

# Matariki

You probably know about the colourful Chinese New Year Festival, which takes place in late January or February. A couple of months later, in April, it's the turn of Thailand to say 'Happy New Year' in the Song Kran Festival, with its famous aquatic customs. But down here in New Zealand, we have to wait till June! That's the time when Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand – a country they know as Aotearoa or 'The Land of the Long White Cloud' – celebrate their New Year festival.

For most Maori, the timing of the New Year depends on when a cluster of stars which they call Matariki, reappears after a short midwinter break. In Western cultures, this cluster is known as the Pleiades and in Japan as Subaru (in fact the stars form the logo of the car manufacturer of the same name!). These stars have always been very important for maritime cultures. The Ancient Greeks actually referred to them as the 'Sailing Stars'. And Pacific peoples, such as the Maori, who crossed huge ocean distances in open canoes, used them both for navigation and as a rich source of cultural knowledge.

Like many traditional cultures, Maori use a lunar calendar and the New Year is marked by the first new moon after the reappearance of Matariki. For some Maori, the words *mata riki* mean 'eyes of the god' and refer to a legend in which the God of the Winds tore out his eyes and threw them into the sky. Other legends view the stars as the Earth mother, surrounded by her six daughters, who have come to help the weary winter sun return across the sky.

In common with many midwinter festivals across the world, Matariki is a time both for celebration and reflection. Because it follows the harvest, it has always been marked by feasting, accompanied by traditional songs and dance. The custom of flying kites has recently been revived and there has been renewed interest in conservation and recycling, inspired by the traditional practices of reconnecting with Mother Earth.

The turning of the year is an opportunity for social and cultural renewal. Family reunions are organised and learning takes a higher profile too. More fundamentally, Matariki is a time for a bicultural nation like New Zealand to rediscover the ancient cultural traditions that make it unique and form an essential part of its future identity in this increasingly globalised world.

1 Which paragraph of the text best matches the title below?

- |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Legends             | paragraph _____ |
| 2 Astronomy           | paragraph _____ |
| 3 Customs             | paragraph _____ |
| 4 New Year festivals  | paragraph _____ |
| 5 Cultural importance | paragraph _____ |

2 Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1 Chinese New Year is famous for customs involving water.                       | T / F |
| 2 New Year takes place when the Matariki stars are temporarily invisible.       | T / F |
| 3 The Matariki stars have been highly valued by cultures with links to the sea. | T / F |
| 4 There are different traditional stories explaining the Matariki stars.        | T / F |
| 5 Kite-flying is a new custom associated with Matariki.                         | T / F |
| 6 Matariki is associated with increased concern for the environment.            | T / F |
| 7 People pay more attention to education at Matariki.                           | T / F |
| 8 Matariki involves both looking back and looking forward.                      | T / F |

**3** English has many examples of nouns and adjectives which look completely different, such as like *moon* (noun) and *lunar* (adjective). This is because these adjectives were borrowed from another language, Latin (in which the word for *moon* is 'luna'). Match the following nouns with the correct adjectives (three of them come from the text).

nouns	adjectives
cat	aquatic
city	canine
countryside	domestic
dog	feline
earth	floral
flower	lunar
home	maritime
moon	rural
sun	solar
sea	stellar
star	terrestrial
water	urban

**4** Complete the following sentences with the correct adjectives from the box above.

- You should pay close attention to the \_\_\_\_\_ weather forecast before sailing.
- Installing \_\_\_\_\_ panels on the roof should certainly reduce your energy bills.
- Water polo is one of the most demanding of \_\_\_\_\_ sports.
- \_\_\_\_\_ staff continue to be employed in large numbers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ television reaches a larger audience than satellite or cable.
- Falling population and poor transport are major problems for \_\_\_\_\_ communities.
- She received a beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ tribute of red, white and pink roses.

**5** Because New Year is associated with doing or thinking about things again, the text has several examples of verbs and nouns with the prefix *re-*. What nouns go with the following verbs?

revive    reappear    refer    renew    reconnect    rediscover    recycle    reunite

**6** Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Do any stars have a special meaning in your culture?
- Do you believe that it's important or possible for modern urban communities to reconnect with nature?
- Has there been a revival of any traditional customs in your country?

## Glossary

- aquatic** (*adjective*) - connected with water  
**bicultural** (*adjective*) - having two equal cultures  
**cluster** (*noun*) - a group of things which are very close together  
**feasting** (*verb*) - eating a lot of food together on special occasions  
**harvest** (*noun*) - collection of plants and fruit which have been grown  
**indigenous** (*adjective*) - traditionally belonging to a place  
**inspire** (*verb*) - give someone hope and motivation through an example  
**logo** (*noun*) - a symbol which represents an organisation or event  
**lunar** (*adjective*) - connected with the moon  
**maritime** (*adjective*) - connected with the sea  
**navigation** (*noun*) - the skill of finding your way across the sea or sky  
**revive** (*verb*) - bring back to life, or make popular again  
**weary** (*adjective*) - very tired