
VISITS, CEREMONIES AND EVENTS

26. Official Visits to New Zealand

26.1 Introduction

For the majority of high-level visits MFAT will be the lead policy agency on the New Zealand side, although of course other departments may be involved and there may be some specialised visits where it makes sense for another department to lead. At the outset, however, communications about a visit should be between missions/posts and the appropriate regional or functional division of MFAT. New Zealand missions and posts in other jurisdictions will often also have an important role.

26.2 Guest of Government Visits

For the highest levels of visitors (Heads of State, Heads of Government and some Ministers) the New Zealand Government will normally accord 'Guest of Government' status. For this category of visit, two key New Zealand agencies will be involved – MFAT and the Visits and Ceremonial Office (VCO) in the Department of Internal Affairs. While MFAT leads on the substance and outcomes of visits, VCO has responsibility for all the practical arrangements of a visit - programming, travel, accommodation, hospitality and transport. Protocol Division is responsible for liaison between MFAT and VCO. The relevant Regional Division in MFAT will take the lead on the substance of the visit.

In the case of visits by Heads of State and Heads of Government, and some other very high ranking visitors, a senior MFAT official will chair the planning process for the visit, which will include relevant officers in MFAT, VCO and other government agencies, including Ministers' offices, Government House, Police and the Defence Force. The appropriate staff of missions and posts accredited to New Zealand will, of course, also have a key role in this planning process. The relevant New Zealand Head of Mission, and in some case the Chief of Protocol, will act as escort for these top level visitors and VCO will designate a visit lead to oversee all planning and operations. Other senior New Zealand officials will also participate as appropriate.

For visits which are accorded Guest of Government status, the New Zealand Government will meet certain costs. The entitlements and allocation of costs is determined by the status of the visitor and will be advised to the sending state once the visit is formally approved.

New Zealand Police will provide security for Guest of Government visitors. The level and nature of the security provided will be determined by New Zealand Police on the basis of security requirements rather than protocol expectations.

For Guest of Government visitors of a lower rank (e.g. senior Ministers) and Partial Guest of Government visitors, the relevant Regional Division and/or a VCO visit lead will coordinate the visit. Protocol Division will maintain a watching brief for this level of visitor and again missions and posts will be key players.

The VCO's Operating Guidelines are available online at www.dia.govt.nz.

26.3 Other Official Visits

There are also a large number of visits to New Zealand by foreign government officials, senior advisers, politicians, academics, media representatives and government, business, trade and parliamentary delegations. While some visits are at the invitation of MFAT or other Government Departments, many are initiated and sometimes funded by the sending state, or by the delegation or individual visitor. Missions and posts will often have a more central role in the organisation and running of such visits but of course will also work closely with the relevant divisions of MFAT, in particular with regard to access to the New Zealand Government system including, where appropriate, New Zealand Ministers.

For all practical information on official visits, the relevant regional division should be the first point of contact.

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