

EATING OUT IN CHRISTCHURCH

The restaurant and café scene in Christchurch is notable for its great variety and, also, because its eateries are dotted all over the city. Most are fairly central, hence close to the city's many hotels but, unless you phone for a reservation, you may save yourself some time by deciding in advance which part of the city to head for, using our area guide. Eating places are listed in no particular order, following the general descriptions below:

Cathedral Square is right in the centre of Christchurch. The Anglican Cathedral, on fine days, looks out on a craft market, food stalls and, for free entertainment, buskers and "soapbox orators", including the Christchurch Wizard. Hotels that fringe the square all have restaurants.

Worcester Boulevard and the Arts Precinct stretches west from the cathedral to the museum, housing several important arts facilities, including the eye-catching new Art Gallery. Designed by the Buchan Group, an Australian company, its wavy façade makes it one of the most stunning buildings in the city. On the opposite corner is the Arts Centre. Once the University College of Canterbury, its collection of neo-Gothic buildings and courtyards contains numerous restaurants, cafes and pubs.

Worcester Boulevard is one of the best areas to experience Canterbury cuisine, which uses the best the province can produce. Ingredients include lamb, cervena (venison), seafood, especially salmon, lobster, groper, monkfish and blue cod, and cheese and fresh fruit and vegetables. There are numerous smokehouses dotted across the region, producing exotic foods like smoked emu and ostrich.

Gloucester Street links with Cathedral Square through a narrow lane, where there are a number of very cheap Asian takeaway restaurants. Some are clustered around Chancery Court where, on winter days, a gas fire sparkles in the grate. Out on the street is a great mix of restaurants, many of them very modestly priced. Here you can go from one to the other and pick your cuisine.

New Regent Street running between Armagh Street and Gloucester Street, is one of Christchurch's most attractive streets. Its numerous small, linked buildings with their fancy décor and upper balconies were designed in Spanish Mission style in the early 1930s. It is the only street in New Zealand designed as an entity and it lends itself to small cafes and restaurants where you can relax with a coffee or a meal.

Armagh Street, Kilmore Street and Colombo Street is part of town dominated by its closeness to the Town Hall and the Convention Centre. Both before and after the shows presented there, you may find members of the orchestra or performers in some of the cafes.

The Strip, Oxford Street - an area alongside the River Avon between Hereford street and Cashel Mall, where tables line a sidewalk that's been enlarged, reducing the road in front to a single lane. The restaurants form a continuous line and you can wander past, look at their menus and finally decide on the one that most interests you. In fine weather, guests dine out of doors. Later in the evening many of these restaurants become nightclubs with live music.

Colombo, Cashel, High, Hereford and Lichfield Streets are major shopping streets, lying parallel to the square and linked by small lanes that run between them. Amongst the major retail shops are hotels, restaurants, cafes, nightclubs and bars.

Manchester Street runs parallel to Colombo Street and is where the less orthodox nightlife is found. Bars here open late. But there is also an excellent range of restaurants, many of them inexpensive.

Victoria Street - another area of cafes, restaurants and bars. Some of the cafes only open at lunchtime to cater for the office workers nearby, but there are also some excellent restaurants and even an all night pub.

Cathedral Square

O.G.B Restaurant

In the Heritage Hotel
Tel: 363 0895

Famous for its specially crafted sauces, served with good Canterbury lamb. There are usually three lamb options - rack, grilled or rump - on the menu. O G B also serves fresh seafood, scallops and Australian prawns.

Piko Piko

At the Millenium Hotel
14 Cathedral Square

Tel: 365 1111

One of the city's few true fusion restaurants. Its free-range chicken is flavoured with lemongrass and coriander. Pan-fried snapper is served on sticky black coconut rice. The restaurant has won awards for its lamb cuisine. It also offers an Aotearoa set menu (\$US30) that features New Zealand ingredients served in an innovative way.

The Tram

Tel: 366 7511

A unique Christchurch dining experience is to be had the heritage tram as it circles the central city. Guests climb aboard at Cathedral Square at 7.30 pm. All meals are prepared on board and the tram has all facilities. Reservations are essential as the tram carries only 36 diners.

Elsewhere on Cathedral Square

For those who want a quick coffee, Starbucks have an outlet in the Square. As well, the cathedral has a café where coffees, teas, breakfasts and lunches are served.

Worcester Boulevard - the Arts Precinct.

Cook 'n' with Gas

23 Worcester Boulevard

Tel: 377 9166

Winner of a heap of awards for both its wine and the promotion of New Zealand food. Menus change regularly and the dishes are imaginative. There's also a table d'hôte menu of three courses (\$55 per head) that includes popular dishes from the a la carte menu like the heritage beef and hot smoked salmon.

Annie's Wine Bar and Restaurant

The Arts Centre

Tel: 365 0566

At Annie's the emphasis is on good food and wine and you can still get a main course for under \$30. Specialities of the house are local salmon and lamb, enhanced by the chef's special ingredients. Many dishes are created to complement the wine, particularly the speciality bottles from boutique vineyards. Annie's is popular with locals.

Curator's House

Rolleston Avenue

Tel: 379 2252

Unusually set in what was the 1920s Curator's House at the edge of the Botanic Gardens, this restaurant concentrates on New Zealand food but serves it with a Spanish flavour. Paella, a specialty of the house, contains a rich mix of seafood. Another popular dish is Zarzuela de Mariscos, a great blend of seafood - salmon, white fish, mussels and King Prawns. The restaurant has its own garden and teaches how such a garden can be used to create top class cuisine.

Le Bon Bolli

*cnr Worcester and Montreal Streets
Tel: 374 9444*

Downstairs is a brasserie that is very popular with theatregoers. Here there are always evening specials as well as an extensive a la carte. The meals tend to be lighter.

Upstairs, there is a separate fine dining restaurant. Entrees of scallops, cuttlefish and quail breast are followed by your choice of venison, grouper, veal, lamb and salmon, often with French style sauces.

Alchemy

*Christchurch Art Gallery
Worcester Boulevard*

Tel: 941 7311

Again the emphasis is Canterbury produce served in imaginative ways. There are a variety of salads, including a smoked chicken and an Akaroa salmon where the salmon has been cured in tequilla and lime.

50 on Park

*The George Hotel
50 Park Terrace
Tel: 379 4560*

A true hotel restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The menu is changed every four months. The emphasis is on Canterbury produce and there are dishes like grilled swordfish, roast loin of Canterbury lamb and Akaroa salmon.

Pescatore Seafood Restaurant

*The George Hotel
Tel: 379 4560*

One of the city's best-regarded seafood restaurants, famous for its starters of oysters and main courses featuring lobster, tuna, salmon and grouper. But the restaurant is not dedicated solely to seafood - lamb is also served. The restaurant also offers a degustation menu.

The Arts Centre

Home to a number of cafes that serve everything from coffees to full meals. Best known is Le Café (Tel 366 7722). On fine days most people sit in the outside courtyard. Backstage, close to the rehearsal rooms of the Court Theatre, is popular with artists who work at the Arts' Centre. It has good coffee and excellent bread baked on site. In winter it is famous for its soups.

Gloucester Street

Just off the street, The Garage (Tel 379 8298) offers selections with names like Engine Boosters, Workshop Grills and Kombi Salads. Beyond is the Marina Restaurant (Tel 366 1898) specialising in Shanghai cuisine. Portions are generous and there's a great choice, many main courses reasonably priced at under \$20.

Above these restaurants is the Chancery (Tel 366 0250), serving a three-course traditional Kiwi roast dinner for \$17.25, a meal that's very popular with travellers.

Just beyond that is the Kaze (Tel 366 1038), a Japanese restaurant with a wide range, including sushi, sashimi, tempura, teriyaki.

On the corner with Columbo street is Mums (365 2211) a Japanese and Korean restaurant with a tempting display of dishes in the window. Among them are Bul go gee, Stone Bowl Rice and Teriyaki Chicken.

New Regent Street

The Blue Note Bar and Restaurant

*20 New Regent Street
Tel: 379 9674*

Specialising in Mediterranean and Pacific rim cuisine, for example, ostrich, served in two ways as a hot pot with boysenberries or a pan-seared steak with Greek salad. There are also a number of reasonably priced pastas.

Little India

*Cnr New Regent and Gloucester streets
Tel: 377 7997*

Focusing on food from the Punjab, so you'll find Tandoori kebabs, kormas and a favourite Murg Mumtaz (butter chicken). A wide-ranging vegetarian selection includes dishes such as Palak Paneer and Paneer Shimla Mirch.

Among the coffee bars is the Daily Grind (Tel 3774959), Café Stir (Tel 371 7217 and Pronto Nachos café (Tel 366 4676).

Armagh Street, Kilmore Street and Colombo Street

This part of town is influenced by its closeness to the Town Hall and the Convention Centre. Both before and after the shows you may find members of the orchestra or performers in some of the cafes.

Boaters

*Within the Town Hall
Tel: 363 3316*

Run by the first-year students of the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. The menu is limited, prices are deliberately kept low and the restaurant is nearly always full. It is almost impossible to get a table here unless you book well in advance.

Retour

*Cambridge Terrace, on the banks of the Avon
Tel: 365 2888*

The intimate atmosphere of Retour is due to its location in an historic 1912 band rotunda with seats for only 45 people. The cuisine is modern New Zealand with European influences. Local ingredients are used in a constantly changing menu.

Café Valentino

*813 Colombo Street
Tel: 377 1886*

Everyone's favourite Italian restaurant, with a great range of choices. Salads, pastas and vegetarian dishes are specialities. Everything is prepared on the premises, even the breads. The atmosphere is like a European theatre cafe and it has the most wonderful series of old film posters on the walls.

Indochine

*209 Cambridge Terrace
Tel 365 7323*

A Euro-Asian blend of food specially designed by Tony Astell and his team. There are elements of Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese blended with European in the mix. A lot of seafood used, as well as lamb, beef and pork. The ambience is bistro-brasserie.

Cafes in this part of Christchurch include Café Metro (Tel 366 4067) a real theatre café serving on coffees and desserts.

There is also a choice of ethnic restaurants - four Thai restaurants in Colombo Street as well as the Bodhi Tree (Tel 377 6808) which specialises in Burmese cuisine. Among its more exotic dishes are Pazum Jo (prawns) and Pet Tohe (pork). Another, Sala Thai (Tel 365 5447) serves not only Thai but also Lao food.

Along the river

Santorini Greek Ouzeri

*Cnr of Cambridge Tce and Gloucester Street
Tel: 379 6975*

Features Greek cuisine and music. Popular dishes are Moussaka and Keftedes and there is a three-course meal for \$40. People come here for a fun night out. The restaurant has live Greek music and guests are encouraged to dance to the music of the bouzoukis.

Brogues on Worcester

Part of Rydges Hotel

*Cnr Oxford and Worcester streets
Tel: 365 3333*

The menu is wide-ranging and is influenced by the European and Chilean chefs who are in charge of the kitchen. There's always Canterbury lamb, Akaroa salmon and other freshly caught fish, too.

Sala Sala

*184 Oxford Tce
Tel: 365 6755*

A wide variety of authentic Japanese dishes prepared by Japanese chefs. Specialising in sushi and sashimi.

The Strip: Oxford Street

In this area alongside the Avon between Hereford Street and Cashel Mall, you can wander by a string of restaurants/bars, look at their menus and decide on one that most appeals to you. The main ones are

- Barcelona. Tel: 377 2100

- The Boulevard. Tel: 374 6676
- All Bar One. Tel:377 9898
- Viaduct. Tel: 377 9968
- Azure. Tel: 365 6088
- The Tap Room. Tel: 365 0547

Among the cafes are Coffee Culture, 160 Cashel Street (Tel 377 8825), Boatsheds Café, on the banks of the Avon at the Antigua Boat Shed (Tel: 366 6768).

Colombo, Cashel, High, Hereford and Lichfield Streets

Palazzo del Marinaio Seafood Restaurant

*Shades Arcade
108 Hereford Street
Tel: 365 4640*

Specialises in Italian-style food and features New Zealand rock lobster, served grilled with garlic and butter or sauteed in a mild cheese sauce. The decor is modern European and much of the music is Italian, often from operas.

Gingko

*153-157 Hereford St
Tel: 374 2523*

Sichuan cuisine with some unusual dishes: - sweet and sour jellyfish, garlic pork ribs, spicy fish, shredded pork stomach.

The Mythai Restaurant and Monkey Bar

*84 Hereford St
Tel: 365 1295*

A multi award winning Thai restaurant.

Merchants

In the Grand Chancellor Hotel

161 Cashel Street

Tel: 371 2314

A seasonal menu based on local produce. One speciality is beef and this often appears on the menu in three different forms - a grilled fillet, beef on the bone and rib eye steak. The food follows European trends and there are European dishes like duck breast and cevapcici - a skinless sausage.

Zak's Brasserie and Grill

In the Centra Hotel.

Cnr Cashel/High street

Tel: 365-8888

One of Zak's speciality dishes is duck and staff are happy to recommend an appropriate wine with this dish. Other specialities are salmon, fresh fish and lamb.

Michael's

178 High Street

Tel: 366 0822

Innovative international cuisine using fresh Canterbury produce. Main dishes include fish, venison, lamb, beef and chicken, each a work of art in itself. Here's a place candlelit romance, where diners linger and have space to chat.

Il Felice

56 Lichfield Street

Tel: 366 7535

Specialising in Italian cuisine. The menu changes quarterly and some of the more popular dishes are linguini marinara and the various vitello dishes. There is a wide range of Italian wines, beers aperitifs and digestifs. The interior is redolent of Tuscany.

Pagoda Court

679 Colombo St

Tel: 366 3931

A centrally located Chinese restaurant with a different style of cuisine. There is the steamboat for those who like to cook their own, a Chinese buffet that contains seafood, and the a la carte.

Aiki Organic Japanese restaurant

599 Colombo Street

Tel: 366 1178

Aiki specialises in home-style Japanese cooking, interpreted in a unique way, catering for vegetarians, omnivores and vegans, alike. Among the special foods are natto (fermented soya bean), made using organic soya beans; tofu made from organic soya beans, and brown rice that's polished in the restaurant's own polishing machine. 90 per cent of all fruit and vegetables and 80 per cent of the meat are organic.

The Thai Smile

818 Colombo Street

Tel: 366 2246

The only Thai restaurant in the South Island to receive 'Thailand's Brand' certificate from the government of Thailand.

Cafes in this part of Christchurch are C1 Espresso, 150 High Street (Tel: 379 1917); Café D'Fafo, 137 Hereford Street (Tel: 366 6083); Vivace Café, 86 Hereford Street (Tel: 365 8248); Starbucks, Cashel Mall (Tel: 372 9251); East's Bookshop 236 High Street (Tel 377 0197).

Manchester Street.

Mega Watt Kitchen

218 Manchester St

Tel: 363 9680

Described as a Kaffeehaus, it opens for breakfast, lunch and dinner and has German and French specialities. It has gluten free products.

Two Fat Indians

112- 114 Manchester Street

Tel: 371 7273

All the traditional Indian dishes at very reasonable prices.

Topkapi

185 Manchester St

Tel: 379 4447

Very reasonably priced authentic Turkish food of excellent quality. Décor adds authenticity to the dining experience.

Dorothy's

2 Latimer Square (just off Manchester Street)

Tel: 365 6034

In a magnificent Edwardian house, dining here has a special ambience. The emphasis is on local produce and Dorothy's always has at least one main course that appeals to those who like try something exotic. Very popular are their wild pig, their fetta encrusted rack of lamb and the seafood pitheiver.

Victoria Street:

The Canterbury Tales

The Crown Plaza Hotel

Tel: 365 7799

The hotel's signature restaurant. Winner of numerous awards, including New Zealand's Restaurant of the Year in 2000. Highly regarded for its innovative cuisine and relaxed, sophisticated ambience.

The Grand Café

The Christchurch Casino

Tel: 372 8892

Serves a buffet breakfast, lunch and dinner and the selection reflects its wide range of patrons. There are both Asian and Western dishes, many of which are created with French flair. There's also a wide range of seafood. All food, even the elaborate desserts, are created on the premises. Café Caesar serves bar snacks for those who are busy with the neighbouring pokey machines.

Hay's

63 Victoria Street

Tel: 379 7501

Here the speciality is lamb, specially reared on Celia and Allan Hay's historic Pigeon Bay property. There is normally a choice of three lamb dishes on the menu and one is usually rack of lamb. The accompaniments change with the seasons. Hay's also serves fish and other specialities. Upstairs and separate from the restaurant is a cooking school and its students sometimes assist the full-time staff.

Saggio de Vino

Cnr Victoria Street and Bealey Ave

Tel: 379 4006

There is an emphasis on slow cuisine and the focus is definitely European. The menu changes regularly but often features dishes like game ragout and carpaccio. There's an excellent selection of wines, both European and New Zealand.

Ciao Bella

131 Victoria Street

Tel: 371 7288

Top-of-the-range fine dining. A popular dish combines Pacific Game fish like marlin and tuna and there is plenty of Canterbury lamb, often served with kumara and macadamia nut croquettes.

Zydeco Café

57 Victoria Street

Tel: 365 4556

The speciality here is Cajun and Creole cuisine and there are many favourites like blackened fish, jambalaya, spiced prawns bayou and lamb mole.

Kanniga's (Thai)

Tel: 355 6228

Various branches of this restaurant lie on both sides of Bealey Avenue. Menus are similar and all the restaurants are usually full.

Ace Wasabi

55 Victoria St

Tel: 365 0762

Has all the wide variety of Japanese dishes with tempura, teriyaki and sashimi.

Many of Christchurch's favourite cafes are in the Victoria Street area. Among them are Vic's Café & Bake with organic food, Hummingbird's with its own roasted coffee beans and the Citrus Bar and café with its light dinners of pizzas, gourmet soups and pastas.