

Designed to bring retail back to the centre of town, Re:START is Christchurch's pop-up mall, built in response to the 2011 earthquake and the first of its kind in New Zealand

The cardboard transitional cathedral has been built to last for 50 years

Re:START mall is built almost entirely from shipping containers, painted in vibrant, positive colours

The New York Times recently ranked the city of Christchurch as second in its list of 52 places to go during 2014

CITY REBORN

John Malathronas takes us on a tour of Christchurch,
New Zealand's most resilient destination

“In the wake of the quake, the response was typical Kiwi: plucky, practical and innovative”

Before the devastation of the 2011 earthquake, Christchurch was basking in its description as the most English of New Zealand cities, while its residents cultivated that image with conviction. The streets were boldly named after shires; its landmark cathedral spire served as a staunch reminder of the people's Anglican heritage; its vast Botanical Gardens were a down-under riposte to the Royal Gardens at Kew.

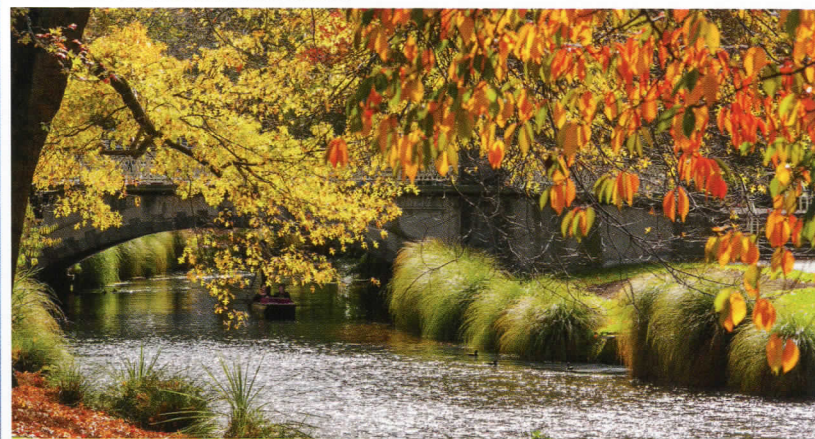
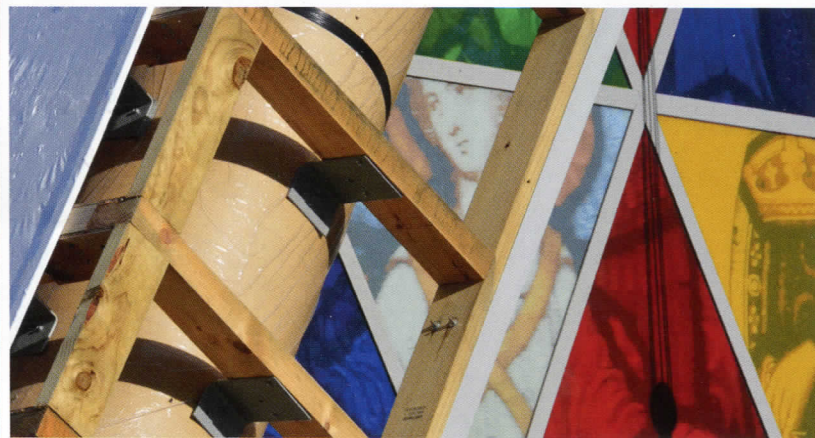
English traditions, from clotted cream teas to boat punting on the river – aptly named Avon – were cherished to the point of exaggeration. Yet, in the wake of the quake, the response was typical Kiwi: plucky, practical and innovative with a healthy dose of quirkiness. You see, beneath the veneer, Christchurch is true to its roots after all.

Its new transitional cathedral on Latimer Square is a tribute to the pure gutsiness and creativity of New Zealanders. The original was seriously damaged, like most buildings in the old Central Business District, so a temporary one was built – out of cardboard.

As the world's only cathedral made out of paper, it has now become a prime tourist attraction in its own right.

Christchurch's cultural scene is still very much alive and kicking, and some of the events are world class. From the infectious busking festival in January to the iconic Cup and Show Week in November, when the city seriously lets off steam, there's always something intriguing going on. Yes, the Arts Centre is undergoing structural repairs that will take several years, but the Canterbury Museum is thriving. Its recent street art exhibition broke all attendance records and included one of the largest private collections of Banksy prints in the world.

But it's the great outdoors that most catches the imagination. Not far from the museum, you can punt and glide along the willows and reeds of the Avon to Hagley Park, a vast green space that has been the city's living lungs since the 1850s. You can take a ride on the Caterpillar, a small electric hop-on hop-off shuttle, for a whistle-stop tour of the spectacular Botanic



Main image The iconic chalice sculpture in Cathedral Square stands tall after surviving the 2011 earthquake
Above, from top The colourful windows and cardboard beams of Christchurch's amazing transitional cathedral; take a punt down the beautiful River Avon, which runs through the city
Below left Beware, penguins crossing

Gardens. Admire the hardy Antarctic daisies, sweat inside a tropical greenhouse or chill at the recently reopened café sipping that most celebrated Kiwi contribution to coffee culture, the flat white, in perfect tranquillity.

The caffeine will power you up for another alfresco expedition: if the weather's good, take the Gondola cable car up to the top of Mount Cavendish for a spectacular view of Christchurch below and the Southern Alps beyond.

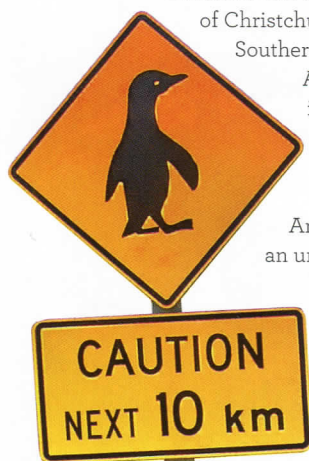
As Christchurch is the gateway to Antarctica, a visit to the International Antarctic Centre is an unqualified must.

Experience an Antarctic storm where the wind chill factor drops to -35°C and

take a ride on the all-terrain Haggglund polar vehicle, a cross between a tank and a mobile rollercoaster. A free shuttle (the Penguin Express) takes visitors to the centre from outside the Canterbury Museum.

Victoria Street is now turning into the new restaurant-and-bar precinct and there are venues opening up there just about every week, but lately it's Latin American flavours that are enticing local palates. Tequila Mockingbird attracts the hipsters while Mexicano's opposite is more old school but no less popular. Nearby a 150-year-old mansion has been fondly restored and is home to Harlequin, a traditional restaurant that prepares seven whole lambs every week in seven different ways.

But hey, if you're not sure what you want, simply wander up and down and see what's available. The continuous regeneration of the city centre means that everything's fluid at the moment, nothing remains still (or gets stale). And this is ultimately the real charm of post-quake Christchurch.



TAKE IT FROM ME

"Everyone who knows Christchurch knows you have to visit Fergburger – they have the best burgers ever, it's hugely popular. Generally, though, Christchurch is just very friendly and the scenery is some of the best in the world. In short, it's amazing."

LISA SUMMERS Australian visitor to post-quake Christchurch

> SEE FOR YOURSELF... To discover more about this remarkable city turn to **pages 14 & 15** for our New Zealand cruises.