

# SHAKEN BUT NOT STIRRING

Christchurch has had its share of setbacks with the earthquake destruction.

**Jenny Caspersenn** takes a drive through the Canterbury region to confirm that it's open and ready for business.

**A**FTER TWO EARTHQUAKES, a lot of love and much hard work, stately Otahuna Lodge is once again welcoming guests to its gracious grounds. Dedicated proprietors Hall Cannon and Miles Refo have spent the best part of 12 months restoring the already restored Queen Anne-style Lodge 20 minutes from Christchurch. The first of Christchurch's earthquakes in September 2010 damaged all 11 of Otahuna's brick chimneys. Painstaking and expensive repairs were almost complete when the second, more devastating, quake hit in February 2011. Fortunately seismic strengthening had already been undertaken and ensured the Lodge sustained only moderate damage.

The reopening of Otahuna in August was a boost for a dispirited local tourism economy. Christchurch Airport is considered the gateway to New Zealand's beautiful South Island and although it was not affected, visitor numbers to the region declined significantly.

According to its Maori name, Otahuna is the "little hill among the hills" with views over its 30 acres of historic gardens, orchards and farmland across the plains to the majestic Southern Alps beyond. It is the largest private historic residence in the country and is recognized as a Category 1 New Zealand Historic Places Trust Landmark. Otahuna was built in 1895 for pioneer Sir Heaton Rhodes who lived there for more than 60 years. Sir Heaton was a long-term parliamentarian and member of the military and was also a philatelist and a devoted horticulturalist.

After purchasing Otahuna in 2005 New York residents Cannon and Refo set about reinvigorating the house and recreating Otahuna's gardening and agricultural history, even honouring Sir Heaton's great passion for daffodils by reviving the open garden Daffodil Day charity fundraiser in September each year.

The Lodge has seven suites. Decadently generous in size, the rooms feature many





**LUXE LODGINGS**  
**Opposite page:**  
**historic Otahuna**  
**Lodge survived the**  
**Christchurch quakes.**  
**Clockwise from left:**  
**relax on Otahuna's**  
**sunny balcony;**  
**Terrace Downs is at**  
**the base of Mount**  
**Hutt; Otahuna's**  
**famous gardens.**

original features including working fireplaces and late-Victorian timber detailing. During Cannon and Refo's initial renovation and restoration of the house, designer Stephen Cashmore was briefed to use local materials and craftspeople wherever possible. Fascinating remnants of Otahuna's former glory remained intact such as the pressed and gilded wallpaper in the main dining room, miraculously surviving Otahuna's various reincarnations over the decades as a commune and a religious retreat.

It is in the lovely dining room that the talents of the ridiculously cheery Executive Chef Jimmy McIntyre are to be enjoyed. Abundant supplies from Otahuna's gardens where hens, pigs, vegetables, herbs and fruits are to be found, along with premium local ingredients thoughtfully teamed with select local wines by vivacious in-house sommelier Emma, make for an original and super fresh dining adventure. Jimmy decides his menu by choosing the absolute best the garden has on offer on any particular day and guests may even select their own vegetables if they wish.

The impact of the quakes has been felt in different ways in Canterbury. Just 25 kilometres north of Christchurch development in the Pegasus Bay region is continuing at pace. Many affected by the Christchurch quakes are not in a position to rebuild and are embracing the opportunity to relocate. The purpose-built town of Pegasus will account for 23 per cent of "shovel ready" residential land capacity in the Canterbury region. Pegasus will eventually



*"The reopening of Otahuna in August was a boost for a dispirited local tourism economy."*

accommodate up to 7,000 residents and extend to the shores of Pegasus Bay.

Still an easy 40 minutes drive north of Christchurch Airport, visitors arrive at the Waipara Wine Valley. Since planting commenced in the 1980s it is now one of New Zealand's most rapidly expanding wine regions with around 80 vineyards covering more than 1,200 hectares. A variety of premium grapes are being produced including Pinot Noir and Riesling along with Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. With a mandatory cellar door tasting stop it will be difficult to leave without one of the region's notable drops such as the operatically named

Pegasus Bay range.

Northwest through the Waipara Valley is the alpine spa destination of Hanmer Springs known for its geothermal heated water. The therapeutic value of thermal bathing has been noted since Roman times and the award winning Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools and Spa complex includes steam rooms, sauna and treatment rooms for massage and other therapies - a perfect destination for soothing the aches and pains of the Australian Wallabies spending time in Hanmer Springs during the Rugby World Cup.

Just outside town is the Select Braemar Lodge and Spa. With some of the comfiest beds ▶

**CANTERBURY CARRIES ON**  
Clockwise from right:  
the stately entrance hall  
of Otahuna Lodge; Tree  
Houses at Hapuku; sit by  
the fire at Otahuna; snow  
capped peaks seen from  
Braemar Lodge.



*Luxury Travel Magazine* has ever collapsed on, Braemar Lodge offers whisper quiet contemporary suites with splendid views from the terrace of the distant pink snow-capped peaks. There are bar and dining as well as spa facilities at the Lodge but it's also worth venturing into town for dining options such as the quaint Chantellini's Café with its delicious European-inspired menu.

The drive from Hanmer Springs to the coast is a scenic medley of deep ravines and lush green hills. Descending into the coastal town of Kaikoura, the mountains literally meet the sea. Beyond an offshore shelf the ocean depths fall away steeply encouraging the abundance of marine species and earning Kaikoura recognition as a premier eco marine tourism destination. Kaikoura literally translates as "to eat crayfish" and the crayfish industry remains a vibrant part of the local economy. The sperm whales are found year round, along with the distinctive dusky dolphins, albatrosses and fur seal colonies. A highlight is the incredible sight of the Ohau Stream seal pup colony just 20 minutes drive north of town. Each winter hundreds of baby fur seals frolic in the waterfall and freshwater pools of the mountain creeks while their mothers go to sea. The main seal colony - a fascinating but stinking affair - treats curious tourists to the sight of these creatures lolling at close range by the side of the road. At Encounter Kaikoura the Dolphin Encounter boat trip provides the opportunity to suit up and swim with the "duskies" as they are known. The Albatross Encounter is a boat trip where a riot of the world's largest birds can be seen at close range, feeding voraciously on the burley from the back of the boat. What skipper Gary, a devoted local and albatross expert, doesn't know about sea birds is not worth knowing. Nearby the Wings Over Whales charter operation provides a bird's eye view of the majestic sperm whales. Half-hour flights above the bay spot the ocean's biggest mammals and track them like dark torpedoes until they dive to the inky depths.

Accommodation in the area includes upmarket Hapuku Lodge and Tree Houses and the country home hospitality of Fyffe Lodge. What the area may lack in choices for luxury accommodation it makes up for in spectacular scenery and local attractions. A special stop at the iconic Nin's Bin for fresh roadside crayfish is a must.

Driving west from Christchurch one hour, Terrace Downs Resort has a leisure or

adventure activity for everyone. From the 18-hole championship golf course, to a day on the slopes at Mount Hutt ski area just a five-minute chopper ride away, Terrace Downs offers myriad action from its position at the base of Mount Hutt on the edge of the majestic Rakaia Gorge. With a choice of well appointed accommodations from one to four-bedroom suites and chalets guests can rocket around in jet boats, horse ride, mountain bike, fish for salmon and trout, try archery and clay bird shooting or just relax in the Terrace Downs spa. A day skiing one day, 18 holes the next? Bliss.

With three restaurants from which to choose and world-class scenery at the door, this is a one-stop shop action destination.

Just a half-hour drive southeast of Christchurch is the Banks Peninsula, named after Sir Joseph Banks who was Captain Cook's botanist. It is in fact an extinct volcano and its steep circular sides fall dramatically into the depths of the beautiful inlets below. Sixty-three French settlers established the tiny town of Akaroa in 1840. Today Akaroa is recognized as a cultural and historic treasure with its strong French influence and charm. Small cafés, galleries and shops line the bayfront esplanade and here at the Akaroa Cooking School Louise and Anthony Bentley have been showcasing their talents since 2009. A thrilling accolade for this dedicated couple came when Lonely Planet named their cooking school as one of the 10 best places in the world to experience local cuisine. Matching local fine wine with their award winning dining, a day spent there is an educational and inspiring indulgence learning so much more than just cooking technique and recipes.

Needless to say the impact of the quakes has been enormous: structural, financial and emotional. The loss of the opportunity to host Rugby World Cup games with the damage to the AMI stadium was keenly felt. Eventually, however, some good will come from the devastation with the opportunity to rebuild Christchurch better and stronger with community input into final design. While Christchurch regroups and finds a path into the future, the local tourism industry is suffering. It will be years before Christchurch is fully recovered, yet the enchantment of New Zealand remains and Australians should consider a trip there to support the local tourism industry and assist our Kiwi cousins.

**For more information on travel and activities throughout the region visit [christchurchnz.com](http://christchurchnz.com)**

## Where to stay

### OTAHUNA LODGE

Rates: Start from NZ\$1,450 (about A\$1,144) per night for double occupancy. The price includes a five-course degustation dinner with wine pairings, pre-dinner drinks with canapés, full breakfast and laundry services. [otahuna.co.nz](http://otahuna.co.nz)

### SELECT BRAEMAR LODGE & SPA

Rates: The Spa Suite with a private outdoor hot tub can be booked for NZ\$560 (about A\$442) per night for double occupancy and includes a three-course dinner and full breakfast. [selectbraemarlodge.com](http://selectbraemarlodge.com)

### HAPUKU LODGE AND TREE HOUSES

Rates: The Lodge Room is NZ\$490 (about A\$386) per night plus 15 per cent GST, and includes breakfast. [hapukulodge.com](http://hapukulodge.com)

### FYFFE COUNTRY LODGE

Rates: The Superior Room is NZ\$295 (about A\$233) on a per room per night basis and includes a full country breakfast. [fyffecountrylodge.com](http://fyffecountrylodge.com)

### TERRACE DOWNS

Rates: Terrace Villa Suites are priced from NZ\$335 (about A\$264) per suite per night for a one-bedroom option. [terracedowns.co.nz](http://terracedowns.co.nz)

## Getting there & around

Air New Zealand flies direct to Christchurch from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, however, those who wish to travel business class will have to go via Auckland. Return economy fares from Sydney start at A\$396, from Melbourne at A\$491 and from Brisbane at A\$421. Return business class fares from Sydney to Christchurch via Auckland start at A\$2,068, from Melbourne at A\$2,142 and from Brisbane at A\$1,941. A direct flight from Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane to Christchurch is just over three hours, while a flight via Auckland will at least double the travel time. [airnewzealand.com](http://airnewzealand.com)

Once in New Zealand, hiring a car is a convenient way to experience the Canterbury region. Apex Car Rentals offers vehicles from small economic models up to 4WD and full size sedans. Prices start at NZ\$43 (about A\$34) per day for a Mazda Demio model including unlimited kilometres, insurance, airport and hotel transfers, 24 hour AA assistance, maps and touring guides. [apexrentals.co.nz](http://apexrentals.co.nz)

## When to go

The most popular time to visit New Zealand is from November to April as weather conditions are usually perfect for outdoor exploration and there are plenty of food and wine festivals, concerts and sporting events. However, school holidays (particularly from mid-December to early February) can be very busy.