

ON THE TRAIL OF LORD OF THE RINGS. POP-CULTURE TOURISM IN NEW ZEALAND

Marek Zoladek

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Institute of Geography, Poland

Paper Type: Review

At the present time, pop-culture tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of travel. All over the world can be found many popular places for these kind of tourists. Often these are places known from movies. The classic areas known from television are megacities include Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo, Paris and London. Sometimes they are whole areas like California or Transylvania. It also happens that the films advertise the whole country. That happened with New Zealand after the making of the trilogy „The Lord of the Rings“ and „The Hobbit“ directed by Peter Jackson. The popularity of films resulted in increased popularity of areas, where they were filmed. Today, this island country is at the forefront of pop-culture tourism destination. Throughout New Zealand find landscapes, places and characters familiar from films made based on the books by J. R. R. Tolkien.

During a trip to New Zealand, you can feel the spirit of „Lord of the Rings“. Using the Air New Zealand people can arrive to this country aboard a specially decorated aircraft. Since 2002 the airline has decorated several of its aircraft with a special mark „the official airline is Middle Earth“. The imagery featured actors from the movie trilogy „The Lord of the Rings“ against backdrops of New Zealand locations used in the films. From 2012 the fleet included airplanes with characters from „The Hobbit“ trilogy. The specially painted planes are mainly wide-bodied aircraft serving intercontinental connections with New Zealand, including only one route to Europe, to London Heathrow airport via Los Angeles.

A good place to start a trip „On the trail of Lord of the Ring“, is located in the capital of New Zealand, Wellington, The Weta

Workshop. Here were created special effects not only for the film trilogy, but also for such films as Avatar, Mad Max: Fury Road, District 9, Hellboy, Rise of the Planet of the Apes and King Kong. Visitors can see original exhibits and characters from the greatest movies. Probably this is the only place in the world, where you can meet Gollum creature and other well-known characters from the films. In Weta Workshop also works the worldwide famous director Peter Jackson and other professionals working on the special effects used in famous movies. It is one of the most important places for fans of movies in the world.

Another „must see place“ for all movie fans is the town of Matamata, also known as Hobbiton. Around 10 km from the city is located private farm with The Hobbiton Movie Set, significant location used for The Lord of the Rings movie trilogy and The Hobbit film series. The biggest attraction of this place are characteristic hobbit hole. These legendary hobbit's houses can be visited only by buying a special tour. Unfortunately there is also no possibility to see Hobbiton from the surrounding hills. Their location between the hills on private land causes the total isolation of the tourist attractions from free public areas. Currently the only possibility to see Hobbiton is to purchase a entry ticket.

In the central part of the North Island, on the Central Plateau is located an active stratovolcano Mount Ngauruhoe with elevation 2291 m. This impressive summit is also inextricably linked with Peter Jackson's movies. It was used as the inspiration for the fictional Mount Doom occurring in the trilogy.



Fig. 1. Mount Ngauruhoe (2,291 m) – “Mount Doom”, source: Zoladek M.

The true face of the volcano is more friendly than that shown in the film. Crater is now buried under rubble of fully colored rocks, among which can be found fumaroles. Also, the volcano it does not look very dangerous and steep as it was in film productions. Summit is available for experienced hikers. The path leads to the top through slope full of loose boulders. It could be a little hard during rain and in the winter. But it is trekking trail, not climbing route. The location in the center of the volcanic plateau guarantees amazing views resembling a lunar landscape

with another New Zealand’s active volcanoes such as Mount Tongariro and Mount Ruapehu. Currently, Mount Ngauruhoe is a popular destination for hikers. They use the same paths to the top as Frodo Baggins with others members of The Fellowship of the Ring.

The main area of the South Island related with film tourism is massif of the Southern Alps. This mountain range is often called The home of the Lord of The Rings and Hobbit trilogies.



Fig. 2. Southern Alps and Lake Pukaki – “Misty Mountains and Middle Earth”, source: Zoladek M.

Wild mountains with glaciers, crystal clear lakes are popular region for hiking, climbing, winter sports, cycling and also more recently a place to visit for fans of the films. Scenes from the Peter Jackson's movies can be seen wandering from great plains, to the towering the highest New Zealand's massif of Aoraki Mount Cook. For the purposes of the director, these areas were renamed to Misty Mountains of Tolkien's Middle Earth. The film crew also visited the Queenstown area and Milford Sound.

New Zealand has much more places associated with Tolkien and trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. Other location of shot movies can be found in Nelson, Canterbury, Mackenzie Country, Southern Lakes and around the capitol Wellington. Visitors can feel for a moment like a visit the land of tales and legends which guarantees unique memories. The main problem for potential tourists is location of the country at a considerable distance from large centers of population in the world. Long flight can be tiring, so well prepared trip on the trail of *The Lord of the Rings* can begin at the departure airport of tourist.



Fig. 3. Meeting in the Middle Earth with Gollum (author on the left), The Weta Workshop Wellington, source: Apollo M.

Tolkien Trail is one of the most popular tourist routes in the world. It is also one of the most important advertising for New Zealand. Currently, every year a large number of tourists from all over the world come to this isolated island country to visit famous places and movie's locations. The development of this form of tourism improves the economic efficiency of tourism and enhances the reputation of New Zealand as a country attractive for tourists from all over the world. Today, pop-culture tourism is also growing in other parts of the

earth, being an important component of tourism in general. Every true fan of great movies and great travel should visit the country, which official website of tourism promotes the slogan „Experience New Zealand, Home of Middle Earth“. Traveling through Tolkien Trail all visitors can see the wonders of nature and legendary landscapes previously known from the cinemas screen. In normal day in New Zealand is possible meet real legendary characters of J. R. R. Tolkien books, including the Gollum.

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Marek Zoladek

Address: Institute of Geography, Pedagogical University of Cracow, ul. Podchorazych 2, 30-084 Krakow, Poland

E-mail: herrmagen@poczta.fm
