

Bringing Middle Earth to Life

A trip to New Zealand's *Lord of the Rings*-inflected landscape

Mordor. The Shire. Rivendell. For many readers, these famous sites of Middle Earth are very real places with very real cultures. J. R. R. Tolkien extensively and thoroughly illustrates the languages, the species, and the many landmarks of Middle Earth in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and in *The Hobbit*, thus creating a whole new kind of reality for his readers. In New Zealand, these cultures and places of Tolkien's Middle Earth leave the pages and are brought to life for the readers and fans of *The Lord of the Rings* to visit and experience.

Lord of the Rings Tours

In addition to *Lord of the Rings* inspired safety videos, New Zealand has also organized a variety of tours for tourists looking for Middle Earth. These tours take fans to Auckland, Tongariro National Park, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Twizel, Queenstown, Kaikoura, Methven, Cromwell, and Te Anau. These sites are the locations for many of the film's scenes. The various tours that New Zealand has created for tourists claim to bring together strangers "as a fellowship of companions who have shared a unique experience, exploring the length and breadth of the country that has become 'Middle Earth.'" The goal of these tours is to allow fans of the *Lord of the Rings* world to become a part of that world and to participate in the culture of Middle Earth. There are many different tours available to those visiting New Zealand and looking for a little bit of Middle Earth. The Center of Middle Earth tour takes visitors to *Lord of the Rings* locations on their own time without following a rigid schedule. Tourists can also hike to various Middle Earth locations on prescribed trails. Some of these tours are longer and include more sights, while others are shorter and just cover the highlights from the movie.

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Comment [1]: This sentence doesn't flow very well with the following sentence, since you don't mention these safety videos until the last page. Try this opening line: New Zealand's tourist landscape has become inundated with Lord of the Rings culture, from scheduled tours to in-flight safety videos.

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Additionally, New Zealand has tours where visitors can experience not only set locations, but also the journeys from the movies. One such tour is the Lord of the Rings Edoras Day Tour. On this tour, tourists can follow in the footsteps of the original fellowship's journey to Rohan. Similarly, there are a few different tours in Wellington, New Zealand, where tourists visit a part of Middle Earth that is home to hobbits, dwarves, elves, and men. Tourists get to visit and explore the homes of these different species. They also recreate over twenty-five scenes from the movie and learn how those scenes were made.

Middle Earth for Film Makers

There are also tours that highlight movie-making skills for tourists that are interested in or part of the film industry. For example, the Gondor Tour in Twizel takes tourists on a journey through Gondor. In this journey, tour guides teach their travelers about the movie-making techniques used during filming. This tour doesn't just go through the sites used for the movie, but it also explores movie making and what made the scenes of Lord of the Rings iconic. Additionally, the Lord of the Rings Twilight Tour also teaches visitors about the art of filmmaking while visiting the sights of Middle Earth at night. These kinds of tours teach prospective filmmakers about creating visual effects, shooting scenes with large armies, finding extras for filming on a grand-scale, and many more film techniques that were important in the filming of the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

The Hobbit Tours

The newest tour available in New Zealand is a tour of locations inspired by the new trilogy based on *The Hobbit*. This tour visits The Shire, Rivendell, Rohan, Mount Doom, Mordor, and Gollum's fishing pool. Seeing these sets makes the world of *The Hobbit* more real and tangible. Additionally, the Hobbit Premiere Tour also has many Tolkein-inspired activities. Tourists can

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view artwork inspired by the Lord of the Rings world. They also get to drink “Middle Earth wines”; the wines that the dwarves enjoy in the film. These kinds of activities help tourists feel like they are part of the world and culture of Middle Earth.

One tourist went on the Lord of the Rings Hobbit South Island tour and, after her experience, she wrote to a friend she met on the tour to say “We went there and back again. For me . . . life will never be the same. My heart is full of joy to have met such kind and loving people. I’m very proud and thankful to have been by your side during your precious moments and courageous times.” These comments from her letter show the deep sense of community that tourists experience when they participate in Lord of the Rings tours in New Zealand. Over fifteen different day tours and four multi-day tours allow tourists to explore and connect with the culture of Middle Earth in a very interactive and informative way.

Taking Flight

New Zealand goes the extra mile to bring the Middle Earth experience to its tourists. Even on the airplanes in New Zealand, Middle Earth is brought to life. Before New Zealand planes take off, fliers see the standard safety instructions. However, these instructions are anything but standard. The Air New Zealand plane safety video calls upon the beloved *Lord of the Rings* characters like elves, dwarves, orcs, hobbits, and wizards to illustrate safety procedures on the plane. A Gandolf-like wizard plays the pilot while two elves walk the hobbits, dwarves, and orcs through safety standards and procedures for emergency situations. Even Gollum makes a special appearance! This video continues to connect New Zealand tourists with the cultures of Middle Earth.

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