

Put a ring around Rotorua cashing in

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New Zealand's tourism industry is gearing up to capitalise on the interest generated by *The Hobbit* films and Rotorua is well positioned to benefit from the *Lord of the Rings* forerunner.

Delegates at Trenz tourism expo last week got a preview of a new Tourism New Zealand campaign to create visitor interest in travel to New Zealand around the release of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* and *The Hobbit: There and Back Again* will be released on December 14 this year and December 13, 2013, respectively.

Destination Rotorua Marketing general manager Oscar Nathan said the industry was very positive about the opportunities around *The Hobbit* and his organisation was working with the likes of Matamata's Hobbiton Movie Set and Farm Tours to ensure Rotorua can be a part of that.



Oscar Nathan

He pointed to the incredible interest generated by the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the "afterglow" that was continuing 12 years later.

"We should do well by association."

Oscar Nathan, Destination Rotorua

"We should really be quite clever around how we leverage off that and support it.

"Hobbiton Tours are in Rotorua every day and have a great product, so we should do well by association."

Hobbiton general manager Russell Alexander said Rotorua was also the closest location of plentiful accommodation to the Matamata attraction, which will be in demand — especially when it has finished developing the site.

As well as the constructions put up for the filming, the business will be extending the Green Dragon into a working pub and Alexander outlined plans to put up marquees to host group events of up to 600 people.

Some groups are already pencilled in, including The One Ring fan club, which is planning to bring in two 787s of people around the premiere in December.

"Rotorua will benefit because these people will need somewhere to stay and Matamata is a semi-rural town."

Middle-earth mania pure gold for NZ tourism

New Zealand's 100% Pure campaign will soon have a new twist, with Tourism New Zealand's 100% Middle-earth promotion.

Aimed at promoting New Zealand as a visitor destination through its association with the two *The Hobbit* films, the campaign is focused on showing how people can experience the places seen in the film for themselves.

Tourism New Zealand chief executive Kevin Bowler said the films would, once again, put the country's spectacular landscapes in front of movie lovers around the world.

"Many movie goers would probably

"We aim to show potential travellers that the fantasy of Middle-earth is, in fact, the reality of New Zealand."

Kevin Bowler, Tourism NZ

consider the landscapes of Middle-earth to be a fantasy, only made possible thanks to the talents of film makers. Not so.

"Through our marketing work, we aim to show potential travellers that the fantasy of Middle-earth is, in fact, the reality of New Zealand — and there is a whole world of experiences to be had and people to meet within the movie-scene style landscapes."

Working with Warner Brothers Pictures, New Line Cinema, MGM and Wingnut Films, Tourism New Zealand will translate scenes and events from the movies into actual experiences.

"We will show how easy it is to come here, see Middle-earth first-hand, and enjoy all the exciting and fun experiences New Zealand has to offer."

Alexander said the release of the first *Lord of the Rings* movie saw numbers through the Matamata iSite soar from 50,000 a year in 2002 to 367,000 in 2004. While only 20 per cent of these visitors actually visited the Hobbiton set, he said the attraction had created diversity for the town and generated income through retail and hospitality when people pass through.



REAL DEAL: Matamata's Hobbiton Movie Set, pictured, may have been created for the movies, but there is a focus on letting potential visitors know the scenery in *The Hobbit* films is very real. PHOTO/SUPPLIED

One Rotorua businesswoman has already put her hand up to help provide that personal experience.
Julie Charity runs Look After Me

homestay network and she told *The Daily Post* homestay was a great way to enable film fans to meet real New Zealanders, have an authentic New

Zealand experience and stay closer to some of the more remote filming locations where commercial accommodation may be lacking.

"Home stays are already working very well in Matamata and it makes logical sense to expand that," Ms Charity said. "It is a new idea for us to explore."

He pointed to the ongoing effect of *The Sound of Music* on tourism in Salzburg, Austria, as an example of the longevity of the interest generated by films.

"That movie came out in the late 1960s and there is still a huge following. And they have no sets, people just get to visit locations."

Tourism New Zealand brand and

international public relations general manager Catherine Bates agreed the original *Lord of the Rings* films were still driving business here and said New Zealand would be looking to build on that interest with *The Hobbit*.

"The International Visitor Survey shows 85 per cent of visitors are aware *Lord of the Rings* was filmed here and the films were part of the reason for

coming for 60 per cent. For 1 per cent, it was their main reason for coming here."

She said people became aware of the "stunningly beautiful" scenery in New Zealand through the original trilogy and Tourism New Zealand was looking to build on that with *The Hobbit* to show people the activities they can do within those landscapes.

"We will add in the amazing experi-

ences and the friendly, welcoming people."

TNZ and the film companies will be working in tandem — using the movies to promote the destination and vice versa.

"If you get the movie right and can put the destination message around it, we will see and increase in visitation from around the world."