

Unexpected journey: Amazon shifts \$1bn Lord of the Rings from New Zealand to UK

A MAZON Studios is moving production of its \$1billion Lord of the Rings television series from New Zealand to the UK in a major coup for British film industry.

The first of the five scheduled seasons, a back story set in Middle Earth thousands of years before the events depicted in JRR Tolkien's books, was filmed in locations around Auckland last year and is due to premiere on Prime Video next September.

But the tech giant today announced it will shift the entire production to the UK when filming for the second season begins in June, having struggled with shortages of studio space and rows with the government over tax breaks.

Strict Covid policies also remain in place which mean the country's borders are effectively closed until the end of the year, leading to 14-day quarantine periods for the mostly UK-based actors or crew entering the country.

The surprise decision came as a disappointment in New Zealand, which has built a lucrative tourist industry from the success of Peter Jackson's blockbuster quarter of Hollywood movies.

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While no details have been announced about where in the UK units will be based, location scouting for the original series took place in Scotland with areas visited including the Isle of Skye, Perthshire, and Loch Lomond.

Amazon and Creative Scotland also held talks about using new studios which are under construction in Leith, Edinburgh.

An Amazon spokesman said the move "aligned with its strategy of expanding its production footprint and investing in studio space across the UK."

Amazon Studios' Vernon Sanders said: "We want to thank the people and the government of New Zealand for their hospitality and dedication and for providing The Lord of The Rings series with an incredible place to begin this epic journey."

The UK offers attractive rebates for TV series that cost more than \$1m an episode to shoot, which has helped to draw high-profile Amazon productions including Good Omens and Sex Education.

The total price tag for the first season came in at a reported \$450million , which is around five times the budget for a typical season of Game Of Thrones.

New Zealand Film Commission chief executive David Strong said: "It's a shame and I feel for everyone who has put their hearts into this production. Season two was expected to begin later in 2022, so our role now is to work hard to keep the Kiwi screen sector employed."

UK Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said: "Thousands of high quality jobs all across the UK will be created and supported by The Lord of the Rings television series so this is very exciting news."