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New Zealand Today

New Zealand has had a bad run on the disaster front in recent years, with devastating earthquakes and mining and helicopter tragedies rattling the national psyche. But things are looking up: tourism is booming, the arts and local craft-beer scenes are effervescing, and the Kiwi rugby and cricket teams are in awesome form – there's plenty to put a smile on the country's collective dial.

Best on Film

Lord of the Rings trilogy (Sir Peter Jackson; 2001–03) Hobbits, dragons and magical rings – Tolkien's vision comes to life.

The Hobbit trilogy (Sir Peter Jackson; 2012–14) Hairy feet on the move – more eye-popping Tolkienism.

The Piano (Jane Campion; 1993) A piano and its owners arrive on a mid-19th century West Coast beach.

Whale Rider (Niki Caro; 2002) Magical tale of family and heritage on the East Coast.

Once Were Warriors (Lee Tamahori; 1994) Brutal relationship dysfunction in South Auckland.

Best in Print

The Luminaries (Eleanor Catton; 2013) Man Booker Prize winner: crime and intrigue on the West Coast goldfields.

Mister Pip (Lloyd Jones; 2007) Tumult on Bougainville, mirroring Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

Live Bodies (Maurice Gee; 1998) Post-WWII loss and redemption in New Zealand.

The 10pm Question (Kate de Goldi; 2009) Twelve-year-old Frankie grapples with life's big anxieties.

The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield (2006) Kathy's greatest hits.

Reasons to be Cheerful

Christchurch's recovery from the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes is ongoing, producing as much good news and bad. On one hand it is testing relationships between the citizens and government agencies, as tough decisions are made about fix-ups and pay-outs. On the other, Christchurch's recovery reinforces Kiwis' perceptions of themselves as 'battlers' with strong communities and civic pride.

Speaking of pride, New Zealanders have been flush with it of late. Following the All Blacks' success at the 2011 Rugby World Cup at home, the beloved national team beat arch-rivals Australia 34-17 in the 2015 final in London. In doing so, NZ became the first country ever to win back-to-back Rugby World Cups, capping off a remarkable four-year period in which the All Blacks lost just three (and drew one) of their 53 matches between World Cup wins.

But the depth of Kiwi sporting talent ranges beyond the rugby pitch. In 2015 the national men's cricket team, the Black Caps, made the final of the Cricket World Cup for the first time, stringing together an impressive series of test cricket results both before and afterwards. Other Kiwi sporting stars making their mark include golfing sensation Lydia Ko, who became world No 1 in 2015, aged just 17; NBA seven-footer Steven Adams (from Rotorua), currently playing with the Oklahoma City Thunder; quadruple US IndyCar champion Scott Dixon; and Valerie Adams, the greatest female shot-putter the world has ever seen (also from Rotorua – something in the water?).

On the arts front, Canadian director James Cameron has set up a rural home base near Wellington, and will create three *Avatar* sequels in the capital from 2016, bringing substantial investment and cementing NZ's reputation as a world-class film-making destination.