

REBUILDING

A shaken city finds its feet

Christchurch is picking up the pieces, writes **Jessica Gardner.**

While many of Christchurch's heritage buildings and its cathedral were lost after February's earthquake, Tim Hunter, head of the city and region's tourism body, is at pains to correct one misconception about the city's facilities.

"We actually have about 8000 beds in commercial accommodation, which is about 56 per cent of what we had before the quake," Hunter says.

Although there are still places to stay, about two-thirds of the city's hotel-type accommodation is out of action. Some hotels are still standing and structurally sound, but are located in the centre of the city, the hardest hit and still inaccessible "red zone".

The Millennium Hotel falls into this category. Unfortunately, the Hotel Grand Chancellor, also in the centre, has been marked for demolition. The George, a boutique five-star hotel located on the edge of Hagley Park and golf course was a lucky survivor. It is one of the better hotels still



Christchurch Art Gallery. Photo courtesy Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

operating, although it is in demand.

The seven Rugby World Cup matches slated for Christchurch were rescheduled after assessments of the city's stadium showed it would require repairs. Nonetheless, the city will host a fan zone during the tournament.

Outside the city centre, the Christchurch Art Gallery suffered little damage and will

reopen as soon as it is no longer needed to house government departments. The botanic gardens and green expanse of Hagley Park are largely untouched, except for some uneven ground due to soil liquefaction.

On a sunny day it is a perfect place for strolling couples, frolicking families and snoozing backpackers.

ACCOMMODATION



Otahuna outlasts quakes

The lodge may be a century old but its charm endures, writes **Marguerite Winter.**

"It's lovely to have the lodge looking like its old self again," Hall Cannon says. Then adds, in what can only be described as understated grace under fire: "If there is a good side to this, it's that we had done all this three years ago and so we had those [rebuilding] relationships already in place."

When the Christchurch earthquake of September last year hit the 100-year-old Otahuna, just 30 minutes' drive north of the city, it had been only three years since Cannon and partner Miles Refo had completed a \$10 million

restoration of the 100-year-old Queen Anne house, now a lodge, that had it looking its "old self" again - plus some.

It took the former Manhattan pair four months to get Otahuna operational again and, just after they reopened, it took another, less severe hit in the February quake. The house sustained minor damage to interior plastering.

Now, in an indication of the owners' commitment to New Zealand tourism and their much-awarded enterprise, Otahuna has again reopened its very elegant doors and is once again doing **Continued next page**

NEW ZEALAND SPECIAL QUEENSTOWN



Adventure on the quiet

The gentler side of thrill-seeking holds its own attractions and fears, writes Hannah Tattersall.

It's not that the gondola ride to the top of the mountain isn't exciting, or that the views from Bob's Peak aren't spectacular once you get there. It's just that once you're up the top of Queenstown's famous skyline, the only way back is down. Our chosen way down on this cool, sunny autumn afternoon is via Ziptrek Ecotours – a flying fox that zooms tourists through the treetops on Bob's Peak. We pause at trunks along the way to learn about flora and fauna in the region – the difference between the introduced Douglas fir tree and the native beech, for example. With our belongings piled into a rucksack and carried down the mountain by a very capable tour guide, we too must be harnessed and hoisted onto the fox to fly. We are scared out of our wits. (When I say we, I actually mean just me, for my Ziptrek companions, two retirees from Texas, appear to have no sense of fear.)

I'm reminded of an episode of *Mr Bean* where he goes to the swimming pool. He thinks he can dive from the highest diving board but when he gets to the edge he panics and can't jump off. Well this is a bit like that.

Once the two Texans had their go, flying off the podium with squeals of delight (one even doing

tricks and twirls along the way) it's my turn. The smug Southerners are watching, waiting for me to jump.

Eventually, of course, I do, and I jump again and again, whooshing through the trees until we reach the bottom of the mountain. At one point I come close to enjoying it.

When I ask people around town what they think of the Ziptrek, the general reaction is that it is lighter on adventure than say, helicopter riding; has less thrill than bungee jumping; and, compared with white-water rafting, river surfing or skiing, is considered boring. Of course it's not, but for those thrill-seeking, adrenalin-junkie types for whom Queenstown is the best thing since the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, it's lame.

But it's adventure enough for me.

Situated in Central Otago, Queenstown is often considered a winter holiday destination famous for its peaks, including the stupendous Remarkables.

According to New Zealand's last census in 2006, Queenstown and surrounding towns – Arrowtown, Glenorchy and Kingston – have a permanent population of about 17,000, but the area lures up to 1.89 million visitors a year in summer and winter, many international. It's why standing in line at the popular Fergburger shop, you'll hear myriad accents and languages spoken.

And for those, like me, who lack the extreme sports gene, Queenstown does offer more than just over-the-top adventure.

Along with *Lord of the Rings*, Hollywood blockbusters *X-Men*

Origins and *Wolverine* were also filmed around Queenstown and it's easy to see why – breathtaking scenery greets you at every turn.

I am met at Queenstown Airport by concierge service Black ZQN and affable local guide – and film director, fishing expert and raconteur – Roger Tomkins, who drives us out of town and along the Glenorchy Road. We stop at Bennett's Bluff to take in the view: over spectacular Lake Wakatipu, across to Pig and Pigeon Islands, to the mouth of the Greenstone River with the Dart and Rees rivers beyond. In the distance

stand the snowcapped peaks of Mt Aspiring and Mt Earnslaw.

(You can book a helicopter from Queenstown to Milford, taking in the scenic Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks, but note that rides can be cancelled or postponed depending on weather.)

Black ZQN provides cars and guides for travellers who want to go off the beaten track – they can drive through rivers and ranges you wouldn't otherwise explore. It can book accommodation and activities with some access to private land and local identities.

A short drive later, we're in Arrowtown. This old gold town nestled below the Crown Range is like something out of a book. A number of cafes (Provisions cafe is famous for its sticky scones with raisins), restaurants and shops are here for tourists to explore and the autumn leaves are glorious.

One can't write about Queenstown without mentioning golf and there are many courses to choose from, including jeweller Michael Hills' private course, The Hills – home of the New Zealand Open. Remarkables Golf Tours will pick you up from your hotel and take you to any or each of the top five 18-hole golf courses in the area (plus surrounding ones as well). They also offer Australian-affiliated rate packages.

We play at Jack's Point, an 18-hole, par 72 championship course set against the Remarkables – the only mountains in the southern hemisphere with both north- and south-facing peaks. Remarkables Golf Tours' guide Tim Kershaw says in addition to The Hills and the 175-room hotel and 27-hole

Around Queenstown, breathtaking scenery greets you at every turn.



Twirls of fun... a straight descent isn't enough for some on Ziptrek's flying fox.

Peace descends on Lake Wakatipu. Photos Hannah Tattersall

NEED TO KNOW

RUGBY WORLD CUP GAMES

September 18: Classic All Blacks v French Classics, Queenstown Recreation Ground, kick-off 2.30pm. The Southern host cities of Invercargill and Dunedin are within a two- to six-hour drive from Queenstown.

WHERE TO STAY

The Spire Hotel

Boutique hotel in the centre of town with luxury service and views of Lake Wakatipu and mountains. Best gin and tonic in town at No5 bar. thespirehotels.com

Eichardt's Private Hotel

Queenstown's premier lakefront address with views of the lake and nearby mountain ranges. Eichardt's Bar is a popular haunt. eichardtshotel.co.nz

Hilton Queenstown

Situated on Lake Wakatipu and 10 kilometres from town, the hotel has Queenstown's largest spa and a 25-metre indoor heated lap pool. hilton.com

DIRECT FLIGHTS

Pacific Blue has direct flights to Queenstown from both Sydney and Brisbane three times a week. Qantas flies direct from Sydney on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

course Milbrook Resort, Jack's has put Queenstown on the golfing map. Here hang-gliders swoop from the rocky mountain above as we walk and cart our way through tussock grasslands to the edge of Lake Wakatipu.

Even Jack's restaurant has extraordinary views – and a vast wine list (there are 200 vineyards in the Central Otago region).

Continuing the search for quieter pastimes, on a lazy afternoon Tomkins and I trundle off for a spot of fly-fishing. The sun at dusk casts long shadows into the rocky mountains, which, at this time of day, have a ruffled, crinkly appearance. The air is numbingly still and the only sounds are of Tomkins and me, clad in oversized boots, coldstream waders and jackets, attempting to catch trout. Although we fail to catch a single fish, the hardest part is getting out of the waders; it may not have been a thrill-seeking, adrenalin-heavy trip to Queenstown, but it certainly was an adventure.

Otahuna outlasts two earthquakes



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what it does best, catering to discerning travellers from near and far, now with 100 per cent seismic compliance for the lodge.

No one, neither guests nor staff, was hurt in either quake, which also left the 12-hectare garden of national significance with its magnificent old trees and period outbuildings mercifully intact. But the distinctive chimneys that give the house much of its character collapsed during the upheaval.

Extraordinarily, the restoration has managed to recreate all the whimsy and quirkiness of the original in a much lighter, quake-compliant structure and the finish of the building's interiors are again in mint condition.

Teams worked around the clock during the restoration, an effort that had got under way within hours of the September eruption. "By 10.30 that morning we had put into place an emergency action plan for Otahuna," Cannon says.

"By Monday morning, the first crane was dispatched from Christchurch to begin removing rubble off the roof; we had appointed teams of removalists to move all the furniture and artworks into shipping containers we had assembled on the front driveway.

"And during that week, we appointed the contractor to begin rebuilding the chimneys, and restoration specialists for the

interiors." Cannon and Refo kept all staff during the rebuild. "A lot of our housekeeping team worked in the gardens for the four months and the grounds have never looked better," Cannon says.

"(Our chefs) remained in-house and prepared lunch and tea for anywhere up to 50 workers a day. It's very much a part of what we are about; looking after our own people because they look after our guests... and us as well."

There were four (Australian) guests in the house at the time of the first quake and the team's first efforts were directed towards getting them comfortably on their way home. And Australia has been an important market for Otahuna, Cannon says. "There's an

awareness that we've got these great properties that are completely different to anything at home and that are so easy to get to. So many Australians come to Otahuna just for a long weekend break."

The lodge is now welcoming back old friends and a few new ones who were unaware of either the quake or that the house had suffered damage. "The remarkableness of it all for us is that we found that people really understand that, anywhere in the world, you can experience a natural disaster," Cannon says.

"No one has said anything negative. From a business point of view, we certainly don't see any long-term concerns."