

Guest Information Book

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# Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti Guided Tour



**ADVENTURE**  
BY NATURE

## Welcome to Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti!

Explore the stunning landscapes and rich history of Castle Hill, also known as Kura Tawhiti, nestled in the heart of New Zealand's South Island. This guided walking tour will take you through the remarkable geological features, cultural heritage, and historical significance of this breathtaking area.

**Duration:** 7 - 8 hours

**Activities:** Bouldering, Sightseeing

**Transport:** Included from Christchurch City Centre & Lyttelton Port

**Food:** Picnic lunch, morning & afternoon tea are included

**Start/Finish location:** Christchurch City & Lyttelton Port

**Pick-up time:** 8:30 am (Exact time confirmed in email)

**Finish time:** 4:00 – 4:30 pm

### Overview:

On this exciting 1-day trip we will discover one of Canterbury's natural wonders, Castle Hill /Kura Tawhiti. We will travel along the "Great Alpine Highway" offers stunning views of the Canterbury Plains and a stop in the rural town of Darfield for local treats. In Springfield, we'll visit the giant doughnut statue and then traverse Porter's Pass to reach the incredible boulder fields of Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti. Your local qualified guide will provide insights into the area's cultural and geographical significance before a picnic lunch. We'll then have time to explore the area at leisure before heading back to the city. This is a must do trip for anyone visiting New Zealand.



*Family sitting on a boulder at Castle Hill*



*Sheep near Castle Hill rocks*



*Group taking photos at Castle Hill*

## Itinerary

You will be picked up from your accommodation, at the meeting point in Christchurch, or from the port in Lyttelton.

Along the "Great Alpine Highway", you'll cross the flat farmland of the Canterbury Plains towards the mountains. Halfway across the plains, you will discover the small rural town of Darfield, where you will enjoy a short stop, allowing you to sample some of the local delicacies from the famous Darfield Bakery. Your next stop is Springfield, just 20 minutes down the road. Its giant doughnut statue is well worth a photo, and your guide will explain how the town ended up with this giant doughnut. From Springfield, the road winds up over Porter's Pass at 900 meters before continuing to Lake Lyndon, where we will stop for morning tea. From here, it's only a 10-minute drive to Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti.

It is also known internationally as a world-class climbing, bouldering, photography, and film-making destination. Your guide will show you around and explain the geography and cultural significance of the area before finding the perfect spot to sit down for a picnic lunch. Following lunch, you will have free time to explore the boulder fields in your own time before meeting back at the car park. From there, your return journey back to Christchurch takes approximately 1.5-2 hours.

### Tour starts – Christchurch or Lyttelton

- *Travel – 50 minutes*

#### 1. **Darfield** - Break, 15 minutes

- *Travel - 20 minutes*

#### 2. **Springfield** - Photo stop, 10 minutes

- *Travel - 20 minutes*

#### 3. **Lake Lyndon** - Snack, Sightseeing - 15 minutes

- *Travel - 10 minutes*

#### 4. **Kura Tawhiti Conservation Area** - Lunch, sightseeing, walk. 3.5 hours

- *Travel – 1.5 hours*

### Tour finishes – Christchurch or Lyttelton

## Local Information – Christchurch, Inland Canterbury and Castle Hill



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### About Christchurch (Ōtautahi)

Christchurch, known as Ōtautahi in te reo Māori, is New Zealand's oldest city, founded in 1850. Its origins trace back to the Canterbury Association, a colonial group established in England in 1848 with the goal of creating a planned settlement based on English social structures. The first European settlers arrived on the First Four Ships, landing in Lyttelton between December 1850 and January 1851. The city was named after Christ Church, Oxford, reflecting the heritage of its founders, particularly John Robert Godley.

Over the years, Christchurch has developed into a vibrant urban centre known for its beautiful gardens, parks, and rich cultural history. Despite facing significant challenges, such as the devastating earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, the city has shown remarkable resilience and continues to thrive as a key destination in New Zealand.

## Major Cities in New Zealand (2023):

- **Auckland:** 1,571,700
- **Christchurch:** 369,000
- **Wellington:** 202,700
- **Hamilton:** 160,900
- **Tauranga:** 136,700
- **Dunedin:** 126,300

### Formation:

The Canterbury Association was established in London in 1848 by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and John Robert Godley, among others. It aimed to create a model settlement in New Zealand based on the principles of systematic colonization.

The Association's vision was to establish a planned settlement in Canterbury, modelled on the English social structure and featuring a network of towns and rural districts. The plan aimed to attract settlers of high social standing and wealth, with an emphasis on the Anglican Church.

The Canterbury Association purchased land from the New Zealand Company in the Canterbury region, including the area around present-day Christchurch. Surveying of the land began in 1849 in preparation for the arrival of settlers.

### First Four Ships:

The Canterbury Association organized the immigration of the First Four Ships, which arrived in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, between December 1850 and January 1851. These ships brought the initial wave of European settlers to Canterbury.

1. **Charlotte Jane:** The Charlotte Jane was the first of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, on December 16, 1850. It carried approximately 150 passengers, mostly from Scotland. The arrival of the Charlotte Jane marked the beginning of organized European settlement in Canterbury.
2. **Randolph:** The Randolph arrived in Lyttelton on December 16, 1850, just a few hours after the Charlotte Jane. It carried around 140 passengers, also primarily from Scotland.
3. **Cressy:** The Cressy arrived in Lyttelton on December 27, 1850, with approximately 240 passengers. Like the Charlotte Jane and the Randolph, most of its passengers were from Scotland.
4. **Sir George Seymour:** The Sir George Seymour was the last of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, reaching the port on January 17, 1851. It carried around 240 passengers, primarily from England.

- Families of these first four ships are prominent in Canterbury society today.
- Christchurch and Dunedin have more social structure than other areas of New Zealand
- What High School students attend in Christchurch is of extreme importance. An interesting local quirk is asking, "What high school did you go to?" during the first meeting. This doesn't happen in other areas of NZ

**Dubbed the “Garden City,” Christchurch is renowned for its abundant green spaces,** meticulously maintained parks, and botanical gardens, including the sprawling Hagley Park, which provides a tranquil retreat for outdoor recreation and leisure activities.

**The Avon River, meandering gracefully through the heart of the city,** offers opportunities for punting, kayaking, and leisurely strolls along its picturesque banks, providing residents and visitors with a serene escape amidst urban surroundings.

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## The Christchurch Cathedral

**History:** The Christchurch Cathedral, formally known as the Cathedral Church of Christ, was built between 1864 and 1904 in the heart of Christchurch, New Zealand. It is a significant example of Gothic Revival architecture and was designed by the English architect Sir George Gilbert Scott.

**Architecture:** The cathedral features a distinctive spire rising to a height of approximately 63 meters (207 feet), making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch. Its Gothic architecture includes pointed arches, intricate stonework, and decorative elements typical of the style.

**Spiritual Centre:** The Christchurch Cathedral served as the spiritual heart of the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch and played a central role in the religious and cultural life of the city. It hosted regular worship services, special events, and community gatherings.

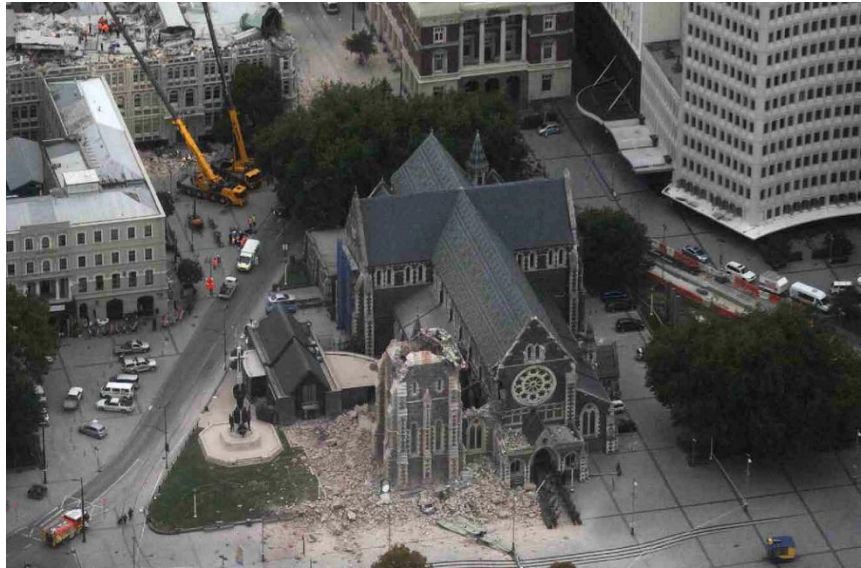
**Earthquakes:** The cathedral suffered significant damage during the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, particularly the collapse of its spire and extensive damage to its structure. These earthquakes had a profound impact on Christchurch and its built environment, including the cathedral.

**Restoration Efforts:** Following the earthquakes, debates and discussions ensued regarding the future of the cathedral. Various proposals were put forward, including restoration, demolition, or rebuilding. The decision-making process involved considerations of heritage preservation, engineering feasibility, and financial resources.

**Construction Delays:**

Construction of the cathedral began in 1864 but was interrupted several times due to funding issues, labor shortages, and the effects of the New Zealand Wars. It took 40 years to complete, with the final sections finished in 1904.

**Spire Height:** At its peak, the cathedral's spire stood approximately 63 meters (207 feet) tall, making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch at the time.



**Bell Tower:** In addition to its spire, the cathedral also featured a bell tower with a peal of 13 bells, including a Bourdon bell weighing over 6,000 kilograms (13,000 pounds). These bells were used for various purposes, including marking the hours and special occasions.

**Current Status:** As of recent years, plans for the restoration or redevelopment of the Christchurch Cathedral have been ongoing. Following the Government's decision in 2024 not to provide further funding towards the reinstatement of the cathedral, construction is now be paused while all options are being considered.

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## Treaty of Waitangi – Te Tiriti o Waitangi (signed 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1840)

The Treaty is a broad statement of principles on which the British and Māori made a political compact to found a nation state and build a government in New Zealand. The document has three articles. "In the English text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'all the rights and powers of *sovereignty*' over their land. In the Māori text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'te kawanatanga katoa' or the complete *government* over their land." (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty>)

It is common now to refer to the intention, spirit or principles of the Treaty. The Treaty of Waitangi is not considered part of New Zealand domestic law, except where its principles are referred to in Acts of Parliament.

## Māori History of Ōtautahi

**The Māori name Ōtautahi translates to “The Place of Tautahi” or “The Place of Tautahi’s People.”** Tautahi was a significant rangatira (chief) of the Ngāi Tahu iwi (tribe) who played a prominent role in the region’s early history. The name Ōtautahi honours his legacy and the ancestral connections of Ngāi Tahu to the land where Christchurch now stands.

**According to stories, Tautahi is an important figure in the migration stories of the Ngai Tahu people.** Te Waka o Aoraki is the name given to the migration story from their ancestral homeland to Te Ika-a-Māui (North Island) and then down to Te Waipounamu (South Island). This migration, known as Te Waka o Aoraki, is a foundational aspect of Ngāi Tahu people’s identity and history.

**The Māori name for the North Island of New Zealand is “Te Ika-a-Māui,”** which translates to “The Fish of Māui.” According to Māori mythology, the North Island is said to be the fish that Māui, a legendary figure in Māori culture, caught while fishing with his magical hook.

**The Māori name for the South Island of New Zealand is “Te Waipounamu,”** which translates to “The Greenstone Waters” or “The Waters of Greenstone.” This name reflects the significance of pounamu (greenstone or jade) in Māori culture and the abundance of this precious stone found in the rivers and mountains of the South Island.

**Hawaiki:** In Māori tradition, Hawaiki refers to the legendary homeland from which the ancestors of the Māori people are believed to have originated. It is considered a mythical place, often described as a distant island or land across the ocean. According to oral tradition, Māori ancestors migrated from Hawaiki to Aotearoa (New Zealand) many centuries ago in voyages by waka (canoes). While the exact location of Hawaiki remains unknown, it holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in Māori cosmology. It serves as the ancestral homeland of all Māori tribes, including Ngāi Tahu.

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## Springfield (Tawera)

Called Kowai Pass until 1880, Springfield is the most westerly town of the Canterbury Plains. The development of the town started around 1860. With the discovery of gold on the West Coast. In the 1870’s, water from the nearby Kowai River was used to develop one of the earliest stock water races in Canterbury.

On 15 July 2007, a statue of a giant pink doughnut was erected to promote the upcoming movie, The Simpsons Movie. It was subsequently set alight and destroyed by an arsonist on 25 September 2009. A tyre painted pink was used as a substitute until it was replaced with a concrete version unveiled on 1 July 2012.



## Lake Lyndon



Lake Lyndon located near Porters Pass on State Highway 73 after Springfield heading into the Southern Alps. The lake regularly freezes in winter due to its elevation and location on the outer border of the Southern Alps. Lake Lyndon is a popular site for rainbow trout fishing as the trout population in the lake is thriving due to the dense oxygen weed beds that provide a plentiful food source. The lake is largely surrounded by Korowai / Torlesse Tussocklands Park, and the Acheron River flows from the lake to the Rakaia River.

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## Castle Hill Basin Information

Kura Tawhiti, meaning "the treasure from a distant land," highlights the historical significance of this region, particularly its connection to the cultivation of kumara (sweet potato). The area holds **Topuni** status, which recognizes its cultural, spiritual, and historic values, giving the Ngāi Tahu iwi a voice in its management.

Evidence of early human activity includes **500-year-old charcoal drawings** found under limestone overhangs, attributed to the Waitaha people, the first known inhabitants of the South Island. The long history of Kura Tawhiti has led to its **tapu (sacred) status** for Māori, who made seasonal hunting and gathering trips from their pa at Kaiapoi. Key food sources included kiore (Polynesian rat), various birds like kākāpō, kiwi, and weka, as well as tuna (eel).

Before human intervention, Castle Hill was surrounded by low totara and broadleaf forests, which are now being replanted around the rocks. In 1858, Porter's brother established the first station in the area, and since 1982, Castle Hill Village has seen ongoing residential and potential commercial development.

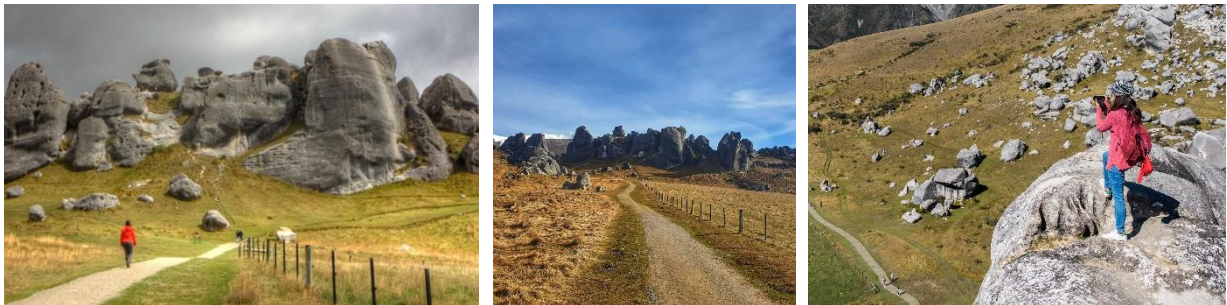
Geologically, the Torlesse Range's **sedimentary rocks** were formed from the erosion of the supercontinent Gondwanaland, settling on the ocean floor between 130 and 300 million years ago. About 30 million years ago, the **Castle Hill Basin was submerged under a shallow inland sea**, providing ideal conditions for marine organisms. The limestone, a sedimentary rock, is composed of the remains of these organisms.

Around five million years ago, the Southern Alps began rising dramatically due to tectonic activity at the subduction zone between the Australian and Pacific plates. **This uplift exposed the limestone beds, which started to erode**, leaving behind the stunning formations seen today at Castle Hill and nearby areas like Flock Hill. Rainfall interacts with the limestone, forming carbonic acid, which slowly erodes the rock over time. Glaciers covered the Castle Hill Basin, expanding and retreating over the

last two million years, with their retreat ongoing since the last glacial maximum about 20,000 years ago. Interestingly, some of the limestone from this region was used in the construction of the Christchurch Cathedral.

In 2002, the **Dalai Lama** visited Christchurch but was unimpressed with the energies he found in town. He was then taken to Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti and was amazed by the beautiful landscape. It was later recorded the Dalai Lama thought the area was **one of the spiritual centres of the universe**.

Many people mistakenly believe that the scenery at Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti, was used as a filming location for the "Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" trilogies. However, these films were never actually shot there. In contrast, one of the great battle scenes in "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" was filmed at nearby Flock Hill, which features a landscape very similar to that of Castle Hill.



# What You'll Spot Along the Way

## Livestock – Sheep Breeds

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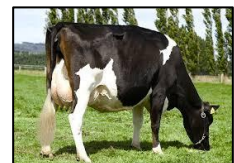
- **Romney** – White face, sturdy build. Most popular sheep breed in New Zealand, valued for both wool and meat. Found in lowland farms and hills throughout Canterbury.
- **Merino** – Smaller frame, often horned rams. Extremely fine, soft wool used in high-end clothing. Found in high country stations.
- **Perendale** – White face, thick wool, medium build. Hardy and good for mixed terrain. Common in hill country; bred from Romney and Cheviot sheep breeds.
- **Coopworth** – Similar to Romney, slightly larger with heavy fleece. Dual-purpose for wool and meat. Find them throughout Canterbury plains.



## Livestock – Cow Breeds

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- **Friesian (Holstein-Friesian)** – Large black-and-white dairy cow. High milk production. Dominant on dairy farms.
- **Jersey** – Smaller, light brown with a gentle face. Produce rich, creamy milk (high butterfat). Found on specialist dairy farms, often mixed with Friesians.
- **Hereford** – Red body with white face and underbelly. Beef cattle. Graze on hill country farms or finishing on Canterbury Plains.
- **Angus** – All black or red, solid build. Premium beef breed. Frequently found on hill farms and in mixed livestock operations.



- **Belted Galloway** - This breed is known for its distinctive white belt that encircles the black or sometimes red body. Known for their hardiness and ability to thrive in cold and rugged environments. Produce high-quality beef.



## Other Wildlife

- **Pūkeko (Australasian Swamphen)** – Bright blue with red beak and long red legs. Common near roadside wetlands and drains.



- **Pūtangitangi (Paradise Shelduck)** – Large, striking duck; males are black, females have a white head. Frequently seen grazing in paddocks and flying in pairs.



- **Pīwakawaka (New Zealand Fantail)** – Small, friendly bird with fanned tail. Often seen fluttering near rest areas or forest edges.



- **Kāhu (Harrier Hawk)** – Large brown bird of prey seen gliding low over fields. Commonly spotted while driving.



- **Black Swan** – Elegant with red bill, native to Australia but naturalised in New Zealand. Seen on lakes like Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere and roadside ponds.



- **Papango (New Zealand Scaup)** – Small diving duck, black (male), or brown (female). Seen on lakes and braided rivers.



- **Karoro (Southern Black-backed Gull)** – Large gull, common along coastlines and in fields (paddocks).



### Introduced Animals Commonly Seen

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- **European Rabbits** – Often seen on roadsides, pastures, and high-country hills. Especially noticeable in dry, open areas.
- **Hedgehogs** – Nocturnal but sometimes seen in grass verges or rural gardens.
- **Deer (Farmed or Wild)** – Only Red deer are farmed in New Zealand due to the fact they grow large quickly compared to Fallow deer. Farmed deer are visible behind high fences. Both Red deer and Fallow deer are found in the wild (rare in lowlands, but possible in high country).



*Wild Rabbit*



*Hedgehog*



*Fallow Deer - Buck*



*Red Deer - Hind*

# Castle Hill/Kura Tawhiti Tour - Maps



## Lyttelton – Darfield – Springfield – Lake Lyndon – Castle Hill.



## Walking Tracks at Kura Tawhiti Conservation Area.

