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# New Zealand Continues to Take Center Stage in Hollywood Blockbusters

DESTINATION & TOURISM | JANEEN CHRISTOFF | FEBRUARY 23, 2016



*PHOTO: The Redwood forest in Rotorua was used in "Pete's Dragon." (Photo courtesy Tourism New Zealand)*

New Zealand has long been promoting tourism through its starring roles in some of Hollywood's biggest motion pictures. The "Lord of the Rings" trilogy inspired an entire generation to take flight and head for Middle Earth and Hobbiton, one of the country's most popular attractions, was created out of film sets used in the production. Now that both the "Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit" series have wrapped, New Zealand continues to be a prominent character in many other current productions.

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The country will once again take center stage in the remake of children's fantasy favorite "Pete's Dragon," coming to theaters this summer, on Aug. 12, 2016. The

David Lowery-helmed, live action feature stars Bryce Dallas Howard and Robert Redford, among others, and was shot in three locations in New Zealand: Wellington, Rotorua and Tapanui.



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Film buffs will want to head to Wellington, where sound stages for "Pete's Dragon" were created at New Zealand's famous Stone Street Studios and to Weta Digital, the visual effects company created by Peter Jackson that gained notoriety for its stunning transformation of New Zealand into the realms of "Lord of the Rings."

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Rotorua is an ideal stand-in for the forests of North America, where "Pete's Dragon" takes place as it is home to a California redwood forest. Visitors can visit the Redwoods Treewalk and cross a series of suspension bridges between 22 ancient redwood trees.

Tapanui, on New Zealand's South Island, played the U.S. town of Millhaven. Visitors can experience the charming fishing village and bike the Clutha Gold Trail, known as one of the country's great cycling rides.



**Other Productions Around the Country**

MTV's recent fantasy show, "The Shannara Chronicles," also called the island nation home when it was filming in 2015. The famous Bethells Beach is a prominent location in the series, which uses New Zealand's dramatic landscapes to recreate the Four Lands originally depicted in Terry Brooks' "The Sword of Shannara" series. Visitors heading to Bethells Beach will find swimming, picnicking, hiking and skim-boarding in the area, which is a popular escape for residents of Auckland.


Hollywood clearly can't get enough of New Zealand's otherworldly landscapes, and big films continue to roll in. This month, New Zealand welcomed Scarlett Johansson to its shores for the filming of the live-action remake of "The Ghost in the Shell," a popular Japanese manga comics. Like "Pete's Dragon," filming for the feature is also taking place at Stone Street Studios.


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The country has also been home to several cult classics, including Peter Jackson's first film, "Heavenly Creatures," and the critically acclaimed breakout Sundance hit "Top of the Lake," which starred "Mad Men's" Elisabeth Moss.

The country is sure to continue making headlines with its stunning locales. And if producers have their way, it should be starring in even more film roles in the future.

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