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10 reasons why Christchurch must survive

By Andrew Stone

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Part of the cultural scene in Christchurch is the annual World Buskers Festival, which the city has hosted in its central square each summer for 18 years. Photo / Simon Baker

Countless justifications can be found for saving the Garden City. Expat Cantabrian **Andrew Stone** looks at just a few

1. Domino effect If Christchurch is allowed to wither and die, there is a risk NZ will slip further down the economic ladder. Canterbury University vice-chancellor Rod Carr says: "If Christchurch does not re-establish itself as a vibrant, entrepreneurial, innovative centre, there is a risk that the country slips into a city state with a large hinterland." Carr, a former deputy Reserve Bank Governor, warns that human and financial capital may not just head for Auckland – "it leaves the country".

2. South Island gateway Christchurch is an entry point for thousands of tourists each year. Seventeen per cent of visitors to NZ set foot there. Six million passengers went through its airport last financial year. The city is the departure point to Antarctica, with 100 flights to the ice each summer. Australia would dearly love this business, worth \$80 million a year to the city. The airport

supports about 5000 jobs, and helps skilled technicians and professionals in the region and New Zealand.

3. Education Two universities, a polytech and a campus of Otago University are in or near Christchurch. Ministry of Education data for 2008 reported 39,870 students were enrolled at its institutions. Prime Minister John Key is a Canterbury graduate. Foreign students are worth \$380 million a year to the region. The city's most illustrious student was Nobel winner Ernest Rutherford, the man who split the atom. He said of his NZ background: "We don't have the money, so we have to think."

4. Economic activity Firing on all cylinders, Christchurch and its hinterland account for about 15 per cent of the economy. The region supports about 250,000 workers and some 38,000 businesses, many of them small. The Reserve Bank calculates that delays in rebuilding Christchurch would reduce GDP by about 0.5 per cent in each quarter this year. These figures took a further knock last week. The economy doesn't need any more.

5. Rugby World Cup All Black coach Graham Henry was born in Christchurch. His assistant Steve Hansen lives there, though his house was rocked by the September quake. His other assistant Wayne Smith played his footy there. Talismanic captain Richie McCaw lives there too. Superboot Dan Carter grew up near the Greendale fault. All have worn the red and black jersey. All will be called upon when the World Cup starts in September. The AB brains trust with ties to the broken city could do without the worry that its rugby heritage could be lost.

6. Festivals Each November Christchurch puts its best foot forward for Show Week, when the country comes to town. At the same time all the top horses are there for Cup Week, a festival of fashion, races, entertainment and often a load of liquor. The A & P Show remains a quaint rite-of-passage for city children to brush against the sights, sounds and smells of rural life. Wiltingly hot nor'-west winds usually stir up dust storms. Piles of dried sludge left by liquefaction will have to be buried before this year's show can proceed.

7. Innovation Many Cantabrians have left their mark in various ways. Chemist Colin Murdoch invented the disposable hypodermic syringe and tranquilliser gun, mechanical engineer Keith Alexander designed a springfree trampoline

which cut injuries among kids, John Britten built a visionary motorcycle and Bill Hamilton perfected the jet boat engine.

8. Heritage A debate is raging about this singular aspect of Christchurch, as many of its landmark buildings have been damaged beyond repair and face the wrecker's ball. Though minister Gerry Brownlee dismisses his city's neo-gothic architecture as "old stuff", it is at the core of the city's built fabric and attracts tourists by the planeload. Some historic buildings withstood the fury of nature, and the technology exists to keep remaining treasures intact. What remains to be settled is which ones and at what cost.

9. Lyttelton The South Island's biggest port is bent but not broken, though much of the town lies in ruins. Shipping has made the port a vital transport hub. Most of NZ's coal exports leave from its wharves, along with milk powder worth millions. It has reopened for business, but in a truncated way. The city cannot prosper without the port.

10. Cantabrians Margaret Mahy, Rita Angus, Karl Kippenberger, Maurice Till, Richard Hadlee, Ray Columbus, Bic Runga, Charles Upham, Anthony Wilding, Bill Sutton, Elsie Locke, Len Lye, Ryan Nelsen, Tipene O'Regan, Miles Warren, Phil Keoghan, Sam Neill, Rhys Darby ... all call, or have called, Christchurch home. So too do thousands enduring the worst of times. They all await better times.