aid).

New Zealand is famous for its tramping (hiking) trails. Be sure to bring a torch (flashlight) for when you're tramping. For picnicking, you'll need a chilly bin (cooler) to keep your food fresh.

If someone invites you over for tea, it can mean dinner, not tea with cucumber sandwiches. Better clarify what time and what they mean, exactly. And if someone asks you to come to a gathering and 'bring a plate' they don't mean an empty one. That would be a 'pot-lock' dinner.

In a restaurant, if you order an entrée, it will be a starter, not a main course. You don't need to tip, so enjoy that difference from the US. Ask for a serviette, not a napkin because a napkin refers to a feminine hygiene product.

Along that same line, don't be startled if someone asks you if you have a spare rubber. They're looking for an eraser. And they say 'bum pack', not 'fanny pack'. Fanny refers to an unmentionable part of the female anatomy.

Garage, is pronounced GA-rage, herbs are pronounced Herbs, like Herbert, and vitamins, with a short 'i' sound, like 'it'. Marmite is a favorite yeasty spread on toast. Beware of the strong taste.

A few other random words and phrases: You will clean your teeth, not brush them. A wee lie down is a nap. Gumboots are rain boots, jandals are flip-flops, biscuits are cookies and spuds are potatoes.

All in all, you will find the Kiwi's to be friendly and welcoming. Just smile a lot and speak slowly. Remember, they are trying to understand your accent.