

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2009

**GOING OUR WAY**  
**Sustainable and affordable?**

How to see Machu Picchu and the Galapagos Islands with minimal disruption. **F3**



**Road Trip** Tens of thousands of bulbs light up a state park. **F2**

**What's the Deal?** Southwest's sale lasts only one more day. **F2**

**The Navigator** Helping readers solve their travel disputes. **F3**

**CHAT** 2 p.m. Monday at [washingtonpost.com/travel](http://washingtonpost.com/travel).

“Every time you look outside your window, you know that a lot is missing.”

—Debi Thomas, Biloxi, Miss., **F6**

**The lingering charms of Christchurch**

BY CLIFF TERRY  
 Special to The Washington Post

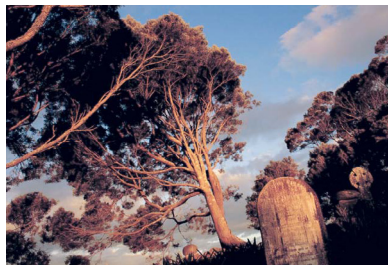
Obviously, it was a very touristy thing to do. But we were ready for a relaxed punting sojourn on the lovely Avon River, with a young man doing all the work as he moved us along with the aid of a long pole.

The punt, of course, is a traditional English flat-bottom boat most famously associated with Oxford and Cambridge, and the 30-minute trip through the beautiful Botanic Gardens in Christ-

church, New Zealand, was a nifty throwback to a more elegant era. It didn't hurt that the weather was nearly perfect, a chamber-of-commerce-like fall day (early April, temperatures in the upper 70s). As Kenneth Grahame wrote in “The Wind in the Willows”: “There is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so worth doing as messing about in boats.”

“I've actually been punt-hijacked,” cracked our pole person. “Some macho tourists are eager to take the boat themselves, and

CITY CONTINUED ON **F4**



The sun sets over a cemetery in Wangamui, on New Zealand's North Island. **F5**

A people photographer takes a break to turn his lens on the otherworldly nature of New Zealand.

**F5**

**Meandering through a ‘Garden City’**

CITY CONTINUED FROM **F1**

so they jump up, grab the pole, and do it.”

No such inclinations on our part. After two weeks of tramping (i.e., hiking) the mountains of New Zealand's spectacular South Island and sea kayaking its lagoons with a group paced by hyper-competitive 30- and 40-year-olds (“It's not a race,” they kept insisting as they charged up mountains and frenetically pedaled down highways), my wife Pat, and I were ready to unwind.

Our base for the next four days would be Christchurch, the largest town (population about 360,000) on the South Island and the only one with an international airport.

When most people think of New Zealand, they envision the rugged scenery. But its cities are also worth exploring, especially Christchurch, known as the Garden City. At first inspection, it seems to be a town of limited charms, its many historical buildings and homes surrounded by hideous examples of sterily modern or outright awful architecture. But after a few days, the place grows on one, mainly due to its centerpiece: the appealing Avon, which meanders through the neighborhoods, winding up at times in unexpected places.

Like Australia's Melbourne, Christchurch — often dubbed the most English of New Zealand cities — is a great place for walking. A good start is the always bustling Christchurch & Canterbury Visitor Centre in Cathedral Square, the heart of the city. A key piece of literature is “Christchurch City Centre Walks,” offering three compact routes that take you to



LOU PIEZZO

most of the essential sights.

A good spot to start exploring is the Arts Centre of Christchurch, a 10-minute walk from Cathedral Square, the bustling heart of the city. The center is a handsome compound of buildings once occupied by Canterbury College (later the University of Canterbury), which was founded in 1873 and modeled after England's Oxford University, with one major difference: It admitted women from the start. In 1975, the growing university moved, leaving the Gothic Revival structures to be occupied by various shops and craftspeople. In the old chemistry building, visitors may

watch artisans at work, turning out high-caliber products such as tapestries, quilts, pottery and wood sculptures.

Other Arts Centre spaces include Rutherford's Den, a multimedia presentation honoring Canterbury scientist Ernest Rutherford, a Nobel Prize winner who did pioneering work on the atom (and who once remarked, “Ions are such jolly little beggars; you can almost see them”). There's also the Te Toi Mana art gallery, selling Maori crafts, and the impressive Cave Rock Gallery, with its propensity for signs such as: “All unattended children will be captured and sold as slaves.”

Also in the Centre are eateries (try the Dux de Lux), theater and dance companies, art-house cinemas, a bookstore and offices housing such organizations as the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. On weekends there's an open-air market filled with vendors staffing stalls selling everything from goat-milk soap to silver spoons bent into imaginative candle holders, along with eclectic buskers — including, one Sunday afternoon, a passable Sinatra impersonator. Free guided tours of the Centre operate daily.

The centerpiece of Cathedral Square, not surprisingly, is the An-



M.K. CANNETRA/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Punting tours along the Avon River offer visitors lovely views of Christchurch.**

and-cream-colored trams. But footing it is best, leading to all kinds of serendipitous discoveries, including such delights as the wonderfully cluttered Smith's Bookshop, crammed with more than 80,000 secondhand books on three floors, including a section on New Zealand authors.

Christchurch is home to myriad and diverse restaurants. We even stumbled across our first-ever Burmese restaurant, the Bochi Tree, on the main thoroughfare, Colombo Street, a five-minute walk from Cathedral Square. The waitress suggested some exotic dishes, all of which were superb, especially the unappetizing-sounding tea salad (pickled tea leaves mixed with garlic, beans, sesame seeds and chili) and tofu thoke (yellow split-pea tossed with salad greens and dressed with tamarind), which drew raves even from confirmed tofu-haters.

Other places we liked included the charmingly funky Cook 'N' With Gas, across from the Arts Centre on Worcester Boulevard; trendy Sticky Fingers (on restaurant-heavy Oxford Terrace across from the Avon River), offering tumbling portions and cutely named drinks; and the bustling Cafe Valentino, across from Bodhi Tree, a favorite of the theatrical set. As for the dress code, no worries. We had dropped in earlier at Sticky Fingers to ask about changing our rather travel-worn clothes, and one waiter cheerfully informed us, “No one dresses up anymore, guys.”

One morning we wandered through the beautiful Hagley Park, following, whenever we

CITY CONTINUED ON **F5**

CITY CONTINUED FROM **F4**

could, the ubiquitous Avon. Locals use Hagley for golf, rugby, tennis and guiding radio-controlled sailboats on a lagoon. Later, a taxi driver told us that Hagley, with its 500 acres, was the third-largest city park in the world behind New York's Central and London's Hyde. He added that, astoundingly, there are about 650 parks in Christchurch, and who were to doubt him?

As for the Botanic Gardens, adjacent to the Canterbury Museum

Antarctic discovery section and information about New Zealand's early colonists.

For the adventurous, all kinds of activities operate out of Christchurch, including hot-air ballooning, jet boating, horse treks, fly-fishing, Clydesdale wagon adventures and bungee jumping.

We took in a few films in audience-friendly cinemas selling wine and beer that you can take to your seat — which, incidentally, helps kill time, because the films invariably start late. In fact, the Kiwis (as New Zealanders

ing harbor with huge container ships and storage tanks. A small, funky little town that reminded us of places in rural Colorado, it has a bustling main street and some nice restaurants. Activities include visiting the historic Timeball Station (where a ball was dropped at precisely 1 p.m. daily for 58 years to provide ships' masters with the correct time), taking walks around the hills and booking a dolphin- or whale-watching cruise.

Earlier, one Sunday evening back in Christchurch, we had attended a service at the cathedral to hear the famed boys' choir. The sermon, delivered by a university professor on the subject of love, noted that many New Zealand men still have difficulty showing emotions, such as hugging. On a more secular level, we learned from others that beer-loving Kiwi men were still reluctant to drink wine, considering it, apparently, a somewhat effete libation.

But during our relaxing outing on the Avon River, our friendly punter wanted to dispel that stereotype, at least on a personal level.

“I drink wine as well as beer,” he confided. “Maybe it's because I run with a different crew. I mean, we can hug anybody!”

[travel.washpost.com](http://travel.washpost.com)

Terry is a Chicago-based freelance writer and a former critic for the Chicago Tribune.

**DETAILS**

**GETTING THERE**  
 United and Air New Zealand have flights from Washington Dulles and BWI to Christchurch with round-trip fares starting at about \$1,700.

**WHERE TO STAY**  
 Eliza's Manor on Bealey 82 Bealey Ave., 011-64-3-366-8584 [www.elizas.com.nz](http://www.elizas.com.nz)  
 This charming, vintage bed-and-breakfast has been a family home for much of its life. Rates start at about \$135.  
 Chateau on the Park Hotel 189 Deans Ave., 011-64-3-348-8999 [www.chateau-park.co.nz](http://www.chateau-park.co.nz)  
 An older hotel surrounded by five acres of landscaped gardens. Rooms start at about \$80.

**WHERE TO EAT**  
 Dux de Lux At Hereford and Montreal streets in the Arts Centre, 011-64-3-366-6919 [www.thedux.co.nz](http://www.thedux.co.nz)  
 The name is Latin for “masters of the finest.” Specializes in pizza \$12 to \$21.

**THE Bodhi Tree** 808 Colombo St., 011-64-3-377-6808  
 Burmese cuisine, featuring such dishes as tea salad and tofu thoke. Dinner only. Dishes range from about \$11 to \$19.

**Cook 'N' With Gas** 23 Worcester Blvd., 011-64-3-377-9166, [www.cookwithgas.co.nz](http://www.cookwithgas.co.nz)  
 Fixed-price offerings at about \$47 a head include grilled salmon, prime filet and belly of pork, as well as a la carte entrees starting at about \$19.

**Sticky Fingers Restaurant & Bar** In the Clarendon Tower, Oxford Terrace, 011-64-3-366-6451 [www.stickyfingers.co.nz](http://www.stickyfingers.co.nz)  
 Offers an extensive menu, from specialty sandwiches such as grilled fish and spiced lamb (\$12) to shared seafood and antipasto platters for four (\$36 to \$43) to entrees priced from \$17 to \$26.  
**Cafe Valentino** 813 Colombo St., 011-64-3-377-1886 [www.cafevalentino.co.nz](http://www.cafevalentino.co.nz)  
 A European-style cafe. Pizza and pasta \$13 to \$18. Entrees such as chicken, beef and veal, \$13 to \$24.

**WHAT TO DO**  
**Arts Centre** 2 Worcester Blvd., 011-64-3-366-0989 [www.artscentre.org.nz](http://www.artscentre.org.nz)  
 Open 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Free.  
**Smith's Bookshop** 133 Manchester St.,

011-64-3-797-976 [www.smithsbookshop.co.nz](http://www.smithsbookshop.co.nz)  
 Open Monday through Friday 10:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Saturday from 10:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Closed Sundays.

**Canterbury Museum** Rolleston Avenue and Worcester Boulevard, 011-64-3-366-5000 [www.canterburymuseum.com](http://www.canterburymuseum.com)  
 Free, donations appreciated. Open daily except Christmas 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., October through March, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. April through September.

**ChristChurch Cathedral** Cathedral Square, 011-3-366-0046 [www.christchurchcathedral.co.nz](http://www.christchurchcathedral.co.nz)

**Antigua Boat Sheds** 2 Cambridge Terr., 011-64-3-366-0337 [www.punting.co.nz](http://www.punting.co.nz)

For punting on the Avon. Offers 30-minute tours; adults \$14, children to 15 \$7, children younger than 5 free. Hours, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 1 to Sept. 30; 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Oct. 1 to April 31.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
 Christchurch City Council [www.christchurch.org.nz](http://www.christchurch.org.nz)  
 Christchurch & Canterbury Visitor Centre [www.christchurchnz.com](http://www.christchurchnz.com)

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