

NEW ZEALAND



's not all about *Lord of the Rings* tours... When it comes to the arts, beautiful New Zealand punches well above its weight.

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Maybe it's a side-effect of tall poppy syndrome. New Zealand is a nation which seems to glory in its small size. You notice it on TV, where the national news feels for all the world like a local bulletin. You feel it in cities where public transport is negligible, because walking is easy and driving is non-traumatic. And you see it in the arts scene too. Go where you will – explore the country's natural wonders, burgeoning fashion scene or its rich indigenous and colonial history, indulge in adventure sports or good old-fashioned retail therapy – and chances are you'll

still find an arts fix just around the corner.

Companies which can travel frequently do. The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra tours constantly within and beyond the main centres, often taking world-class soloists along for the ride. The Royal New Zealand Ballet is also in perpetual motion, with each tour encompassing six cities and a series of orchestras. Chamber Music New Zealand maintains perhaps the most extensive itinerary: this year's takes in not just the usual cities but Gore, Gisborne and Te Awamutu. The line-up of artists isn't too shabby either: Piers Lane, Elizabeth Wallfisch and the acclaimed NZ String Quartet all feature on this year's roster.

Opera is costly enough to maintain while standing still, so it's no surprise the national company limits itself to seasons in Auckland and Wellington only. With just two mainstage shows per year, and the occasional concert performance, pickings are admittedly slim. But NBR New Zealand Opera works on quality-not-quantity lines, with production values high and stellar casting, so if your timing is right – next up is Verdi's *Macbeth* in September/October – you're in for a treat.

And touring companies are only a fraction of the story: the famous Kiwi self-sufficiency holds as true in the arts as in agriculture. Each of the centres has its own distinct arts scene, replete with temptations for all tastes.

Auckland is New Zealand's truest metropolis, home of big business and over a quarter of the national population. The CBD may seem faceless at times – populousness doesn't always mean personality – but it also contains some of the city's finest performing ensembles. The hub of it all is The Edge, a collection of venues in the heart of town, where you'll find not just the national companies, but the Auckland Chamber Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and a variety of theatre and dance performances.

Opera fanatics in want of luxury should head for Mollies, a gourmet restaurant and five-star boutique hotel whose opera-loving owners frequently invite top NZ singers to perform during the evening. Further afield, The Opera Factory presents up-and-coming performers in small, slightly quirky productions. **lovers of the voice should also keep chamber choir Musica Sacra in mind.**

The Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand's largest art collection, is currently under extensive redevelopment, but its contents are still open to view in the New Gallery. The city also offers a panoply of contemporary galleries with a NZ bent, and the dedicated art-tourist might consider a visit to the Titirangi cottage of the late Colin McCahon, surely New Zealand's greatest painter.

Further south, the nation's political capital is arguably its arts capital too: picturesque, windswept Wellington ▶

DESTINATION FILE



Where New Zealand is located roughly 1,600km east of Victoria and Tasmania, in the Pacific Ocean.

Average Temperatures

During winter: 1C to 12C;

During summer: 12C to 24C

Population 4,300,000

Currency New Zealand dollar (\$1AUD = \$1.22NZD)

Best time to visit

New Zealand is great to visit year-round, although the warmer months (December to April) are the most popular. Keen skiers may prefer to visit between June and October.

Getting there Air New Zealand, Qantas, Emirates and Pacific Blue fly between most Australian capital cities and New Zealand's centres several times a day. Visit www.webjet.com.au or the airline websites for more details.

Getting around In the major cities there are a range of public transport options, including buses, trains, ferries, and, in Wellington, cable cars. For travel between cities, consider hiring a car. Ferries connect the North and South Islands between Wellington in the north and Picton in the south. Domestic flights are another option, with Air New Zealand and Qantas flying between most centres.

Tourist Information Visit www.newzealand.com for tourist information. Once there, a network of 90 iSITE visitor information centres are located throughout the country.