

# Selector



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## master menu

*Justine, Julie and Poh impress in the Selector kitchen*

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ISSN 1445-4343

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# Canterbury tales

THE LUSH COUNTRYSIDE OF THE CANTERBURY PROVINCE SURROUNDING NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND CITY OF CHRISTCHURCH IS FAST EMERGING AS A GOURMET'S DREAM.

Words **Winsor Dobbin**

**L**eafy Christchurch often finds itself overshadowed by bustling Auckland and buzzy Wellington. With the sleepy River Avon winding its way through its core, it closely resembles an English provincial university town and is best explored at a leisurely pace; on foot, by bike or by tram.

As you peel away the layers, the capital of the Canterbury province, dotted with inventive restaurants and chic wine bars, reveals itself as a gourmet's delight. The surrounding countryside, dramatically green, is home to some of the best of New Zealand's famed luxury lodges, and there are some excellent wineries in the Waipara region, just north of the city.

The best base for getting to grips with the city is the boutique, newly refurbished George Hotel, which overlooks Hagley Park and is within easy walking distance of all the main attractions. The George, part of the Small Luxury Hotels group, is also home to two of the city's best

restaurants; the upmarket Pescatore, with its degustation or à la carte menus and the casual 50 On Park.

Other popular city dining destinations include local favourite Saggio di Vino, a restaurant-cum-wine bar with a huge cellar of classy Bordeaux and Burgundy wines, and Annie's Wine Bar and Restaurant at the Christchurch Arts Centre.

Funky newcomer Estudio-S serves Spanish and Middle Eastern influenced dishes and there are dozens of cafés and restaurants jostling for attention in the district known as SOL (south of Lichfield) on the edge of the city.

Restaurant Schwass, Sezn, Minx, Retour on Cambridge Terrace, Speights Ale House, Cook'n' With Gas and Hay's (which specialises in lamb raised on the owner's farm) also have loyal followings, while Two Fat Indians is considered the best of the city's many curry restaurants and Chinwag Eathai is a Thai restaurant that regularly earns plaudits from critics.





Christchurch was settled in 1850 and is now the largest city on the South Island, with a population of over 300,000. It is surrounded by green pastures producing outstanding lamb – which features on many menus, along with local seafood.

Waipara is the best known of the local wine regions but grapes have been grown in the plains around Christchurch since the 1970s, making it one of the oldest grape-growing regions on the South Island. Pinot Noir does particularly well, along with aromatic whites, including Riesling and Pinot Gris.

Waipara is a 45-minute drive north of the city and is part of the Alpine Pacific Triangle. This region stretches north to the crayfish catching port of Kaikoura, New Zealand's best spot for whale watching, and the alpine resort of Hanmer Springs, known for skiing in winter, hiking in summer and its natural hot springs.

The 'must visit' destination in Waipara is Pegasus Bay, whose winery restaurant has been named as the best in New Zealand for the past two years.

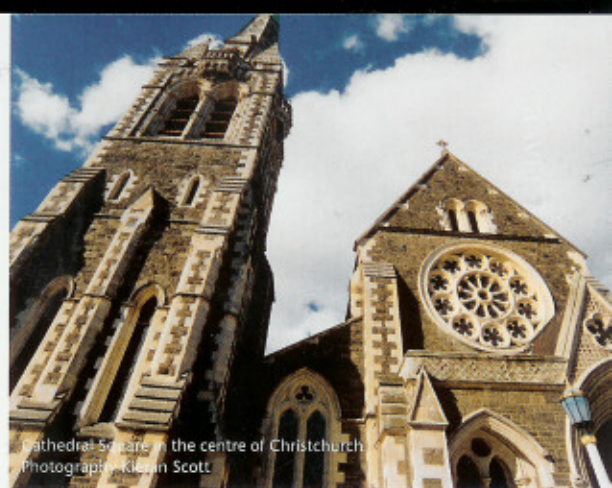
Local produce is the signature of chef Oliver Jackson, often sourced from the property's potager, or from the local farmers' market. Mud House and Waipara Springs also have on-site eateries and Daniel Schuster, Fiddlers Green, Sherwood Estate and Torlesse all offer cellar door tastings.

There are few places to stay – Dunnolly Luxury Vineyard Cottage and Villa is the best option locally. Many visitors simply make a day trip from Christchurch or stay in bed and breakfasts down the road at Amberley, a 10-minute drive away, where Saturday morning farmers' markets are held at the casual Nor'Wester Café.

Outstanding Canterbury wineries include French Farm Winery, at Akaroa, while Langdale Vineyard, Melton Estate, Opihi Vineyard, Rossendale and Tram Road all have cellar door restaurants.

Rossendale is just down the road from the amazing Otahuna Lodge – a magnet for gourmets from around the world. Not only does this magnificently restored old mansion offer sublime luxury, it is also a superb food and wine experience with chef Jimmy McIntyre favouring organic produce and sourcing his herbs and vegetables from his own kitchen-garden.

McIntyre takes guests on autumn truffle hunts in the forests nearby while five-course degustation dinners are available each night featuring wines from the extensive cellar matched with each course. There are also regular



Cathedral Square in the centre of Christchurch  
Photography: Kieran Scott

on-site cooking classes, while the more adventurous can fly via helicopter to the neighbouring Southern Alps ski fields.

Another lovely gourmet experience can be found at the Select Braemar Lodge, an hour past Waipara at Hanmer Springs. The spacious suites have sweeping views of the Southern Alps, while some have their own hot tubs in which to relax after a spa at the on-site facility. In the evening, Altitude restaurant features the modern New Zealand cuisine of chef Nikki Brown, as well as spectacular breakfasts, making it the perfect overnight stop for anyone meandering their way from Christchurch to Marlborough.

## + Info

### Otahuna Lodge

+ Ph: +64 3 329 6333, otahuna.com.

### The George

+ Ph: +64 3 379 4560, slh.com/thegeorge

### Select Braemar Lodge

+ Ph: +64 3 315 7555, selectbraemarlodge.com.



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# Auckland's escape

EVERY MAJOR METROPOLIS HAS ITS LOCAL LAID-BACK HOLIDAY RETREAT – AUCKLAND JUST HAPPENS TO HAVE AN ISLAND TREASURE COMPLETE WITH SANDY BEACHES, VINEYARDS AND GOURMET DELIGHTS.

Words **Winsor Dobbin** Photography **Kieran Scott**

In the wake of the America's Cup, Auckland has developed into a world-class metropolis; a city of well over a million people with myriad activities available day and night. But just a 35-minute ferry ride across the Hauraki Gulf is Waiheke Island – a delightful rural retreat that moves at an altogether slower pace.

Waiheke (it's pronounced Y-hecki) is a blend of farmland, forests, beaches, vineyards and olive groves – and over the

past two decades it has developed into a gourmet hotspot with a range of award-winning wines and country produce.



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The island, which is just over 19 kilometres long and up to 9.5 kilometres wide, has dozens of deserted beaches and is generally warmer than Auckland, which is why many well-to-do residents of New Zealand's largest city spend their weekends and holidays here.

Around 8,000 people live here, but that number swells dramatically over the summer holiday period. Even at peak periods, however, Waiheke has a somnambulant feel. But it is its many local wineries, specialising largely in Bordeaux varieties, that have put it on the tourism map.

Among the other big names are Cable Bay, Te Whau Vineyard, Passage Rock and Te Motu (all of which have on-site restaurants), Stonyridge, Goldwater Estate, Peninsula Estate, Obsidian and newly-opened Italian-themed Podere Crisci. Man O'War is the biggest producer but does not, as yet, have a cellar door.

Te Whau boasts it has 'the finest wine list in New Zealand' and serves Pacific Rim cuisine in the vein of twice-cooked duck with vanilla carrots, oyster mushrooms, apple aioli and duck jus.

There are dozens of small guesthouses and bed and breakfasts if you want to spend a night or two on the island. The luxurious BoatShed, overlooking peaceful Oneroa Bay and with its own gourmet restaurant for residents only, is a favourite with visiting celebrities, particularly the three-level Lighthouse suite.

The Waiheke Island Wine Festival is held annually in February (see [whatsonwaiheke.co.nz](http://whatsonwaiheke.co.nz)). Boutique olive oil producer Rangihoua Estate is worth a visit and the Waiheke Wine Centre is the perfect place to buy some local wine to take home. ■

Left to right: The Waiheke 'blend of farmland, forests, beaches, vineyards and olive groves'; one of the many spectacular views: The Mudbrick Vineyard Cellar Door; a relaxing beach setting in any season.