

CHATHAM ISLANDERS

Tchakat Tchatam Airani

..is a documentary about identity

..is a place people live as they want to

..is about community

..is about whānau

...is about transformation and tradition

...is about looking after each other physically and culturally, the land, the sea

...is about the past, the present and the future



Tagline :

CHATHAM ISLANDERS Tchakat Tchatam Airani is a documentary about life on Aotearoa's remotest island.

Short synopsis :

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Full synopsis :

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The Chatham Islands, Rēkohu, population 600 is a 2 hour flight from Aotearoa. When you touch down you enter another world, a time-warp. Life on the island moves at a different pace. There's no cell towers for a start.

The Past. The Present. The future.

The Chatham Islands has a rich history that has been incorrectly told for many years until recently. Moriori are the waina pono - the original inhabitants. They arrived about 1000 years ago directly from East Polynesia with their own distinct language, artforms and customs. Moriori called their new home Rēkohu, (misty sun). They lived in peace for hundreds of years following the pacifist teachings of tohunga Nunuku-whenua who banned war and killing. In certain cases disputes could be settled through combat, but only with a stick twice the width of a man's thumb, no longer than his height, and only until first blood. There is no word for Mana in Moriori, only manareka which means to show respect to everyone and everything around you.

300 - 500 years after Moriori arrived on Rēkohu sealers and whalers arrived, then the missionaries. At first relations with Māori who arrived were good, but in 1835 everything changed when displaced Taranaki Iwi Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama turned up on Rēkohu

attacking, killing and enslaving Moriori. Because of their peace covenant, Moriori wouldn't fight back. After Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed Moriori wrote to Governor Grey begging for help and protection. But they received none. By 1870 more than 90% of the Moriori population had been wiped out. But they were not conquered. Moriori made a deliberate decision not to fight.

Of the remaining Moriori, some remained on the island, others escaped to different parts of Aotearoa. School children were taught that Moriori were less human than others, stupid, smaller headed, inferior. For many people, being Moriori was shameful and many hūnau (whānau) chose to hide their Moriori heritage. Even today in whānau some will identify as Moriori, and others won't. Even brothers.



“The myth that Aotearoa was once home to Moriori who were primitive, inferior folk and were completely wiped out by Māori was very convenient for colonists to keep alive because if Māori could push out Moriori, it was fine for Europeans to push out Māori. It suited their narrative as it was a justification of European colonisation of Māori land.”

Māui Solomon

There are many lessons that can be learnt from indigenous cultural values locally and globally.

These days many Moriori still live on the island and all around the world, despite having been told for decades that they don't exist anymore. For Ngāti Mutunga, it's an uncomfortable piece of history. Today 60% of the population of Rēkohu are Māori and many whānau are both Māori and Moriori. For most people on the island the day to day challenges of living on such a remote and sometimes seasonally challenging place is all about the here and now.

The waters surrounding Rēkohu are some of the roughest in the world, but they're also bountiful beyond belief. The fertile waters of Tangaroa are the islands main source of income. It's also the local pantry. On every calm and not so calm morning a fleet of boats depart with fishermen, cray-fishermen and paua divers, many diving down 40 metres below for their treasure.

The wild weather when it comes, can last for weeks, and it's in these times that the locals make their own fun. For the kids this means eeling, or hunting pigs and weka.

CHATHAM ISLANDERS is a documentary about a remote community we see and hear very little from. It's a documentary about community, history, isolation, connection, and making it through the tough times. It's an exciting time for the island as it is on a path to reclaim its own story and mana after having its history incorrectly written by colonialists and taught in schools for many years.

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Beneath the Surface – there’s more to these islands than what you see.

Rēkohu / Chatham Island / Wharekauri. Three peoples one land. The Chatham Island archipelago is 45 minutes ahead and 800 kilometres east of Aotearoa. The land and the sea and the people are ruggedly beautiful. The islands history is so very rich, and so very dark. Rēkohu / Chatham Island / Wharekauri. These remote islands have a profoundly beautiful and devastatingly sad history that is still felt today.

The sun shines on the shores of Rēkohu before any other place in the world and Moriori are moving out of the mist and the darkness and into the light.



Tommy Solomon Statue

“I can be quite tohe. But I fought this for my ancestors. The truth must be told. The Crown tried to silence Moriori because it was embarrassed. They have been active in the suppression of Moriori history for 150 years.”

Māui Solomon



RĀKAU MOMORI Images have been engraved by Moriori hundreds of years ago in the Kopi trees of Rēkohu. They are images of people and animals that reflect the world at the time, their identity, honouring the ancestors with the tapu represented on the trees. Moriori are the only known culture in the world to engrave on living trees. The trees have been carved to signify people who have passed away, and are portals to their spiritual homeland.



Tom Lanauze is both Ngāti Mutunga and Moriori, a proud promotor of his heritage, and an active proponent of revitalising Moriori culture. He wants to pass on the knowledge to his moko Zion.