

Understand New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND TODAY322

The Christchurch earthquake, Pike River mine tragedy, a challenge to NZ's 'clean green' image, and the government's response.

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Tread a New Zealand timeline from Maori and Pakeha settlement, through the fast-paced evolutionary stages of one of the world's youngest countries.

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Get the lowdown on the land, flora, fauna, national parks and environmental issues.

New Zealand Today

Historically considered a tough, nimble little country with bankable primary industries and a resilient economy, New Zealand has proven as susceptible as any first-world country to the downturn in global financial trading. It may have been able to take this challenge in its stride were it not for a devastating series of earthquakes and a mining tragedy, and frequent, costly storms and floods. Pressure is on to keep the economic wheel turning, but at what cost to its '100% Pure' environment?

Best on Film

Lord of the Rings trilogy (Dir: Sir Peter Jackson; 2001–03) The three-installment adaptation of Tolkien's work that cleaned up at the Oscars.

The Hobbit trilogy (Dir: Sir Peter Jackson; 2012–14) Having practised on *LOTR*, director Jackson goes all out on the prequel.

The Piano (Dir: Jane Campion; 1993) Erotica, an unforgettable axe scene and a youthful Sookie Stackhouse from *True Blood*.

Whale Rider (Dir: Niki Caro; 2002) Allegorical battle of the sexes set in a small, Maori village; cameo from whale.

Boy (Dir: Taika Waititi; 2010) Funny, affectionate portrayal of a young Maori boy reconnecting with his father.

Best in Print

The Luminaries (Eleanor Catton; 2013) Gold-rush tales in epic form; winner of the 2013 Man Booker.

The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield (Penguin; 2007) The essential anthology of NZ's most famous short-story writer.

Mister Pip (Lloyd Jones; 2007) Charles Dickens changes a girl's expectations during the Bougainville civil war.

The Carpathians (Janet Frame; 1988) The beloved NZ writer's last novel; magical happenings in a rural town.

Potiki (Patricia Grace; 1986) A Maori community faces mortal danger in this poignant novel by a revered writer.

Shaky Isles

There's no denying it, NZ has had it tough over the last few years. It may be a long way away from just about everywhere but it is not immune to the vagaries of the global economy. In September 2010, just as the country was edging out of its worst recession in 30 years, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck near Christchurch, the nation's second-largest city. The damage was extensive but miraculously no lives were lost, partly because the earthquake occurred in the early hours of the morning when people were in their beds.

Then, in the early afternoon of 22 February 2011, a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Christchurch. This time the city wasn't so lucky and 185 people lost their lives. Numerous buildings, already weakened by the September 2010 quake and its aftershocks, were damaged beyond repair and had to be demolished completely.

The city's rebuild has been slow: the centre of the city didn't reopen fully until mid-2013. Cantabrians, however, have displayed admirable resilience and innovation, helping Christchurch to re-emerge as one of NZ's most exciting cities. With the city centre still somewhat 'munted', fringe suburbs have been reinvigorated, such as Woolston ('Coolston') and Addington, while an innovative cardboard (yes cardboard!) cathedral has been brought into the fold. The city was named by Lonely Planet as one of the world's top 10 cities in its *Best in Travel 2013*.

Christchurch isn't the only place to be awarded such a plaudit, with the South Island's West Coast named as one of the world's must-visit regions in *Best in Travel 2014*. Increasing recognition of its extensive conservation estate and unique ecological values sits uncomfortably alongside continual interest in exploiting the area's natural resources. But mining has always been part of