

Kelman, I. 2007. "Kiwi Conundrum? Nature and Natural Hazards in New Zealand". New Zealand Vacation, <http://www.new-zealand-vacation.info/articles/new-zealand-disasters>

Full text:

New Zealand, it is often said, has it all. That includes natural hazards. The capital city, Wellington, is built on a major earthquake fault. Active volcanoes could blanket the largest city, Auckland, with ash. New Zealand's other main city, Christchurch, is built in a river flood plain and a tsunami inundation area.

Add landslides, avalanches, wildfires, wind storms, rain storms, blizzards, sea flooding, and droughts amongst many others and you have a country with everything that the environment's extremes can offer. That is all the more reason to visit or live there in order to enjoy these spectacular islands.

Nature's forces build as well as destroy, providing unique beauty which cannot be found in calmer areas. Ruapehu's volcanism has created wonderful skiing while Taranaki's hiking trails reveal breathtaking vistas. New Zealand's National Museum, Te Papa, in Wellington was constructed using the latest (and Kiwi-invented) technology for earthquake-resistant buildings and includes an exciting and interactive natural hazards display called *Awesome Forces*. The dramatic landscapes of Arthur's Pass and Fiordland continue to be shaped by geology and climate, both long-term trends and sudden events such as earthquakes and landslides.

Yet four million people and more than ten times as many sheep live in New Zealand, undeterred by the past and possible future disasters. Instead, they have created a prosperous country, trying to balance modern and traditional cultures, with a welcoming and open-minded spirit, a love of life and adventure, and a respect for—not fear or domination of—nature.

Because nature is everywhere in New Zealand. From elusive kiwi birds to mischievous kea to cute tuatara, eons of isolation and an ever-changing landscape with a diversity of ecological niches yield an incredible variety of flora and fauna. Landforms, too, are a never-ending spectacle. Chatham Island's basalt columns rival Northern Ireland's World Heritage Site of Giant's Causeway. Raglan's expansive beaches are perfect for sunset strolls, picnics, and volleyball.

The tumultuous earth is also part of New Zealand's rich history. Indigenous oral tradition tells tales of volcanoes around the islands. European settlers in the Wellington area were greeted almost immediately by devastating floods and a huge earthquake. Napier's unique art deco architecture emerged from the ruins of another earthquake. The country's worst train disaster resulted from a sudden volcanic mudflow damaging a railroad bridge.

What will be the next chapter in Kiwi disaster history? Will it be moving the capital elsewhere because Wellington is no longer habitable after the Big Quake? Or will it be a classic case study illustrating how a major city quickly shook off a massive earthquake because years of preparation paid off? Will it be a trans-Pacific tsunami of comparable devastation wrought by the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunamis? Or will it be a perfect tsunami response involving warning, communication, evacuation, and insurance- and government-supported reconstruction? Will droughts lead to sustainable water and energy management or to parks flooded for reservoirs and hydroelectric generation?

Yes, New Zealand has it all, and seeing it all for yourself will let you enjoy the wonder, inspiration, vulnerability, and ability to tackle challenges of an isolated island state built upon the ever-changing land and sea.

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