

How to get to Middle-earth



TASMIN WABY
Lonely Planet Writer

With the release of the first *Lord of the Rings* film 15 years ago, New Zealand was suddenly thrust on the travel radar for a whole new generation. Its beautiful landscapes from bubbling brooks to snow-capped peaks and lush forest valleys are the perfect setting for Peter Jackson's vision of Middle-earth, and now tourism is New Zealand's second largest industry.

The Hobbiton set is the country's best-known attraction today with close to half a million visitors a year, but there is of course a wealth of film locations far beyond 'the Shire'. You can always discover New Zealand's dramatic film locations (over 150 were used during filming) for yourself, starting with [this handy guide](#), or you can head to this remote country on a tour.

We've rounded up a few of the many operators running Tolkien tours of New Zealand in 2017, each for a different type of travellers. One thing they all seem to have in common is the desire to meld real life with fantasy worlds while exploring one of the world's most beautiful countries.

Be a Middle-earth explorer



Behold the beauty of Lake Pukaki and Aoraki (Mount Cook) in winter. MacKenzie District, New Zealand © Rob Suisted / Naturespic

You can also follow in the footsteps of Frodo and Bilbo with Round the World Experts (roundtheworldexperts.co.uk) on a 17-day tour of all things Lord of the Rings. As well as the obligatory visit to Hobbiton, the tour takes you to Wellington to go behind the scenes at the interactive Weta Cave workshops, learning how *Lord of the Rings* was brought to life with props, costumes, models and special effects. Next it's on to filming

locations in the South Island, with highlights including exploring Aoraki (Mount Cook), New Zealand's highest mountain peak, discovering Queenstown, and experiencing the silence of Middle-earth on an overnight Milford Sound cruise

Wander windswept beaches



Get more Gandalf-like on stunning New Zealand beaches © PC Agency

A 21-day tour with Discover the World (discover-the-world.co.uk) takes diehard fans through *Lord of the Rings* film locations with the national carrier, Air New Zealand (airnewzealand.com). The itinerary starts with a visit to Hobbiton in the rolling hills of Matamata, then hits all the visual splendour of the films including the stunning beaches at the top of the South Island as well as the the dramatic mountains and fjords of the Fiordland & Southland. There are several guided location tours included, as well as an overnight cruise on the spectacular Doubtful Sound.

Join the fellowship



One of the most Instagrammed sites in New Zealand, the Hobbiton set © Saram Orme / PC Agency

Silverfern (silverfernholidays.com) does a 16-day journey travelling

through New Zealand's magnificent landscapes from Auckland down to Queenstown. The tour includes film locations across the country, with a few surprises like dinner at the Green Dragon Inn in Hobbiton; and a hike to Pinnacle Ridge in the heights of Mount Ruapehu, which stands in for Mordor.

Lord it up on a luxury tour

Luxury travel outfit Zicasso (zicasso.com) covers similar territory but includes a private, after-hours tour of the Weta Cave as well as off-road adventure touring in a 4WD to Middle-earth film locations. A visit to the North Island is never complete without touring the steaming mud pools and erupting geysers at Rotorua's Wai-O-Tapu and Waimangu for more *Lord of the Rings* style photo opportunities. This tour then heads to the South Island to jet-boat past mountains and waterfalls on the glacier-fed Arrow River near Wanaka. Finally, take a helicopter ride over the Fox and Franz Josef and pretend your flying over Caradhras, one of the three Mountains of Moria.

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