

Lord of the Rings South Island adventure

A CLOCKWISE CIRCUMNAVIGATION AROUND THE SOUTH ISLAND
STARTING AND ENDING YOUR MOTORHOME ADVENTURE IN CHRISTCHURCH.

There's some good in this world Mr. Frodo — and it's worth fighting for

When the decision was made to film the Lord of the Rings trilogy entirely in New Zealand, the secret was already out — that the country's scenery was enchantingly beautiful.

More than two decades later, the buzz and excitement surrounding the film franchise locations and those of its subsequent prequels remain.

We've keenly researched this South Island LOTR itinerary and organised it in a way that works perfectly as a clockwise circumnavigation around the island — starting and ending your motorhome adventure in Christchurch.

Lord of the Rings South Island filming locations await! So what are you waiting for? After all, *a wizard is never late*.

Itinerary highlights:

- Edoras — Mount Sunday, Canterbury
- Pelennor Fields — Mackenzie Country, Canterbury
- Edoras to Helm's Deep — Deer Park Heights, Otago
- Isengard — Paradise, Otago
- Anduin River — Mavora Lakes, Southland
- Fangorn Forest — Snowdon Forest, Southland
- Dead Marshes — Kepler Mire, Southland
- Ered Nimrais — Mount Gunn, West Coast
- Dimrill Dale — Mount Owen, Tasman
- Chetwood Forest — Canaan Downs Scenic Reserve, Tasman
- The One Ring — Jens Hansen, Tasman



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1 Edoras — Mount Sunday

A green hill rises upon the east

Nestled deep amongst the Ashburton Lakes is a unique rocky outcrop that was once the scene of Edoras — the capital city of the Kingdom of Rohan. It's difficult to describe this place because it's absolutely breathtaking.

Introduced to this stunning location in *The Two Towers*, it's well worth making a detour to drive the sealed and gravel roads to Mount Sunday car park. This is also the trailhead where you can start your half hour stroll to the peak.

Featured movies: *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*

Where: Hakatere Conservation Park, Canterbury

Directions: Take Inland Scenic Route 72 to Ashburton Gorge Road which becomes Hakatere Potts Road to the [Mount Sunday trailhead](#)

How best to view: Hike to the summit

Resources: [Mount Sunday Track](#)



Edoras photo of Holly Darville



Leaving no trace

The filmmakers were allowed to build Edoras atop Mount Sunday provided it was removed after filming and the location was left in exactly the same condition it was found. Natural vegetation had to be lifted and stored in a nursery during the 16 month shoot.



Pelennor Fields, photo by Agnese

2 Pelennor Fields — Mackenzie Country

Ride, ride to ruin and the world's ending

The Mackenzie Country was the location of the largest battle between good and evil in *Lord of the Rings*. This is where thousands of Sauron's orcs fought against the warriors of Gondor and Rohan.

A vast space of land between golden tussock hills, this region was named after James Mackenzie — an infamous sheep thief during the 1850s. It was chosen for its sweeping grassy fields that stretch to the foothills of the mountains.

Most of the filming took place on private farmland near Twizel. Up to 1,700 people and 200 horses were on set over the 32 days of filming. There was a guided tour of the battle's film locations a few years ago but that now seems to have run its course.

Featured movie: *The Return of the King*

Where: Near Twizel, Canterbury

Directions: Take State Highway 8 to [Twizel](#)

How best to view: From afar as the exact location is on private land

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A town for hire

Almost the entire population of the small town of Twizel helped out with filming — either as orc extras or as crew support behind the camera. Those with horses were paid \$100 a day for their work and another \$100 a day for their horse's efforts.



Aragorn vs warg scene

3 Edoras to Helm's Deep — Deer Park Heights

If the wall is breached, Helm's Deep will fall

One integral part of the second movie, *The Two Towers*, is the Rohirrim refugee journey from Edoras to the security of Helm's Deep. Many of the iconic scenes along the way were filmed at Deer Park Heights — an impressive subalpine location that's also a working deer farm.

Pay an entry fee online and drive your vehicle into and around the park with the opportunity to stop at the various film locations. Bring a picnic lunch and take in the magnificent Remarkables mountain range that featured as the backdrop to some of the refugee scenes.

A few other memorable moments shot here were Aragorn being dragged off a cliff by a warg, Legolas leaping onto his horse, and Gimli being thrown off his steed.

Featured movies: *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*

Where: Near Queenstown, Otago

Directions: Take State Highway 6 to Peninsula Road and on to signposted [Deer Park Heights](#)

How best to view: Drive through the park stopping at the many [film locations](#)

Resources: [Map of Deer Park Heights](#)



Deer Park Heights



Aragorn's Cliff - Deer Park Heights



It's just not cricket

The 10,000 Uruk-Hai battle chant during the attack on Helm's Deep was actually recorded at The Cake Tin stadium in Wellington. Sir Peter Jackson led a 25,000 strong crowd during a break in the cricket match between New Zealand and England.



Aragorn's Cliff photo of Charlotte Eve Lewis

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4 Isengard — Paradise

My business is with Isengard tonight — with rock and stone

The location of the fortress of Isengard is in a small rural locality named Paradise, not far from Glenorchy. A truly isolated location, it's essentially fields of sheep surrounded by imposing mountain peaks.

You'll find Paradise about halfway between Glenorchy and the Routeburn trailhead. Take your time and imagine how the characters interacted with Saruman's Tower amidst the stunning environment.

Nearby is also the location of the forest of Lothlórien — a natural beech forest between Glenorchy and Paradise. It featured in *The Fellowship of the Ring* where the Uruk-hai were chased by Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli.

Although filmed on private forest land, you can still pull over into some off-road parking areas to get a feel for the location. It's perhaps fitting that the fairest realm of the elves remaining on Middle-earth was filmed in a place called Paradise.

Featured movies: *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*

Where: Near Glenorchy, Otago

Directions: Take the Glenorchy-Paradise Road to [Lothlórien](#) and the Glenorchy-Routeburn Road to the [Isengard Lookout](#)

How best to view: Drive or join an [LOTR tour](#)



Minister of the Rings

The New Zealand Government appointed Energy Minister Pete Hodgson to also be Minister of the Rings during *LOTR* filming — to raise the international profile of the country.



5 Anduin River — Mavora Lakes

Even the very wise cannot see all ends

About 70km from the picturesque tourist town of Te Anau are the tranquil Mavora Lakes. To get there, you'll have to take a 40km stretch of gravel road — so check that travel on unsealed roads is permitted by your rental vehicle operator.

Both Mavora Lakes, and the Mararoa River that connects them, were utilised for multiple scenes in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, including:

- The edge of Fangorn Forest — where Merry and Pippin escaped from the orcs and hid from the Uruk-hai
- Nen Hithoel — a large lake on the River Anduin where the Fellowship camped out and where Boromir's body was left to float home down the river.
- The end of the Fellowship's journey along the Anduin River.



Liquorice mouthwash

Orcs apparently have black blood so their mouths also needed to be black. Prior to each orc scene, the actors playing orcs had to swill liquorice mouthwash.

Featured movie: *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Where: Near Te Anau, Southland

Directions: Take State Highway 94 to Mavora Lakes Road then on to [North Mavora Lake](#) where the above scenes took place

How best to view: Drive or join an [LOTR tour](#)

Resources: [Mavora Lakes Conservation Park](#)

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6 Fangorn Forest — Snowdon Forest

I am Gandalf the White. And I come back to you now — at the turn of the tide

The last habitation of the Ents, Fangorn Forest, is located in majestic Fiordland National Park. It's famous for a few uplifting scenes in *The Two Towers*.

Not only does Aragorn track the hobbits' trail into the forest but Gandalf also whistles for his noble horse, Shadowfax, on the edge of Fangorn.

The most important scene for the movie's storytelling shot here was the encounter with, and subsequent revealing of, Gandalf the White.

In New Zealand, Fangorn is known as Snowdon Forest and is a popular spot for fishing and hiking.

Featured movie: *The Two Towers*

Where: Near Te Anau, Southland

Directions: Take State Highway 94 to Kakapo Road then on to Takaro Road which weaves between [Snowdon Forest](#)

How best to view: Drive or hike

Resources: [Snowdon Forest tramping tracks](#)



7 Dead Marshes — Kepler Mire

There are dead things — dead faces in the water

The swampland known as the Dead Marshes was partly filmed at Kepler Mire which is located roughly halfway between Manapouri and Te Anau. It makes for a quick photo stop as it doesn't have any associated walks with it.

Frodo, Sam and Gollum trudged through this marshland environment and began seeing ghostly faces in the wetlands.

The nearby Waiau River was also used for some Anduin River scenes.

Featured movie: *The Two Towers*

Where: Near Te Anau, Southland

Directions: Take State Highway 95 towards Manapouri to Mount York Road and [The Kepler Mire](#)

How best to view: Drive



The magic of Fangorn

Gandalf the White's first appearance in *The Two Towers* was intentionally made confusing. Saruman's eyes were composited with Gandalf's face and both voices were mixed together.



Gollum juice

To keep his throat lubricated, Andy Serkis who played Gollum drank many bottles of what became known as Gollum juice — a mixture of honey, lemon and ginger.

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8 Ered Nimrais — Mount Gunn

The Beacons are lit! Gondor calls for aid — and Rohan will answer

One of the most memorable scenes from *The Return of the King* is the visual sequence of the beacons being lit on mountain tops across Middle-earth. This was the kingdom of Gondor's signal to the land of Rohan when in need of military aid.

The primary filming location for this iconic moment was at Mount Gunn in the mighty Southern Alps. Situated on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island, this 1,261m high mountain was used as a stunning backdrop.

You can check this location out by either:

- Hiking the [Franz Josef Glacier viewpoint track](#), or
- Flying over the region in a scenic flight.

Featured movie: *The Return of the King*

Where: Near Franz Josef Glacier, West Coast

Directions: Take State Highway 6 to the Franz Josef Glacier access road which leads to [Franz Josef Glacier car park](#) near [Mount Gunn](#)

How best to view: Scenic flight or hike



Tunnelweb Spider

The spider, Shelob, in *The Return of the King* is based on [New Zealand's tunnelweb spider](#).

9 Dimrill Dale — Mount Owen

Some things that should not have been forgotten were lost

Exiting the Mines of Moria should've been a relief for the Fellowship. Yet instead, there was grief at the loss of Gandalf the Grey. When you get to experience this incredible filming location, you'll more likely feel euphoria.

Mount Owen is 1,875m high and is home to some of the oldest rock in New Zealand. You can reach its summit by hiking up or viewing from a helicopter.

If you prefer to hike in, drive to the northern trailhead and follow the track to [Granity Pass Hut](#) before route-finding your way to the peak of [Mount Owen](#) the following day. This option is for experienced hikers only.

For a more relaxing visit, consider a [scenic chopper flight](#) that will land you right on this rocky landscape.

Featured movie: *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Where: Near [Tapawera](#), Tasman

Directions: Take Tadmor Valley Road from Tapawera to Tadmor-Bushend Road which becomes Wangapeka River Road till the [Mount Owen trailhead](#)

How best to view: Scenic flight or hike

Resources: [Mount Owen tracks and routes](#)



To heli or to hike

The actor who played Boromir, Sean Bean, was afraid of flying in helicopters so he hiked to many of *The Fellowship of the Ring's* alpine locations — in costume.

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10 Chetwood Forest — Canaan Downs Scenic Reserve

All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us

Spectacular Takaka Hill with its marble limestone caves, beech forest and rocky outcrops, served as the film location for Chetwood Forest in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Here is where the hobbits fled Bree and the Black Riders into the forest — led by the mighty Aragorn.

To get to this area you'll have to drive the 11km unsealed road from the main highway. Take your time to travel to the end of the road at Canaan Downs Campsite, where you'll be rewarded with panoramic views over Golden Bay.

Featured movie: *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Where: Near Takaka, Tasman

Directions: Take State Highway 60 over Takaka Hill to Canaan Road till the [Canaan Downs Campsite](#)

How best to view: Drive and hike

Resources: [Canaan Downs Scenic Reserve](#)



Bring in the army

When you saw the army of orcs in *LOTR*, it's unlikely you thought they might be a real army. In fact they were —15,000 members of the New Zealand Army were cast as orc extras.

11 The One Ring — Jens Hansen

One ring to rule them all

As you're circling back around on your *LOTR* loop journey to Christchurch, stop by Nelson to visit the one creator of The One Ring.

[Jens Hansen](#) designed and made the iconic ring for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy — and their business is right in the very heart of Nelson. Take the opportunity to chat to the jewellers and try on some of the rings used in the films.



Your planned Lord of the Rings South Island adventure is now well advanced. It's time to get seriously excited. And in the words of Frodo Baggins — there's no real going back.

Ready for your own Middle-earth adventure?

GET IN TOUCH

BOOK NOW!