5 NZ housing trends you can't ignore (2026)

The key numbers from the video, on one page. Counted down from five to one.

5. The tale of two islands

Draw one line across Cook Strait. Above it, house prices are mostly falling. Below it, they're mostly rising. Same country. Two markets.

Bouncing back hardest (rise from the bottom of the downturn)

1. **Invercargill:** up 21.6%, back to a record high
2. **Queenstown-Lakes:** up 18.6%
3. **Southland District:** up 16.9%
4. **Far North:** up 15% (the only North Island market in the top five)
5. **Christchurch:** up 11.4%, back to a record high

Still stuck (fall from peak, little or no bounce-back)

1. **Lower Hutt:** down 34%. The biggest fall of any major market in the country.
2. **Wellington City:** down 30%
3. **Upper Hutt:** down 29%
4. **Porirua:** down 27%
5. **Horowhenua:** down 26%

Why? The South Island is cheaper to buy into. And it didn't rise as far before Covid, so it had less far to fall and more room to run.

> **What it means for you:** What house prices do today is mostly explained by the last 10 to 15 years. A market that lagged can have more room to catch up. That doesn't mean rush south. Today's pain in the North Island could be tomorrow's opportunity.

4. New Zealand isn't a rural country anymore

- 1901: almost 40% of workers were in farming, forestry and mining. Today: under 7%.
- Under 2% of workers are farmers. About 52,000 people.
- The median farmer is nearly 50. The rest of the workforce: about 41.
- Average dairy herd: 147 cows in 1985. About 450 today. We now have fewer, but bigger, more productive farms.
- 1901: about half of Kiwis lived rurally. Today: 87% live in urban areas.
- Stats NZ projects Auckland alone will account for about 40% of NZ's population growth to 2048.

> **What it means for you:** Housing demand is concentrating in the metros: Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, Hamilton and Tauranga. In my view, that's why a larger city gives you more confidence than a smaller town.

3. The satellite squeeze

- Selwyn District, on the edge of Christchurch, was the fastest-growing area in NZ in the year to June 2025. Not the Garden City. The ring around it.
- Selwyn grew nearly 30% in five years. The council expects another 40% within a decade.
- Waimakariri is growing faster than Christchurch. Cromwell and Wānaka are growing faster than Queenstown. Kāpiti Coast is growing while Porirua's population shrank.
- Marchetti's Constant: through history, people have budgeted about one hour a day for travel. Half an hour each way. Build faster roads and people don't commute less. They move further out for a bigger, cheaper house.
- Auckland's City Rail Link opens in September. Shorter commutes from the west mean more people willing to live and rent further out.

> **What it means for you:** Follow the roads. When a motorway, rail line or four-laning is announced, don't look at the towns it connects today. Look at the paddocks up the road.

2. The house itself is changing shape

- Average new home consented: about 200 sqm in 2010. About 160 sqm in 2019. 20% smaller in a decade. That's a double garage's worth of house, gone.
- Floor plans have flipped.

Out: separate rooms and a long dark hallway.

In: open-plan kitchen, dining and living, with the master bedroom zoned away from the kids' rooms.

> **What it means for you:** The shape of a house decides who wants to live in it. Homes built for smaller households and open-plan, low-maintenance living have a growing pool of tenants and buyers. Homes built for 1985 are less set up for how we live now. When you buy, you're buying into where demand is heading. Or where it's leaving.

1. Fewer people in every home

- 1951: 3.7 people per household. Today: 2.7. Still falling.
- Stats NZ projects household size will keep falling in every region over the next couple of decades, driven by more one-person households.
- Fewer children: 1.53 births per woman, a record low. Longer lives. And over-65s are more likely to live alone.
- The maths: one million people at 3.7 per home need about 270,000 homes. The same million at 2.7 per home need about 370,000. That's 37% more homes with zero population growth.
- Cologne, Germany, in the 1990s: about 40,000 homes built to house 10,000 more people (Dr Oliver Hartwich, NZ Initiative).

> **What it means for you:** The population can stay flat and we still need more homes. A single person or a couple with no kids doesn't need four bedrooms on a quarter acre. The market is quietly reorganising itself.

This cheat sheet is general information, not financial advice. Whether it's relevant to you depends on your situation. Property investment carries risk, and past price movements don't tell you what prices will do next. Seek financial advice before acting. Price figures: Opes Partners analysis of house price index data to June 2026.

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