



PRESS RELEASE



ONE YEAR TO GO UNTIL THE LIONS MEET THE KIWIS

Today marks one year to go until the British & Irish Lions Tour kicks off in New Zealand



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Today (Friday 3 June 2016) begins the one year countdown until the British & Irish Lions start their 2017 tour of New Zealand challenging Kiwi teams to beat the legendary Lions.

The tournament is due to attract more than 20,000 visitors across the seven host cities; Whangarei, Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua, and Wellington, in the North Island and Christchurch and Dunedin, in the South Island. The Lions Tour is the biggest sporting series to be held in New Zealand since the Rugby World Cup 2011.

New Zealand Rugby and the British & Irish Lions have agreed a programme of 10 matches during their 2017 series, kicking off in Whangarei, in the far north, on 3 June and finishing in Auckland on 8 July.

The series will include three tests against the All Blacks – the first and final tests both at Eden Park in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city on 24 June and 8 July respectively, with the other in the capital city of Wellington on 1 July.

RUGBY NATION

The Lions Tour is a highlight on rugby's global calendar and New Zealand, well known for putting heart and soul into its national game, is a favourite destination for the "Red Army" – the loyal group of British & Irish Lions supporters.

The tour has been timed to maximise spectator interest in the midst of the New Zealand rugby season and visitors will find plenty of other diversions with a wide range of winter events and activities to attract them from region to region.

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EVERY 12 YEARS

A Lions Tour to New Zealand only happens every 12 years and the schedule is well suited to cater for the thousands of loyal supporters who base their holiday around the rugby action.

The 2005 series brought more than 20,000 Lions supporters, contributing an estimated NZ\$135.2m into the New Zealand economy and New Zealand Rugby Chief Executive Steve Tew says they are confident the 2017 series will exceed those figures.

He says the series in New Zealand will be a huge occasion featuring the best players from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, providing almost six weeks of incredible rugby.

WORLD CUP EVENTS

New Zealand Sport and Recreation Minister Jonathan Coleman said sport in New Zealand was on a high after the successful hosting of the ICC Cricket World Cup and FIFA Under 20 World Cup this year.

Most of the cities chosen to host the Lions series were also venues for the cricket and football world cups and Tourism New Zealand Chief Executive Kevin Bowler says the various regions are well primed to offer visitors plenty of off-field action enhanced with the legendary hospitality that makes a visit to New Zealand so memorable.

“There is something quite special about a Lions tour. It is an epic event for New Zealand that’s celebrated right across the country, on and off the field. An important part of visiting New Zealand is to get to know the locals and the Lions tour is one of those occasions when everyone comes together to have a fantastic time while watching some great rugby.”

As well as a warm welcome, visitors can expect a diverse range of scenery and a varied cultural experience as they travel throughout New Zealand’s host regions from Whangarei in Northland to Dunedin in the southern region of Otago.

WHANGAREI

The NZ Lions 2017 Series will kick off with a game against a Provincial Union XV side on 3 June at Toll Stadium in Whangarei in the far north of the North Island. Northland has a sub-tropical climate and nowhere is more than 40kms from the sea, making this a marine playground rich in history and culture.

When not watching rugby, fans can explore the surrounding area of Whangarei with Canoe Safaris (www.canoesafaris.co.nz) canoeing journey on the Wanganui River. The canoeing safari takes guests on a unique journey along the river with a local Maori guide, who brings to life the cultural significance of the river whilst telling traditional Maori tales of the past.

AUCKLAND

Auckland is New Zealand's biggest city and boasts the country's largest sporting stadium - Eden Park, the home of Auckland rugby and cricket since 1910. The first and final test matches of the Lions tour will be played here as well as a game against the Blues on 7 June. As part of the 2016 Steinlager Series, New Zealand will play Wales at Eden Park on 11 June 2016.

The sprawling metropolis of Auckland is home to a third of New Zealanders and ranks as one of the top 10 places in the world to live. The blend of harbour, islands, Polynesian culture and modern downtown has created a unique urban outdoors lifestyle.

A must do experience in Auckland is a Sky Walk or Sky Jump from the Sky Tower. At 328 metres high the panoramic views from the Sky Tower are unlike any other available in Auckland.

HAMILTON WAIKATO

Just an hour and a half south of Auckland is the bustling commercial centre of Hamilton - a fast-growing university city and major events centre on the banks of the mighty Waikato River. The region is known for its passionate and enthusiastic rugby supporters and will host a Chiefs vs Lions match at Waikato Stadium on 20 June. The All Blacks will also play Argentina in Waikato on 10 September 2016.

A town for movie lovers, the ultimate Tolkien experience to Middle-Earth is just a short journey away. The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings fans can head to Hobbiton Movie Set where daily tours allow visitors to explore the homes of Frodo and Bilbo.

ROTORUA

Rotorua is New Zealand's oldest tourism destination for visitors attracted by natural hot springs, bubbling mud pools, and active geysers. The city staged the official welcome for the 2005 Lions Tour and visitors for the 2017 Series can expect another rousing welcome to the heartland of Maori culture when the Lions play the Maori All Blacks at Rotorua International Stadium on 17 June.

Rotorua's fascinating landscape provides the backdrop to numerous adventure activities - mountain biking, trout fishing, bathing in natural hot pools, white water rafting, and some world-first experiences like Ogo or Zorbing and Schweeb. Sports fanatics can take in the scenery surrounding Rotorua on a mountain bike adventure with more than 70km of track, only minutes away from the city centre.

WELLINGTON

New Zealand's capital city will host two internationals in 2016 when the All Blacks play Wales on 18 June and Australia in the Investec Rugby Championship on 27 August 2016. The second Lions test will be played in Wellington as well as a mid-week match against the Hurricanes on 27 June.

Westpac Stadium Wellington, which is home to the Wellington Lions rugby team, is within easy reach of the inner city where visitors can enjoy a vibrant mix of lively cafés and restaurants, boutique shopping, heritage buildings, museums and galleries, and entertainment venues.

As New Zealand's 'Craft Beer Capital' a pub-crawl of Wellington's best bars with local beers is a must do. Paired with a selection of restaurants serving fine New Zealand cuisine, Wellington will excite the taste buds of those passing through.

CHRISTCHURCH

The garden city of Christchurch is embracing the chance to welcome players and supporters during the 2017 Lions tour when they play the Crusaders at AMI Stadium on 10 June. The city will also host a game between the All Blacks and South Africa as part of the Investec Rugby Championship on 17 September 2016.

Christchurch is New Zealand's oldest city and the centre the country's largest region, Canterbury - bordered in the west by the Southern Alps and the east by the Pacific Ocean, offering a vast array of outdoor nature and adventure experiences.

As New Zealand's oldest city, Christchurch is overflowing with history and culture with a vibrant arts scene and a wide array of bars, shops and restaurants to explore. A must visit in Christchurch is the 'Cardboard Cathedral' - constructed of just cardboard, wood and steel, the Cathedral was built in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and is a true urban masterpiece.

DUNEDIN

Sport, particularly rugby, is firmly imbedded into Dunedin culture, hardly surprising in the Scottish-rich environment known as the Edinburgh of the south. The city is home to the Highlanders rugby team, the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame and the Forsyth Barr Stadium - the only stadium in the world where grass grows naturally under cover. The Lions will play the Highlanders here on 13 June and Dunedin will also host two other international rugby matches, All Blacks vs Wales on 25 June 2016 in the Steinlager Series, and Australia on 26 August 2017 in the Investec Rugby Championship.

Teaming with heritage attractions and gothic-style Edwardian architecture, Dunedin showcases some of the most unique properties in New Zealand, which are steeped in history. Larnach Castle and Olveston House are a must visit before the rugby begins.

PACKAGES

A selection of Lions Rugby tailor-made packages are available to purchase including the Flight and Ticket Tour 3. Over 24 days rugby fans can explore the regions of New Zealand in between three test matches. The first match will take place at Eden Park, Auckland where the Lions will challenge the reigning world

champions on 24 June 2017. The second match will take place at Westpack Stadium, Wellington on 1 July 2017 where visitors can see the Lions take on the Wallabies. The final of the three matches in this package takes fans back to Eden Park on 8 July 2017 where the Lions will end their tour in a match that's not to be missed.

The Flight and Ticket Tour 3 starts from £2,999 per person and includes flights, tickets to three test matches and a Lions merchandise pack.

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