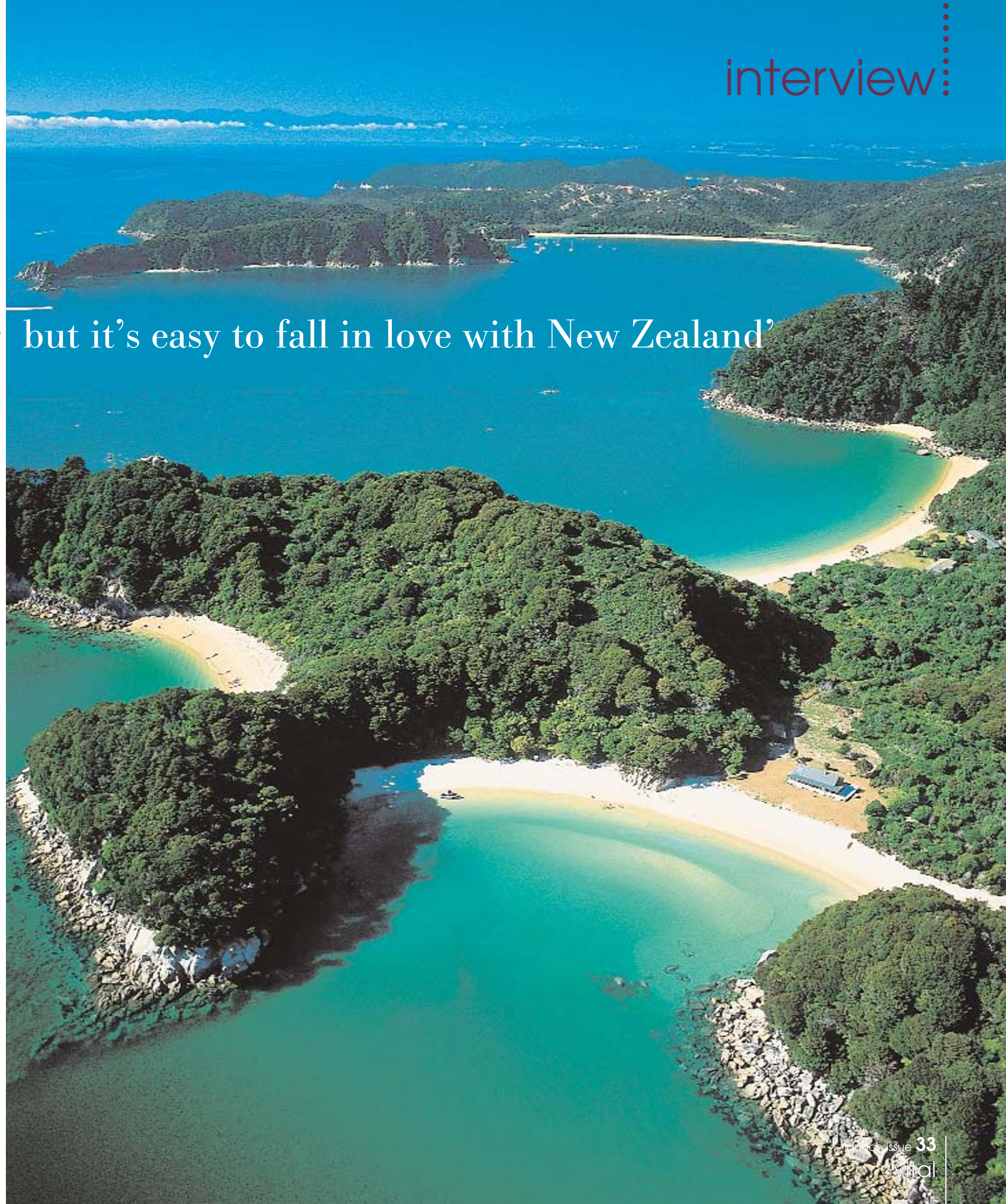


With its attractive work environment and beautiful landscape, New Zealand surely demands consideration for a working overseas experience, but be warned, New Zealand may have you hooked, writes **Liane Voisey**.

‘There’s no
Marks and Spencer

but it’s easy to fall in love with New Zealand’

LAND OF THE BIG WHITE SMILE



New Zealand offers amazing diversity in landscape from the lush greenery of the North Island to the snow-capped mountains of the South, but for the dental hygienist from the UK, it is also a great place to work.

'It was supposed to be a three month working holiday' says Zoei Meatyard, who seven years on is still enjoying living and working in the country known as the 'the land of the long white cloud'.

Zoei worked as a dental nurse in the UK before training as a hygienist in New Zealand. She had visited New Zealand once before, when Coventry-based Zoei was offered the opportunity to work as an operating department practitioner (ODP) in New Zealand. Zoei returned to the UK for nine months, but found that she missed the New Zealand lifestyle.

'I found I couldn't stand the traffic and vast number of people,' she says, so she decided to return, but this time to train as a dental hygienist at Otago Polytechnic dental school.

A career as a dental hygienist was something she had considered in her teens, says Zoei. 'I left school with one 'O' level and one GCSE and had no direction in life at 16 whatsoever, until I was offered a YTS placement to work as a dental assistant with the dentists Martin Davies and Chris Lucas at a practice in Leicester.' These dentists, she says, encouraged her to complete the Dental Surgery Assistants Certificate, which she says stood her in good stead for studying for the dental hygiene diploma in New Zealand.

Time no object

Working for a Christchurch-based dental practice, Zoei says that her appointments average 30-45 minutes for patients and one hour for new or perio patients.

'I can spend a lot of time explaining and discussing with the patient about their oral health and really getting to know them, as opposed to just treating them,' she says. As a nurse, Zoei worked with a hygienist who was afforded only 15 minutes per patient and had as many as 15 patients a day.

'I get to see a real improvement in their oral health – you just can't do that in a 15 or 20 minute appointment.' To Zoei, this is the most important and satisfying part of working as a dental hygienist in New Zealand.

In the future, Zoei hopes to study for a health sciences degree at Massey University and is considering going into health care management one day. She misses 'family, friends and the great English sense of humour' not to mention the pub, Marks and Spencer and the northern hemisphere Christmas. 'After seven years, Christmas is just not the same in the sun!'

But Zoei loves New Zealand for its lifestyle and how everything seems so accessible and laid back.

'Living in Christchurch means you are only a couple of hours from the nearest ski field and 20 minutes from the beach. The lack of population and traffic is great and the weather is a bonus, though a little changeable!'

Cynthia Wallbridge has never regretted her decision 11 years ago to emigrate to New Zealand. Cynthia lives in Auckland with her New Zealander husband and two daughters, aged eight and five. She works part-time as a dental hygienist in Greenlane, Auckland.



Photos this page: Jon Fairweather

Angela Cynthia Zoei



Lifestyle choice

Cynthia misses her family in Ireland, but says she felt New Zealand was a good place to bring up a family.

'I love the climate and the lifestyle, the houses with a section and view and the facilities for my children are much better – there is more space and the good weather for them to use the facilities.'

Armed with experience and diplomas in dental therapy and dental hygiene from the UK, Cynthia says she found it easy to register and work in New Zealand. She says there is a huge difference in the work environment in New Zealand.

'Here people expect to pay for their dental treatment – in the UK even though more dentists are becoming private the public really don't want to pay much for their dental treatment,' says Cynthia.

Like Zoei, she finds she has more time to devote to each patient.

'The most time I was given in the UK to treat a patient was 20 minutes, even in private practice, whereas here we see patients for a minimum of 30 minutes and generally mine are all one hour long,' she says. The standard of work, in her opinion, is higher in New Zealand and expected to be that way.

Angela Baldi works for a practice in St Heliers, Auckland and has been living in New Zealand for nine years.

Angela graduated from Glasgow Dental Hospital in 1993 and ten months later decided to move to New Zealand after being made a job-offer. She had heard about the job in Newmarket, Auckland, after attending an alumni meeting at the hospital. 'They announced that a dental practice in Auckland was looking for a new hygienist as their current hygienist was leaving after four years to go travelling,' recalls Angela.

'It was only meant to be a two-year contract, but I fell in love with New Zealand and applied for permanent residency.'

In the UK, Angela says that working for Ayrshire and Arran Health Board she only had 15-20 minutes to do scalings. 'That is the big difference I find here – I'm allowed as long as I require to see patients.'

Both practices she has worked for in New Zealand, says Angela, are very periodontally aware and nearly every patient sees the hygienist. She's also pleased to be working in a practice that specialises in orthodontics.

'I've had the chance to expand my skills and it's great to see kids too,' she says.

Young profession

As dental hygiene is a relatively young profession in New Zealand Angela says that she still sometimes comes across patients who have never heard of a hygienist. It can be challenging, she says, trying to build up a patients trust when they say that their dentist always cleaned their teeth before, but satisfying too, when a client leaves feeling really pleased with the results.

In the absence of a nurse, Angela has also had to learn to multi-task. 'But you learn very quickly to be able to do fissure sealants and scale using the ultrasonic technology single-handedly,' she says.

Dental hygienists in New Zealand are not permitted to administer local anaesthetic which Angela would love to see changed, even though the dentists she has worked with have been more than happy to administer LA when needed.

She also thinks dental hygiene becoming a registered profession will be good for the profession.

'A course in Dunedin is offering a three-year degree option for hygiene and in the future, I would like to be able to do the papers necessary to bring my diploma to degree level.'

Although she misses family and friends in the UK and shops like Marks and Spencer and Boots, Angela says it has been easy to fall in love with New Zealand.

'The weather is great, the beaches are

beautiful, the countryside and bush are amazing and completely unspoiled and all within less than an hour's drive.'

Working in New Zealand

Interested in pursuing a dental hygienist career in New Zealand? Immigration laws are changing, so for advice in the first instance, consult an immigration adviser at the New Zealand Embassy in London. The address is New Zealand House, 80 Haymarket, London.

At present dental hygiene is not a registered profession in New Zealand. This means that anyone, qualified or unqualified, can practice as a dental hygienist so long as it is under the supervision of a dentist. From July 2004 this is likely to change and dental hygiene could become a registered profession.

Useful websites:

Jobsearch website: <http://www.workingin-newzealand.com>

New Zealand Embassy website: <http://newzealand.embassyhomepage.com>

International Federation of Dental Hygienists: <http://ifdh.org/workabroad/nz.shtml>

New Zealand Dental Hygienists Association: <http://www.nzdha.co.nz>

IT'S A FACT

- There are 157 dental hygienists working in New Zealand (World Health Organisation).
- Dental hygienists in New Zealand train on a two or three year course.
- Dental hygienists operate under the direct supervision of a dentist.
- Hygienists are currently not registered but proposed new health occupational legislation will see hygienists registered.
- 77 per cent of the dental hygienist workforce are under 35 years of age.
- Fewer than half of the active workforce of dental hygienists work full-time (Dental Council of New Zealand).
- A job offer may be required before a Work Permit/Visa is issued. Consult the New Zealand Dental Hygienists Association for advice.