AUSTRALIAN FILMS:

The Rage in Placid Lake
Just out of prep school -- where he was the target of tyrannical bullies -- misfit teen Placid Lake (Ben Lee) yearns to be a regular Joe. When a mishap lands Placid in a body cast for months, he formulates a plan to reinvent himself by donning a suit and taking a job as a drone at an insurance agency. But he soon discovers that conformity isn't what it's cracked up to be in this offbeat Aussie comedy from rookie director Tony McNamara.

Strictly Ballroom
This quirky, tenderly hilarious romantic comedy is sure to leave you tapping your toes. Directed by Baz Luhrmann, Strictly Ballroom is the off-beat story of a championship ballroom dancer (Paul Mercurio) who breaks all the rules by choosing an ugly duckling dancing partner (Tara Morice). Sweet, funny and original, this is one you won't forget quickly.

The Castle
When plans for an airport expansion threaten the home of Darryl Kerrigan (Michael Caton) and his family, the patriarch refuses to move from his "castle" -- in actuality, a shabby suburban tract house. Darryl rallies the troops and takes his battle to the highest court in Australia. This irreverent, warm-hearted comedy is frequently compared to The Full Monty.

The Dish
July 1969. Neil Armstrong is about to walk on the moon, and everyone's eyes are riveted to their TV screens. In Parkes, Australia, a radio dish antenna is slated to receive Apollo 11’s video feed and send that historic sight out to the world … that is, if the Australian staff (including pipe-smoking, absent-minded scientist Sam Neill) and their NASA supervisor (the tense, by-the-book Patrick Warburton) don't make any mistakes!

Rabbit Proof Fence
Australia's aboriginal integration program of the 1930s broke countless hearts -- among them, those of young Molly (Evelyn Sampi), Gracie (Laura Monaghan) and Daisy (Tiana Sansbury), who were torn from their families and placed in an abusive orphanage. Without food or water, the girls resolve to make the 1,500-mile trek home. Meanwhile, a well-intentioned tracker is trying to return the girls to the authorities.

Muriel's Wedding
Misfit Muriel (Toni Collette) has always escaped life by listening to ABBA ditties and dreaming about marriage. After she and her carefree friend Rhoda (Rachel Griffiths) leave small-town Porpoise Spit, Australia, behind them, the chance to fulfill her wedding fantasies comes along in the form of a hunky swimmer (Daniel Lapaine) looking for Aussie citizenship. At long last, her storybook dreams have come true … or have they?

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert
Drag queens Mitzi (Hugo Weaving) and Felicia (Guy Pearce) team up with transsexual Bernadette (Terence Stamp) on a trip across Australia in a pink bus named Priscilla. Along the way, the friends change into their most outrageous costumes and put on lip-synch performances to popular disco tunes (including plenty of ABBA) for locals in the outback. They eventually make enough money to get to the next town, defeating homophobia as they go.

Mandatory Book for anyone studying in Australia:
“In a Sunburned Country” Bill Bryson
Bill Bryson follows his Appalachian amble, A Walk in the Woods, with the story of his exploits in Australia, where A-bombs go off unnoticed, prime ministers disappear into the surf, and cheery citizens coexist with the world's deadliest creatures: toxic caterpillars, aggressive seashells, crocodiles, sharks, snakes, and the deadliest of them all, the dreaded box jellyfish. And that's just the beginning, as Bryson treks through sunbaked deserts and up endless coastlines, crisscrossing the "under-discovered" Down Under in search of all things interesting.
NEW ZEALAND FILMS:

The Whale Rider
Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. A Maori tribe must contend with the distinctly non-traditional concept of having a female leader when young Pai's (Keisha Castle-Hughes) twin brother -- the intended heir to the throne -- dies during childbirth. Now, she must struggle to prove herself. Stars Rawiri Paratene, Vicky Haughton, Cliff Curtis and Grant Roa. Written and directed by Niki Caro.

Once Were Warriors
Does love conquer all? Maybe not, at least according to Once Were Warriors, a disturbing drama directed by Lee Tamahori and based on Alan Duff's novel of the same name. Her marriage a shambles and her psyche bruised and betrayed, a woman fights tooth and nail to keep her family intact.

Worlds Fastest Indian
Based on a true story, this drama follows 67-year-old grandfather and New Zealander Burt Munro (Anthony Hopkins) as he flies across Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats and blazes into the record books at 183.586 mph on his customized Indian Scout motorcycle. Set in 1967, this film is the second pairing for Hopkins and writer-director Roger Donaldson (Cocktail, Thirteen Days), who also worked together on The Bounty (1984).

The Piano
It is the mid-nineteenth century. Ada is a mute who has a young daughter, Flora. In an arranged marriage she leaves her native Scotland accompanied by her daughter and her beloved piano. Life in the rugged forests of New Zealand's South Island is not all she may have imagined and nor is her relationship with her new husband Stewart. She suffers torment and loss when Stewart sells her piano to a neighbour, George. Ada learns from George that she may earn back her piano by giving him piano lessons, but only with certain other conditions attached. At first Ada despises George but slowly their relationship is transformed and this propels them into a dire situation.

In My Father’s Den
Paul, a prize-winning war journalist, returns to his remote New Zealand hometown due to the death of his father, battle-scarred and world-weary. For the discontented sixteen-year-old Celia he opens up a world she has only dreamed of. She actively pursues a friendship with him, fascinated by his cynicism and experience of the world beyond her small-town existence. But many, including the members of both their families, frown upon the friendship and when Celia goes missing, Paul becomes the increasingly loathed and persecuted prime suspect in her disappearance. As the violent and urgent truth gradually emerges, Paul is forced to confront the family tragedy and betrayal that he ran from as a youth, and to face the grievous consequences of silence and secrecy that has surrounded his entire adult life.

Boy
Boy is the unsettling story of a young male prostitute, or Rent Boy, in a small rural town who learns the truth behind a hit and run accident which has killed a local girl. When the news of the girl’s death spreads through the community, the driver and his family decide that the boy must be silenced. The set out to scare him into silence. The pressure becomes more and more violent, but despite this, the boy battles to expose the truth.

Black Sheep
An experiment in genetic engineering turns harmless sheep into blood-thirsty killers that terrorize a sprawling New Zealand farm.

Scarfies
Five Otago University students (‘Scarfies’) decide to squat in an empty house. They discover a locked room that holds a hidden treasure - a large quantity of marijuana. What happens when the cash-strapped students decide to become amateur druglords for the week? And what exactly should they do about the owner of the crop?

Shark vs. Eagle
Eagle vs Shark is the tale of two socially awkward misfits and the strange ways they try to find love; through revenge on high-school bullies, burgers, and video games.

Heavenly Creatures
Based on the true story of Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, two close friends who share a love of fantasy and literature, they conspire to kill Pauline's mother when she tries to end the girls' intense and obsessive relationship.

Her Majesty
Her Majesty is a 2005 coming of age film about a young girl who realizes her lifelong dream when Queen Elizabeth II comes to visit her small hometown.

Flight of the Conchords
Flight of the Conchords is a Grammy award winning New Zealand-based comedy duo composed of Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement. Billing themselves as "formerly New Zealand's fourth most popular guitar-based digi-bongo acapella-rap-funk-comedy folk duo", the group uses a combination of witty observation, characterization and acoustic guitar music. The duo's comedy and music became the basis of a BBC radio series and then an American television series, which premiered in 2007 on HBO, also called Flight of the Conchords.

Mandatory Book for anyone studying in New Zealand:

Come on Shore and We Will Kill and Eat You All: A New Zealand Story
In this unusual hybrid of history and memoir, Harvard Review editor Thompson examines the historical collisions between Westerners and Maoris through the lens of her marriage to a Maori man. As an American grad student in Australia, Thompson met her husband-to-be, known as Seven, while on vacation in New Zealand. She was petite, blonde and intellectual; he was large, dark and working-class. Yet within a short time, they had married and started a family. Their relationship, and her scholarship, took them back and forth across the Pacific, until they finally settled in her family's New England home outside Boston. Thompson's deep knowledge of the history of Europeans in the Pacific allows her to trace the misunderstandings and stereotypes that have marked perceptions of Polynesians up to the present day. A sensitive observer and polished stylist, Thompson is never dullly tendentious or dogmatic. The narrative moves smoothly by way of well-told anecdotes both personal and historical.