



Hagley Park

# Christchurch

In New Zealand's South Island, Christchurch offers language students the best of New Zealand's adventurous way of life, combined with city living. **BETHAN NORRIS** reports.

Located on New Zealand's south island, Christchurch has a reputation as a very friendly place for language students to stay and learn English. Kate Rouse at Languages International says, "The people of Christchurch have a very well-deserved reputation for their approachability, friendliness and interest in visitors to their city. Students frequently comment on how willing locals are to stop and provide help to anyone in need of assistance. And our homestay families always go the extra mile, dropping off and collecting students on their first day at school, taking them on weekend trips and sometimes even taking them on family holidays."

With a population of just half a million, Christchurch has a friendly small town feel despite being the largest city on the south island and the third largest city in New Zealand. It also has a lot of other advantages, according to Jason Hall of Cathedral City Academy. "Christchurch is a wonderful city with beautiful architecture, good public transport, a variety of festivals and friendly locals," he asserts. "The beach is just 15 minutes from the city and the mountains just one hour to the west. There are various adventure-style activities

all within easy reach from Christchurch, whether it be for a day trip, a weekend or even longer."

Most visitors are attracted to New Zealand by the promise of spectacular scenery and a mind boggling array of outdoor activities. Indeed, Christchurch is particularly popular with thrill seekers, given its proximity to Queenstown, which was the home of the first bungee jump. Justin Mastoyo from Geos Christchurch Language Centre says, "Trips to Queenstown are offered on a regular basis, which is the most famous place for adventure activities. Do your bungee jump where it was invented!"

Mastoyo adds that Christchurch is the gateway to the south island and there are many attractions within a short distance of the city. "There's excitement waiting within an hour or two in any direction," he says. "To the east the sheltered bays, sandy beaches, bush clad valleys and the rocky coastline of Banks Peninsula, along with wineries and the French settlers village of Akaroa. To the west, past fertile plains and braided rivers are forested foothills and lakes, leading to the highest mountains in Australasia, the Southern Alps."

The nearby Mount Hutt is a popular destination for ski and snowboarding enthusiasts and at Hanmer Springs, students can take advantage of the health benefits of bathing in the natural thermal springs. Many schools in Christchurch arrange excursions for their students to these places and many others. William Neale at Seafield School of English says that they have a range of unusual excursions laid on for their students including "Maori cultural performances, a Lord of the Rings tour – visiting some of the unusual landscapes where this movie was filmed – surfing, swimming with dolphins, whale watching, caving adventure, swimming in hot alpine springs near Christchurch and long weekend visits to Nelson/Abel Tasman National Park & Queenstown".

Nearby Akaroa, a 90-minute drive away from Christchurch, is a picturesque harbour village, which has an interesting French heritage and a local pod of dolphins that visitors can swim with. Slightly further away at Kaikoura, it is possible to go whale watching in the right season and Sheryl Jackson from Kaplan Aspect says that here, "the Alpine mountains meet the sea and seals gather on the rocks".

However, students don't need to travel from the city to experience some of the area's natural attractions as Christchurch is known as the Garden City and according to Neale, "approximately 10 per cent of Christchurch is either a park or sports ground

and there are around 20 golf courses in or close to Christchurch". Jenny Roberts at King's Education says that their school is located in the heart of the city and students like to make the most of the local parks in their lunch break. "They can enjoy shopping, stroll by the river or in the expansive Hagley Park, do some research in the library or people watch in Cathedral Square."

Roberts adds that evenings in Christchurch are also vibrant and there are a variety of restaurants and cafés for students to meet up with new friends. She adds, "There are also a number of cinemas, with frequent interesting film festivals showing a variety of world cinema." Jackson says that the numerous parks and open spaces also provide opportunities for free evening entertainment. "Throughout the year, the parks and squares offer fun, free entertainment – buskers, musicians, magicians and even the wizard [a local eccentric who makes frequent appearances as a soap box orator dressed as a wizard in Cathedral Square]," she says.

Another important feature of the city is the River Avon, which winds its way through the centre and Judith Koller at Aspiring Language Institute says that the

river is a "special feature for Christchurch residents and tourists alike". Neale adds that canoeing on the river is popular with their students. "The Avon River meanders its way through central Christchurch and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens before passing near our school and out to the sea via a large estuary," he says.

Sport plays a large role in the lives of local New Zealanders and visitors will not be able to avoid supporting the local rugby team. Rouse says that attending a live rugby match is a key activity in their range of programmes for students. "During the week we offer activities as diverse as climbing, surfing, horse riding, cooking, karaoke, pool, salsa and even belly dancing, not to mention the truly cultural experience of watching the famous Crusaders rugby team beat off all the regional and international competition," she enthuses.

Hall adds that sports activities provide an ideal way for students to mix with other students and local people. "Just a month ago, I introduced one of



#### Southern Alps

This stunning mountain range runs along the western side of New Zealand's South Island. Its highest point – Mount Cook (or Aoraki as its known in Maori culture) – reaches some 3,754 metres high



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## Agent viewpoint

"Many of our students want to come to a small and quieter city to start their overseas life and study – some of them want to avoid their busy life in Japan. The image of New Zealand is full of nature and it looks the same as England with beautiful old buildings. Students like visiting the Sunday market and shopping at the mall in Christchurch. They also go swimming and walking on the hills and some students have part-time jobs. Christchurch has good bus services that are free at weekends and it is also easy to walk around. Time goes slowly in Christchurch and it is a beautiful city."

**Teruyo Koizumi, Last Resort, New Zealand**

"Christchurch has a holiday atmosphere – like the UK. The security is maintained well and the price is comparatively cheaper. Also, there are few Japanese students in New Zealand. Students like to relax on a farmstay, walk through nature and participate in sports and whale watching."

**Tomoko Shoda, Geos International Exchange Association, Japan**

"Students enjoy the New Zealand sun at the beach and doing outdoor activities like bungee jumping, canoeing, horse riding and skiing. They also go to the pub, enjoy clubbing on Friday night and have a barbecue party in the park, which is a very unique experience for Korean students. Cathedral Square is one of

the most enjoyable areas. The art centre, Avon River, Cathedral Square Market and the tramway provide a fantastic experience for international students."

**Benett Oh, Welsson, Korea**

"Among the English speaking countries, New Zealand is the cheapest place [apart from] the Philippines. But it's also the safest place with friendly people, especially Christchurch. Christchurch isn't a big city and so people can easily get used to new circumstances. They can enjoy any kind of activities any time. Everything in Christchurch is a short distance away – just 30 minutes by bus – such as the sea, and mountains."

**Gun Kim, Southern View Company, Christchurch**

our Omani students to a local soccer team and now he still plays for the team," he says. "In the summer I introduced some Japanese students to a touch rugby club where some friends played. The Arab students have arranged a soccer league so many of them meet students from other schools – both Arab and non-Arab."

Students with working holiday visas can intersperse their language studies with casual work in New Zealand and Nick Arnott, Sales Manager at Christchurch College of English, located on the campus of the University of Canterbury, says that they offer help to students looking for a job. "Activities and events are tailored to students' needs," he says. "For example, CCEL runs free seminars for students with working holiday visas. Topics include job-hunting, making a CV in English and job interviews."

Whether students decide to work while they are in Christchurch or not, interacting with the local people should not be a problem. As well as the city's renowned friendliness, a recent campaign was introduced in order to encourage more international students to study in the city, according to Tom Hayashi from Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT). "Recently the City council has launched a campaign in conjunction with other education providers including CPIT, the Human Rights Commission and the NZ police to welcome international students to Christchurch," he relates.

### Cathedral square

The city's main meeting point for locals and tourists alike, this square is a real hubbub of noise, culture and art. Set in front of the Anglican cathedral, there's even a giant chessboard for chess enthusiasts!



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