

# › Understand New Zealand

## **NEW ZEALAND TODAY ..... 638**

The Christchurch earthquake, the grounding of the MV *Rena*, the Rugby World Cup afterglow... Time for a Kiwi temperature check.

## **HISTORY ..... 640**

Tread a NZ timeline from Maori origins to Pakeha arrivals and recent ructions.

## **ENVIRONMENT..... 650**

Get the low-down on the land, flora and fauna, national parks and environmental issues.

## **MAORI CULTURE ..... 657**

Read up on NZ's first people: history, religion, legends, traditions and the arts (and of course the *haka*).

## **THE KIWI PSYCHE ..... 665**

Global psychiatry: lie down on this couch NZ, and tell us all about yourself.

## **ARTS & MUSIC ..... 670**

The best Kiwi books, movies, TV, music and visual arts... This little nation punches well above its artistic weight.



## population per sq km

NEW ZEALAND



AUSTRALIA



USA



= 3 people

# New Zealand Today

## Shaky Isles

There's no denying it, New Zealand 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 life was lost, partly because the earthquake occurred in the early hours of the morning when people were in their beds (by way of comparison, Haiti's slightly smaller earthquake earlier that year killed more than 316,000 people).

While the clean-up was continuing on the East Coast, tragedy struck on the West Coast when an explosion occurred at the Pike River coalmine near Greymouth, sealing 29 men inside. All hope of rescue ended on 24 November when a second large explosion ripped through the mine.

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. Canterbury has barely had a break since then, experiencing literally hundreds of aftershocks: a 6.3 earthquake killed an elderly man in June; a 5.8 rattled Christmas shoppers on 23 December; and a 5.5 got the new year off to a shaky start on 2 January 2012.

Just when it seemed that things couldn't get any worse, a fully loaded container ship, the *MV Rena*, hit the Astrolabe Reef in October 2011 and proceeded to leech heavy fuel oil into the Bay of Plenty, leading to NZ's worst environmental disaster. As we write, the recovery continues, with most of the fuel tanks drained and a substantial proportion of the containers removed.

- » Population: 4.4 million
- » Area: 268,680 sq km (similar to Colorado, bigger than the UK)
- » GDP growth: 1.1% (2011)
- » Inflation: 1.8% (2011)

## You'll Need

- » Travel insurance that covers you for high-risk activities
- » Insect repellent to keep the sandflies at bay
- » The ability to feign enthusiasm for rugby
- » A bottomless appetite for Kiwi food and wine

## Top Films

- » *Lord of the Rings trilogy* (2001–03) Dir: Sir Peter Jackson
- » *The Piano* (1993) Dir: Jane Campion
- » *Whale Rider* (2002) Dir: Niki Caro
- » *Once Were Warriors* (1994) Dir: Lee Tamahori
- » *Boy* (2010) Dir: Taika Waititi
- » *Sione's Wedding* (2006) Dir: Chris Graham
- » *The Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* (2009) Dir: Leanne Pooley
- » *In My Father's Den* (2004) Dir: Brad McGann
- » *Out of the Blue* (2006) Dir: Robert Sarkies