

The NZ Film Locations Road Trip Guide

45 films and television series, filmed across Aotearoa, from Auckland to Invercargill.

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WELCOME

Before You Go

Every visitor arrives in New Zealand with high expectations. This guide exists to make sure those expectations get exceeded, not just met.

You already know the big one — Middle-earth changed everything. But this country has quietly stood in for Narnia, Japan, Montana, the Himalayas, and an alien ocean moon, and most of those stories never make it onto a typical itinerary.

Regions are ordered the way most visitors actually travel: Auckland first, working south to Queenstown and Fiordland. Full depth — real quotes, real tour operators, real driving times — is included for every title in the regional guides.

ABOUT YOUR GUIDE

Not Just Another Travel Blog

This guide isn't written by someone who visited once and wrote it up. It's built from over 20 years professionally guiding travellers across New Zealand — the same places, in every season, more times than I can count.



Bulls, Manawatu — one of thousands of small moments from 20+ years on the road.

Scattered through this guide you'll find photos that aren't of the film locations themselves — real places nearby that I return to again and again, because they're genuinely worth the detour. Not stock imagery. Just what two decades on the road has actually taught me makes a trip here better than expected.

My goal has always been the same, whether I'm leading a tour in person or writing this guide: you arrive with high expectations, and I want to make sure you leave feeling like they were exceeded.

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Auckland

New Zealand's biggest city is also its busiest backlot — more productions have quietly passed through Auckland's studios, beaches, and forests than almost anywhere else in the country.

The Piano

1993

 ~45 min from Auckland CBD (Karekare Beach)

THE STORY

A haunting, intensely beautiful period drama about a mute Scottish woman sent to colonial New Zealand for an arranged marriage, who expresses herself solely through her beloved piano and a passionate affair.

WHY HERE

The story is intrinsically tied to the dense, brooding New Zealand bush. The movie's most iconic visual — the piano sitting isolated on a vast, black-sand beach — was filmed at Karekare Beach on Auckland's wild West Coast.

INSIDER NOTE

Karekare Beach has no cafes or shops nearby — bring supplies, and expect to share the black sand with surfers, not tour buses.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Evil Dead & Evil Dead Rise

2013 / 2023

 ~45 min from Auckland CBD (Woodhill Forest); ~25 min (Auckland Film Studios)

THE STORY

The blood-drenched, terrifying modern reboots of Sam Raimi's legendary horror franchise, unleashing the flesh-possessing Deadites via the ancient Book of the Dead.

WHY HERE

Longtime franchise producer Rob Tapert lives in New Zealand and has made it a southern hub for horror. The 2013 film used the dark, dense woods of Woodhill Forest just outside Auckland, while the urban-set 2023 sequel was filmed entirely on massive sound stages in Auckland.

INSIDER NOTE

Woodhill Forest is a working forest park with public tracks — go in daylight unless you're keen to test your own nerve.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

2016

Also filmed on the Central Plateau.

 ~40 min from Auckland CBD (Waitākere Ranges)

THE STORY

A hilarious and deeply touching adventure film based on Barry Crump's book Wild Pork and Watercress. A defiant city kid and his grumpy foster uncle become the targets of a nationwide manhunt after getting lost in the wild New Zealand bush.

WHY HERE

The film is a love letter to the rugged, breathtaking, and dense New Zealand wilderness. Filming took place across the spectacular, volcanic landscapes of the Central Plateau and the dense, green forests of the Waitākere Ranges.

INSIDER NOTE

The Waitākere Ranges have serious, changeable weather even close to the city — check DOC alerts before heading in.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Meg

2018

 ~40 min from Auckland CBD (Kumeu Film Studios)

THE STORY

A gloriously fun, action-packed creature feature where a deep-sea rescue diver is called upon to save a submarine crew from the jaws of a massive, prehistoric 75-foot shark known as the Megalodon.

WHY HERE

The Hauraki Gulf and the warm coastal waters around Auckland provided the perfect open-water filming conditions. Massive, specialized deep-water tanks were also constructed at Kumeu Film Studios to pull off the elaborate underwater action sequences.

INSIDER NOTE

The Hauraki Gulf is genuinely full of marine life — just, thankfully, nothing megalodon-sized.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Guns Akimbo

2019

 Central Auckland CBD

THE STORY

An anarchic, adrenaline-fueled action-comedy. A mundane video game developer wakes up to find guns bolted to his hands and himself forced to compete in a real-life, city-wide deathmatch streamed online to millions.

WHY HERE

Though set in a gritty, unnamed American metropolis, this hyper-stylized film was shot right in the heart of Auckland. Movie buffs will recognize the neon-lit streets of the Auckland CBD and the industrial docks serving as the backdrop for the high-octane gunfights.

INSIDER NOTE

Auckland's CBD by night has exactly the neon energy the film leaned into — worth a walk after dark, minus the gunfights.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

M3GAN

2022

 ~10 min from Auckland CBD (AUT campus)

THE STORY

The viral, sci-fi horror sensation that took the world by storm. A brilliant roboticist builds a life-like, AI-powered doll designed to be a child's greatest companion — only for the doll to develop a terrifying, overprotective streak of lethal independence.

WHY HERE

Produced by horror mogul Jason Blum and Kiwi icon James Wan, the film took full advantage of Auckland's modern suburban architecture and tech spaces. Local spots like the Auckland University of Technology stood in for the high-tech toy corporation.

INSIDER NOTE

AUT's campus is a working university — respectful, quiet visits only, especially in term time.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

A Minecraft Movie

2025

 ~25 min from Auckland CBD (Auckland Film Studios); ~1 hr (Huntly)

THE STORY

The blocky, pixelated universe of the world's best-selling video game comes to life in a fun, live-action cinematic adventure. A group of misfits is pulled through a mysterious portal into the Overworld and must master crafting to protect it from Piglins.

WHY HERE

The production crew fell in love with Auckland's top-tier studio infrastructure and local creative talent. The cubic biomes were built practically inside Auckland Film Studios, while locations like Huntly in the Waikato and the historic Settlers Country Manor in West Auckland added real-world texture.

INSIDER NOTE

Huntly and West Auckland don't advertise their film connection loudly — this is genuinely off the beaten tourist path.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Hercules: The Legendary Journeys & Xena: Warrior Princess

1995–2001

Also filmed at Huka Falls, near Taupō.

 ~1 hr from Auckland CBD (Bethells Beach)

THE STORY

The ultimate cult-classic 90s fantasy adventure shows. These action-packed series brought ancient Greek mythology to life, following the demigod Hercules and the reformed warlord Xena as they traveled the ancient world fighting for the greater good.

WHY HERE

The production team discovered that the lush, diverse landscapes just outside of Auckland could effortlessly double for ancient Greece, Rome, and fantasy realms. The black sands of Bethells Beach and the forests of the Waitākere Ranges became iconic recurring backdrops.

INSIDER NOTE

Bethells Beach (Te Henga) has serious rips — beautiful, but respect the surf lifesaving flags if you swim.

Power Rangers

2003–2023

 ~30–45 min from Auckland CBD (various locations)

THE STORY

For two incredible decades, the global phenomenon of color-coded, martial-arts superheroes piloting giant robotic Zords called New Zealand home. From Ninja Storm all the way through to Cosmic Fury, generations of Rangers saved the universe right here.

WHY HERE

Efficiency, incredible local stunt talent, and diverse geography. The crew could film a futuristic city center, a volcanic alien landscape, and a lush forest all within a 30-minute drive of their Auckland studios.

INSIDER NOTE

Filming spanned so many Auckland locations over two decades that almost any day trip around the city touches a Power Rangers set somewhere.

Legend of the Seeker

2008–2010

 ~40 min from Auckland CBD (Kumeu)

THE STORY

A lavish, action-packed fantasy series based on Terry Goodkind's popular Sword of Truth novels. It follows a humble woodsman who discovers he is a fated hero destined to wield a magical sword and defeat a ruthless, magical tyrant.

WHY HERE

The fantasy world required vast, magical forests, medieval villages, and dramatic cliffs. The production utilized beautiful locations all around the Auckland region, including the rolling hills of Kumeu and the scenic Henderson Valley.

INSIDER NOTE

Kumeu's rural roads are classic West Auckland wine country now — combine a location visit with a cellar door or two.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Spartacus

2010–2013

 ~20 min from Auckland CBD (Mount Wellington)

THE STORY

A stylized, visceral, and highly successful historical drama that charts the legendary story of Thrace's most famous gladiator, from his capture by Rome to his leadership of a massive, bloody slave uprising.

WHY HERE

While the show features a heavily digitized, graphic-novel aesthetic inspired by the film 300, it was filmed entirely inside massive green-screen sound stages at Mount Wellington Studios in Auckland, employing hundreds of talented local actors and stunt professionals.

INSIDER NOTE

This was entirely soundstage work — Mount Wellington Studios isn't a public attraction, so there's no physical arena to visit.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Shannara Chronicles

2016–2017

 ~10 min from Auckland CBD (Auckland Domain)

THE STORY

A vibrant, high-fantasy epic based on Terry Brooks' best-selling novels. Set thousands of years after the fall of human civilization, an elf princess, a human-elf hybrid, and a human rover embark on a quest to stop a horde of released demons.

WHY HERE

The show required an epic post-apocalyptic fantasy landscape where nature had reclaimed ancient structures. The production utilized locations across the Auckland region, including the dramatic cliffs of Auckland's West Coast and the sprawling grounds of the historic Auckland Domain.

INSIDER NOTE

Auckland Domain is free, central, and open daily — one of the easiest filming-location visits on this whole list.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Wilds

2020–2022

 ~1 hr from Auckland CBD (Bethells Beach)

THE STORY

A gripping, mystery-laden survival drama that plays like a modern Lord of the Flies meets Lost. A group of teenage girls from wildly different backgrounds are stranded on a deserted island after a plane crash, unaware they are part of an elaborate social experiment.

WHY HERE

The entire first season was filmed along the rugged, windswept coastline of Auckland's West Coast, particularly around Bethells Beach (Te Henga), which perfectly provided the dramatic, isolated desert-island look required for the high-stakes survival story.

INSIDER NOTE

Bethells Beach doubles for a deserted island convincingly because it genuinely feels remote, despite being close to Auckland city.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Sweet Tooth

2021–2024

Also filmed across the Southern Alps.

 ~40 min from Auckland CBD (Waitākere Ranges); Southern Alps scenes are a separate South Island leg

THE STORY

A heartwarming, beautifully realized post-apocalyptic fairytale based on the DC comic book series. Ten years after "The Great Crumble" ravaged the world, a lovable ten-year-old deer-hybrid boy leaves his forest sanctuary to search for his mother.

WHY HERE

New Zealand's pristine forests and sweeping mountain ranges provided the ultimate "nature-reclaiming-the-earth" aesthetic. Filming spanned across the country, from the lush foliage of the Waitākere Ranges to the dramatic alpine backdrops of the Southern Alps.

INSIDER NOTE

Locations span from the Waitākere Ranges to the Southern Alps — a reminder of just how much ground a single NZ production can cover.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Cowboy Bebop

2021

 ~30 min from Auckland CBD (East Auckland)

THE STORY

The stylish, live-action adaptation of the legendary Japanese anime series. This space-western follows a ragtag group of bounty hunters as they chase down the solar system's most dangerous criminals while trying to outrun their own dark pasts.

WHY HERE

The production team needed an array of diverse, retro-futuristic urban backdrops. They built massive, intricate city sets across various sound stages and industrial warehouses in East Auckland, blending physical New Zealand locations with high-tech digital enhancement.

INSIDER NOTE

East Auckland's industrial warehouses aren't a tourist draw on their own, but they're a reminder of how much production work happens quietly around the city.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

One of Us Is Lying

2021–2022

 ~20–30 min from Auckland CBD (various suburbs)

THE STORY

A glossy, binge-worthy high school mystery thriller based on Karen M. McManus's best-selling novel. Five students walk into detention, but only four walk out alive — leaving everyone a suspect in a high-stakes whodunit.

WHY HERE

While the story is firmly set in sunny Bayview, California, the entire first season was filmed around Auckland. Local schools, modern suburban neighborhoods, and coastal roads stood in seamlessly for the American high school experience.

INSIDER NOTE

Auckland's suburbs stand in convincingly for small-town California — look closely and you'll spot the same streets in other productions too.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Our Flag Means Death

2022–2024

 ~40 min from Auckland CBD (Kumeu Film Studios)

THE STORY

A hilarious, heartwarming, and wonderfully queer pirate comedy loosely based on the true adventures of Stede Bonnet, an 18th-century aristocrat who abandons his wealthy life to become the "Gentleman Pirate," eventually crossing paths with the infamous Blackbeard.

WHY HERE

For its spectacular second season, the production packed up its sails and moved directly to Auckland. The dynamic coastal landscapes, combined with the state-of-the-art water tanks at Kumeu Film Studios, provided the perfect canvas for the show's chaotic, romantic seafaring adventures.

INSIDER NOTE

Kumeu Film Studios' water tanks aren't open to visitors, but the surrounding coastline is classic West Auckland — worth exploring regardless.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

REGION 02 OF 10

Waikato

Rolling green farmland that became the most famous fictional country on Earth. This is where “filmed in New Zealand” first became a global phrase.

The Lord of the Rings Trilogy

2001–2003

Also filmed extensively in Tongariro National Park (Mordor and Mount Doom).

THE STORY

The trilogy that put New Zealand on the global cinematic map and turned the entire country into Middle-earth. Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's legendary fantasy masterpiece, this epic saga follows Frodo Baggins on his perilous quest to destroy the One Ring.

WHY HERE

Jackson knew his homeland possessed the raw, primordial landscapes required to bring Tolkien's world to life. From the emerald rolling hills of Matamata (Hobbiton) to the volcanic peaks of Ruapehu (Mt. Doom), NZ is Middle-earth.

INSIDER NOTE

Visit Hobbiton at golden hour, just as the crew did for the most famous shots — the low sun makes the hills glow exactly like on screen.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Hobbit Trilogy

2012–2014

Also filmed at Turoa, Mt Ruapehu (Hidden Bay).

THE STORY

Return to Middle-earth for the prequel that started it all. Based on Tolkien's 1937 novel, this trilogy chronicles Bilbo Baggins' unexpected journey with a company of dwarves to reclaim the Lonely Mountain from the dragon Smaug.

WHY HERE

With Wētā Workshop already based in Wellington and the permanent Hobbiton set waiting in the Waikato, returning to New Zealand was a no-brainer. The production expanded into the dramatic alpine cliffs of Twizel and the surreal rock formations of Mangaotaki Valley.

INSIDER NOTE

Book well ahead in summer — Hobbiton tours sell out days in advance during peak season.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe & Prince Caspian

2005–2008

Also filmed at Flock Hill in Canterbury.

THE STORY

Step through the wardrobe into a world of eternal winter, talking beasts, and epic battles. Based on C.S. Lewis's beloved classic novels, these films follow the Pevensie siblings as

they fight alongside the great lion Aslan to liberate Narnia.

WHY HERE

Adamson wanted a landscape that felt ancient and untouched by humans. Movie buffs flock to Cathedral Cove on the Coromandel Peninsula — the unforgettable location where the children discover the ruins of Cair Paravel — and the dramatic, rocky landscape of Flock Hill in Canterbury.

INSIDER NOTE

Cathedral Cove is tide-dependent — check DOC tide times before you go, or you may be turned back partway along the track.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Endless Summer

1966

 ~2 hrs from Auckland CBD, or ~45 min from Hamilton (Raglan / Manu Bay)

THE STORY

A pioneering surf documentary that introduced the world to New Zealand's Raglan and its now-legendary left-hand point break, following two American surfers on a round-the-world hunt for the perfect wave.

WHY HERE

Brown brought August and Hynson to Manu Bay as one stop on a round-the-world search for perfect waves. The point break's mechanical, rock-reef-fed left-hander turned out to be one of the longest and most consistent in the world, instantly putting Raglan on the global surfing map.

INSIDER NOTE

The wave that made Manu Bay famous is the exact same wave surfers ride today — unlike a film set, nothing here was built or has changed. You're paddling into genuine cinema history.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Rotorua & Taupō

Geothermal drama and towering forest, all within reach of one of the North Island's most visited regions.

Pete's Dragon

2016

Also filmed near Tapanui, Otago.

 ~10 min from Rotorua CBD (Whakarewarewa Forest); Tapanui, Otago is a separate South Island leg

THE STORY

A heartwarming Disney live-action reimagining about the touching friendship between an orphaned boy named Pete and his best friend Elliot — who happens to be a giant, furry green dragon.

WHY HERE

Disney wanted an enchanted, old-world forest feel. They found it in the towering, majestic redwoods of Whakarewarewa Forest in Rotorua. Production also headed south to the historic, quirky town of Tapanui in Otago, which perfectly doubled as a sleepy Pacific Northwest lumber town.

INSIDER NOTE

Whakarewarewa Forest's towering redwoods are free to walk any day of the year — go early morning for the same misty light as the film.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Gisborne / East Coast

Remote, coastal, and deeply connected to the stories filmed here — this region asks for a little more respect and a little more time.

Whale Rider

2002

 ~25 min from Gisborne (Whāngārā)

THE STORY

A deeply moving, globally acclaimed drama based on Witi Ihimaera's novel. It tells the story of Kahu, a young Māori girl who must fight against centuries of patriarchal tradition to fulfill her destiny as the new chief of her tribe.

WHY HERE

The film is a pure celebration of Ngāti Porou culture. It was filmed exactly where the story is set: the stunning, isolated coastal village of Whāngārā on the East Coast of the North Island, infusing the movie with deep, authentic local spirit.

INSIDER NOTE

Whāngārā is a small, living community, not a film set — visit respectfully, as you would any local township.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Taranaki

A single, near-perfect volcanic cone that's spent decades quietly standing in for mountains on the other side of the world.

The Last Samurai

2003

 ~40 min from New Plymouth (Mount Taranaki / Uruti Valley)

THE STORY

A sweeping historical drama about an embittered American military officer who is captured by Samurai warriors in 19th-century Japan, ultimately embracing their code of honor.

WHY HERE

Mount Taranaki! The near-perfect volcanic cone of the Taranaki region bears an uncanny resemblance to Japan's Mount Fuji. Combined with the lush hillsides of the Uruti Valley, New Zealand provided the ultimate, tranquil backdrop for this deep dive into Edo-period Japan.

INSIDER NOTE

On a clear day, Mount Taranaki's near-perfect cone really does look uncannily like Mount Fuji — locals joke it auditioned for the role.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

REGION 06 OF 10

Central Plateau / Ruapehu

Three volcanoes, New Zealand's first national park, and the real landscape behind Mordor — a genuinely major destination for travellers, film fans or not.

Without a Paddle

2004

Also filmed in Wellington, Rotorua, and Waikato (Huka Falls).

THE STORY

A comedy about three childhood friends who reunite after a loss and set off on a treasure hunt for D.B. Cooper's legendary hijacking loot, deep in what the film calls the Oregon wilderness.

WHY HERE

Almost entirely filmed across New Zealand's North Island standing in for Oregon — the small town of Raetihi, near Ohakune, makes a genuine five-minute cameo as the trio's rural American pit stop, with the town's historic Theatre Royal visible in the background of one scene.

INSIDER NOTE

Raetihi's Theatre Royal still stands today — the small town leans into its heritage rather than its five minutes of Hollywood fame, so don't expect a plaque, just keep an eye out.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

REGION 07 OF 10

Wellington

The country's creative capital — home to Wētā Workshop, Wētā FX, and a genuine claim to being the effects and production heart of the entire industry.

King Kong

2005

 ~10 min from Wellington CBD (Miramar)

THE STORY

A spectacular, action-packed reimagining of the classic 1933 monster movie. An ambitious filmmaker drags his cast and crew to the mysterious Skull Island, only to discover a prehistoric world ruled by a towering, tragic giant ape.

WHY HERE

Jackson kept the mega-production local. Wellington's Miramar peninsula was transformed into the streets of 1930s New York, while the rugged, windswept coastline of

Lyall Bay doubled as the perilous shores of Skull Island.

INSIDER NOTE

Miramar is now the beating heart of Wellington's film industry — Wētā Workshop itself is a short walk from where 1930s New York was built.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Avatar & Avatar: The Way of Water

2009 / 2022

 ~10 min from Wellington CBD (Miramar); ~1 hr (Wairarapa)

THE STORY

The highest-grossing cinematic epics of all time. Set on the lush, alien moon of Pandora, these sci-fi masterpieces follow Jake Sully as he defends the indigenous Na'vi people and their breathtaking oceans from human exploitation.

WHY HERE

While Pandora is a digital marvel, it was entirely birthed in New Zealand. Cameron utilized the world-class digital wizardry of Wētā FX in Wellington. For the sequel, the live-action elements were filmed at Stone Street Studios, and Cameron loved the country so much he bought a permanent estate in the Wairarapa.

INSIDER NOTE

Wētā Workshop runs public tours in Miramar — you can walk through the same building where Pandora was built, pixel by pixel.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Lovely Bones

2009

 ~1 hr from Wellington CBD (Wairarapa)

THE STORY

A visually stunning and emotional adaptation of Alice Sebold's best-selling novel. It follows a murdered 14-year-old girl who watches over her grieving family — and her killer

— from the vibrant, surreal landscape of the "In-Between" afterlife.

WHY HERE

While the real-world scenes were shot in Pennsylvania, Jackson chose his home turf to manifest the ethereal, dreamlike world of the afterlife. The stunning, rolling green hills of the Wairarapa region were transformed into a magical, shifting paradise.

INSIDER NOTE

The Wairarapa's green hills are a short, scenic drive from Wellington city — a good half-day trip rather than a full expedition.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

District 9

2009

 ~10 min from Wellington CBD (Wētā FX, Miramar – studio only)

THE STORY

A groundbreaking, gritty, found-footage sci-fi thriller about extraterrestrial refugees forced to live in slum-like conditions in South Africa, and the government agent who begins to mutate after being exposed to alien biotechnology.

WHY HERE

While the gritty live-action was shot on location in Johannesburg, the movie's phenomenal, Oscar-nominated creature design and visual effects were entirely generated by the geniuses at Wētā FX in Wellington.

INSIDER NOTE

This one's a studio credit, not a filming location — the visual effects were built entirely inside Wētā FX, so there's no physical 'spot' to visit, just the studio itself.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

What We Do in the Shadows

2014

 Central Wellington

THE STORY

A riotously funny mockumentary following a group of centuries-old vampires who share a flat in modern-day Wellington, navigating the mundane horrors of chores, rent, and trying to get into local nightclubs.

WHY HERE

This homegrown comedy masterpiece leans heavily into deadpan Kiwi humor. It was shot entirely on location in Wellington, capturing the capital city's vibrant, eclectic nightlife and cozy suburban flats.

INSIDER NOTE

Wellington's flats and villas genuinely look like this — the film barely needed to dress up the city at all.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Ghost in the Shell

2017

 ~10 min from Wellington CBD (Stone Street Studios, Miramar)

THE STORY

A visually spectacular, live-action cyberpunk adaptation of the iconic Japanese manga. In the near future, a cyber-enhanced super-soldier begins to question her past while hunting down a dangerous hacker who targets cybernetic minds.

WHY HERE

Wellington's Stone Street Studios provided the state-of-the-art infrastructure required for this effects-heavy blockbuster. The city's central business district was transformed into a neon-soaked, futuristic metropolis with towering holographic advertisements.

INSIDER NOTE

Stone Street Studios isn't generally open to the public, but Wellington's CBD itself still carries a faint neon-futurist energy after dark.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Time Bandits

2024

 Central Wellington; ~40 min (Remutaka Range); ~50 min (Queen Elizabeth Park)

THE STORY

A wildly imaginative, comedic time-travel adventure series adapted from Terry Gilliam's beloved 1981 film. The story follows a brilliant 11-year-old history buff who discovers a time portal in his bedroom and joins a ragtag group of historical thieves.

WHY HERE

Wellington is the home turf for Taika and Jemaine, offering an incredible variety of locations within a short radius. Production transformed Wellington's CBD into 1920s Harlem, used the Remutaka Range to double for the Great Wall of China, and built a full-scale replica of Stonehenge in Queen Elizabeth Park.

INSIDER NOTE

Queen Elizabeth Park's full-scale Stonehenge replica was temporary — don't go looking for it, but the park itself is a lovely coastal reserve worth visiting anyway.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

REGION 08 OF 10

Canterbury

From Christchurch's Victorian streets to the alpine wall of Aoraki / Mount Cook, Canterbury covers more visual range than almost any other region on this list.

Heavenly Creatures

1994

 ~10 min from Christchurch CBD (Victoria Park)

THE STORY

A dark, visually dazzling psychological drama based on the infamous 1954 Parker–Hulme murder case in Christchurch. It chronicles the obsessive, fantasy-fueled friendship between two schoolgirls that takes a tragic, lethal turn.

WHY HERE

Because it happened there. Jackson shot on location in Christchurch, utilizing the exact spots where the real-world events unfolded, including the beautiful but haunting paths of Victoria Park.

INSIDER NOTE

Victoria Park sits above Christchurch with sweeping city views — a quiet, reflective spot rather than a tourist hotspot.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

The Frighteners

1996

Also filmed in Wellington.

 ~20 min from Christchurch CBD (Lyttelton)

THE STORY

A delightfully campy, cult-classic supernatural comedy-horror. A fraudulent psychic investigator who can actually talk to ghosts finds himself up against a malicious, Grim Reaper-like entity that is murdering both the living and the dead.

WHY HERE

Robert Zemeckis executive-produced the film and originally intended to set it in the US, but Jackson convinced him to shoot entirely in New Zealand. The Victorian-style architecture of Lyttelton and the streets of Wellington doubled flawlessly for a quirky American town.

INSIDER NOTE

Lyttelton's Victorian streets survived the 2011 earthquakes in patches — some exact filming spots have since changed.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Vertical Limit

2000

 ~3.5–4 hrs from Christchurch (Aoraki / Mount Cook)

THE STORY

A high-altitude, edge-of-your-seat survival thriller. A retired climber must assemble a ragtag rescue team to ascend K2 — the world's second-highest mountain — to save his sister and her expedition crew trapped in a mountain crevasse.

WHY HERE

While the movie is set on the lethal slopes of the Himalayas, the actual filming took place on the breathtaking, accessible peaks of Aoraki / Mount Cook. New Zealand's alpine base camps provided the ultimate, treacherous visual terrain for the production.

INSIDER NOTE

Aoraki / Mount Cook is the real deal, not a green-screen double — check conditions carefully, this is serious alpine terrain.

Full in depth information, stories, anecdotes and fascinating facts of every movie in the regional guides.

Mulan

2020

Also filmed in the Tasman District.

 ~3.5 hrs from Christchurch (Ahuriri Valley, near Omarama); Tasman District is a separate leg further north

THE STORY

Disney's visually spectacular, live-action reimagining of the classic Chinese legend. A fearless young woman disguises herself as a man to enlist in the Imperial Army, steps up to save her ailing father, and becomes one of China's greatest warriors.

WHY HERE

Caro leveraged the epic scale of the South Island to stand in for ancient China. The spectacular battle sequences were filmed against the dramatic, clay cliffs of the Ahuriri Valley and the expansive, snow-capped vistas of the Tasman District.

INSIDER NOTE

The Ahuriri Valley near Omarama is remote and exposed — pack for sudden weather even on a clear-looking day.

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REGION 09 OF 10

Otago

Dramatic, wide-open, and endlessly photogenic — Central Otago and Queenstown have doubled for everywhere from Montana to the Himalayas to Pandora.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

2009

Also filmed at Milford Sound, Fiordland.

 ~45 min from Queenstown (Lake Wakatipu area); Milford Sound is a ~4.5–5 hr return day trip

THE STORY

The explosive backstory of Marvel's most iconic mutant. This superhero blockbuster traces Logan's dark past, his complex relationship with his brother Victor, and the sinister military experiment that bonded adamantium to his skeleton.

WHY HERE

The filmmakers needed a location that could convincingly double as the remote, breathtaking Canadian Rockies. They found their paradise in the South Island, filming around the jaw-dropping landscapes of Queenstown, Milford Sound, and the pristine waters of Lake Wakatipu.

INSIDER NOTE

Milford Sound gets over 6,000mm of rain a year — some say the moodier the weather, the more it looks like the film.

Mission: Impossible – Fallout

2018

 ~45 min from Queenstown (Glenorchy)

THE STORY

Tom Cruise climbs, leaps, and flies his way through the most critically acclaimed installment of the high-octane espionage franchise, racing against time to stop a catastrophic nuclear threat.

WHY HERE

New Zealand's dramatic Southern Alps played host to the film's nail-biting, helicopter-chase finale. The production built a massive set in the remote Rees Valley near Glenorchy, utilizing the country's world-class helicopter pilots and vast airspace for Cruise's death-defying aerial stunts.

INSIDER NOTE

The Rees Valley set was built and removed after filming — today it's simply one of the most scenic 4WD and helicopter routes near Glenorchy.

The Power of the Dog

2021

 ~45 min–1 hr from Queenstown (Central Otago)

THE STORY

A tense, psychologically gripping drama based on Thomas Savage's 1967 novel. Set in 1920s Montana, it explores the toxic brilliance of a cruel rancher who wages a war of intimidation against his brother's new wife and her son.

WHY HERE

Campion knew the stark, wind-swept plains and dramatic hills of Central Otago could effortlessly double as the isolated, beautiful, yet unforgiving landscape of 1920s Montana.

INSIDER NOTE

Central Otago's wind is relentless and very real — dress for it, exactly like the cast and crew had to.

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30 Days of Night

2007

 ~30–40 min from Queenstown / Wanaka (Pisa Range, Cardrona)

THE STORY

A terrifying, bloody horror film based on the graphic novel miniseries. An isolated Alaskan town plunged into its annual 30-day winter darkness finds itself under siege by a pack of savage, bloodthirsty vampires.

WHY HERE

To capture the freezing, isolated atmosphere of Alaska, the production headed to the South Island. They utilized the snow-draped landscapes of the Pisa Range near Cardrona, alongside massive indoor sets built at Auckland Film Studios to control the endless "night."

INSIDER NOTE

The Pisa Range near Cardrona gets genuine snow in winter — for the atmosphere, go cold-season, not summer.

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A Wrinkle in Time

2018

 ~1 hr from Queenstown (Lake Hāwea, near Wanaka)

THE STORY

A vibrant, visually dazzling Disney fantasy epic based on Madeleine L'Engle's classic novel. A young girl, her brother, and her friend are guided by three celestial beings on a cosmic journey across time and space to rescue her missing father.

WHY HERE

When the characters travel to the utopian planet of Uriel, the filmmakers needed landscapes that looked heavenly. They chose the Southern Alps, filming around the dramatic mountain vistas of Lake Hāwea, the Hunter Valley, and the golden tussock plains of Central Otago.

INSIDER NOTE

Lake Hāwea's blue is real, not a filter — visit on a calm day for the mirror-like reflections seen in the film.

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Top of the Lake

2013–2017

 ~45 min from Queenstown (Glenorchy)

THE STORY

A dark, moody, and critically acclaimed mystery-drama series. It follows an obsessive detective who returns to her remote childhood home to investigate the disturbing disappearance of a pregnant twelve-year-old girl.

WHY HERE

Campion showcased the South Island's breathtaking but imposing, brooding isolation. The fictitious town of "Laketop" was filmed around the stunning, glacier-carved landscapes of Queenstown, Glenorchy, and the misty shores of Lake Wakatipu.

INSIDER NOTE

Glenorchy remains one of the quietest, most photogenic small towns in Otago — go for the day, stay for golden hour.

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The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power (Season 1)

2022

Also filmed in Fiordland and the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland.

 ~1 hr from Queenstown (Central Otago); Fiordland and Auckland scenes are separate legs

THE STORY

The most expensive television production ever mounted. Set thousands of years before the events of *The Hobbit*, this sweeping epic chronicles the history of the Second Age of Middle-earth, the forging of the rings, and the rise of the Dark Lord Sauron.

WHY HERE

To maintain the cinematic visual continuity established by Peter Jackson's films, Amazon returned to New Zealand for its massive first season. Production utilized the iconic Hauraki Gulf, the majestic peaks of Fiordland, and the golden fields of Central Otago.

INSIDER NOTE

Season one filming spanned three very different regions — proof that ‘filmed in New Zealand’ rarely means just one corner of the country.

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REGION 10 OF 10

Fiordland & Southland

The wildest corner of the country, where the weather is as much a character as the landscape.

The World's Fastest Indian

2005

 ~15–20 min from Invercargill (Oreti Beach)

THE STORY

The ultimate, feel-good true story of Burt Munro, an eccentric, charming elderly man from the bottom of the world who spends years modifying his classic 1920 Indian Scout motorcycle, eventually traveling to Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats to set a land speed record.

WHY HERE

The film celebrates a true-blue New Zealand folk hero. Filming took place in Munro's actual hometown of Invercargill and along the dramatic, wide-open expanse of Oreti

Beach, where Burt used to test-ride his motorcycle at terrifying speeds.

INSIDER NOTE

Oreti Beach is still a legal, driveable beach — you can stand where Burt Munro once opened up the throttle.

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Alien: Covenant

2017

 ~2.5–3 hrs from Te Anau, or ~4.5–5 hrs from Queenstown (Milford Sound)

THE STORY

Ridley Scott's thrilling, terrifying return to the dark sci-fi universe he created. The crew of a colony ship lands on a pristine, uncharted paradise, only to uncover a sinister threat that forces them into a desperate fight for survival.

WHY HERE

Scott needed an epic, untouched landscape that felt genuinely alien yet majestic. He found his answers in the dramatic Fiordland National Park, using the towering peaks and misty waters of Milford Sound to double as the mysterious colony planet.

INSIDER NOTE

Milford Sound is best experienced by boat, exactly as the misty, alien coastline reads on screen.

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LAST PAGE

45 Titles, 10 Regions

This guide covers 45 titles across New Zealand. Standalone regional guides add full depth — real quotes, real operators, and real photography — for every title.

