

Māori Cultural Values to guide your filmmaker journey in Aotearoa New Zealand

Honouring Land, Language and Legacy

New Zealand
FILM COMMISSION



Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga



nzfilm.co.nz



1.

Nau mai ki Aotearoa - Welcome to Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is more than a filming destination, it's a place where storytelling is woven into the land, the people, and the spirit of the culture. At the heart of this creative landscape is the Māori worldview, offering filmmakers a unique opportunity to collaborate with one of the world's most vibrant and proactive cultures.

Whether you're a filmmaker from Mumbai, Seoul, São Paulo, or Los Angeles, your journey here begins with understanding the cultural richness and creative potential that Māori collaboration brings.

What is Aotearoa?

Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand, meaning "land of the long white cloud." It's widely recognised and increasingly used alongside 'New Zealand' to honour the country's Māori heritage and bicultural identity.

In creative industries and everyday language, the use of 'Aotearoa' reflects a growing respect for Māori culture and its central place in the story of this land. For filmmakers, acknowledging the name Aotearoa is a simple but powerful way to show cultural awareness and connect with the spirit of the place you're working in.



2.

Introduction to Māori Culture

Māori culture is a living, dynamic, and deeply embedded culture in the social, political and creative fabric of Aotearoa New Zealand.

While Māori people and their culture exist in the modern world, they will draw on traditional customs and beliefs that are sourced from their tribal communities. These perspectives influence and generate creative interactions.

Understanding values and key concepts in Māori culture will greatly assist you in working in Aotearoa New Zealand. These concepts are central to Māori values of connection the environment, importance of relationships, and collaborations that create enduring value.

Connecting to Land and Place

Te Taiao

Environment

In Māori culture, the land and sky are living ancestors – central to creation, identity, and storytelling. Some filming locations are recognised as significant to Māori or local iwi (tribes). Consultation and permission may be required. Your locations team or the NZFC can guide you through these processes.

Kaitiakitanga

Guardianship of Land and Knowledge

Māori hold a deep spiritual and ancestral connection to the whenua (land). Filming on location may require consultation and respectful practices to honour these relationships.

Tapu

Restricted Access

Tapu refers to restrictions placed on people, places, or objects to protect what is considered culturally significant or special taonga (treasures). It may affect permitted activities at filming locations, as well as protocols around work areas, locations, waste, food handling, and more.

Relationships and Engagement

Tāngata

People

Māori value people as a cornerstone of community. Welcoming visitors – whether to our country, region, or home – is a valued tradition. Building trust with local communities is essential for respectful collaboration.

Whanaungatanga

Relationships

Kinship (whakapapa) and shared experiences form strong connections. Whānau (family) includes all generations, and whanaungatanga – the building of relationships – is key to working in Aotearoa. Long-term partnerships with iwi (tribes) and hapū (sub-tribes) enrich creative outcomes.

Kanohi ki te Kanohi

Face-to-Face

Personal engagement is preferred over remote communication. In-person meetings show respect, builds understanding, and helps create genuine trust.

Manaakitanga

Respect and Care

Speaks to the important relationship of host and visitor. Reciprocal understanding, hospitality, and generosity in all interactions. Respectful behaviour on set and in community engagement fosters goodwill.

Kotahitanga

Unity and Shared Purpose

Working together with a collective mindset strengthens creative outcomes and ensures all voices are respected in the storytelling process.



Knowledge and Creative Collaboration

Mātauranga

Knowledge

Refers to Māori knowledge systems and content, including cultural, historical, and environmental wisdom. Cultural advisors and Māori creative voices with lived experience bring depth and authenticity to storytelling and can help guide your journey.

Reo

Language

Te reo Māori (Māori language) is an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand and is considered a taonga (treasure), a vital part of cultural identity. Its respectful use in communications, scripts, or dialogue enhances cultural integrity. Professional language and cultural experts are available to support your work is correct and informed.

Tikanga

Protocols and Customs

Tikanga are the daily customs that guide respectful behaviour and interaction. Observing tikanga practices that honour the land and people (e.g. pōwhiri or welcome ceremonies) is important. Participating in these protocols is a way to acknowledge the authority (mana) of tangata whenua (people of the land).

Mahi Tahī

Working Together

Collaboration is grounded in shared purpose and mutual respect. Co-creating with Māori teams ensures culturally aligned and inclusive filmmaking.

These values shape how Māori communities engage with storytelling, collaboration, and creative expression. They are not just cultural markers; they are guiding principles for how to work together.

Te tiriti o Waitangi - NZ's founding agreement:

Signed in 1840 between Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown. Its intention was to create a partnership where Māori would keep authority over their lands, culture, and taonga (treasures), while agreeing to share governance with British settlers.

Three main ideas or principles generally guide how we continue to honour Te Tiriti:

- Partnership — genuinely working together and being involved in decisions that affect Māori people, land, and taonga.
 - Protection — ensures Māori language, culture, and rights are respected and safeguarded.
 - Participation — have considered and equal opportunities to be involved and have access to opportunities, in all areas that concern Māori content, people, land, and taonga.
 - Understanding Te Tiriti is a way to show respect, build trust, and strengthen relationships in our country which was founded on a shared agreement and mutual respect.
-

3.

Filming in Aotearoa New Zealand as an International Production

Filming in Aotearoa New Zealand offers international filmmakers a rare convergence of cinematic excellence, cultural depth, and institutional support. It's a place where storytelling is not just a creative act but a cultural responsibility, where landscapes are alive with ancestral narratives, and where Māori collaboration is not a trend but a cornerstone of the national screen identity.

A Destination Like No Other

New Zealand's natural beauty is world-renowned. Its true distinction lies in the opportunity to build genuine partnerships with Māori people and their communities.

These collaborations are not about adding cultural flavour, they are about creating stories that are grounded in place, people, and purpose. The Māori worldview, Te Ao Māori, brings an interconnected and spiritual lens to storytelling, offering filmmakers a chance to explore themes of connection, stewardship, and belonging in ways that resonate globally.

Case Study: Heart of the Beast

Filming with Respect Across Aotearoa



Heart of the Beast, a survival thriller starring Brad Pitt, filmed across iconic South Island locations including Queenstown, Milford Sound (Piopiotahi), and Mt Aspiring National Park. From the outset, the production team worked with local iwi and hapū, supported by NZFC, to uphold cultural protocols.

Cultural consultants and location managers facilitated site blessings and guided engagement near culturally significant areas, ensuring respectful storytelling and strengthening relationships with mana whenua (indigenous people who have historic or territorial rights to the land). The production also partnered with local crews and businesses, showing how cultural engagement can enhance both creative and logistical outcomes.

This case demonstrates that early and genuine engagement with Māori when filming on location in Aotearoa builds trust, enables smooth operations, and achieves meaningful collaboration.



A Thriving Production Ecosystem

New Zealand's screen industry is internationally respected for its technical and creative excellence, skilled crews, and streamlined production infrastructure. The country offers comprehensive incentives, including the New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR) – International. What truly sets New Zealand apart, though, is its cultural infrastructure. The New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) provides not only funding and logistical support but also cultural guidance. This ensures productions involving Māori content or collaboration are supported from concept to delivery with genuine care.

Case Study: A Minecraft Movie

Cultural Grounding and Industry Impact in Aotearoa



The live action *A Minecraft Movie*, starring Jason Momoa and Jack Black, was filmed across Auckland and Waikato, transforming local landscapes into the fictional town of Chuglass, Idaho. Locations included Helensville, Waimauku, and Otahuhu College, with Huntly's Power Station and streets playing a central role.

From the outset, the production engaged with mana whenua (local tribes with ancestral authority over land) in both regions, incorporating iwi consultation, site blessings, and pōwhiri (welcome ceremonies) at Auckland Film Studios. Cast and crew were welcomed through Māori protocols, grounding the production in local culture. Jason Momoa noted that “the very first moment I landed, I knew this is where I want to be. Because of the people, the culture, the landscape. It made sense for *Minecraft* to shoot here.”

The film employed 85% New Zealand crew and 84% local cast, including Māori and Pacific talent. It also led to a world-first collaboration between Tourism New Zealand, Warner Bros, and eleven iwi (tribes). Director Jared Hess praised the local industry, sharing that filming in New Zealand was “one of the best production experiences of my whole life. The crew was unbelievable. Everybody was so dialled-in, they were 10 steps ahead of you.”

A Minecraft Movie exemplifies how international productions can thrive in New Zealand's dynamic screen ecosystem. Through iwi engagement, regional collaboration, and NZFC support, the film became a culturally grounded, globally successful project, highlighting Aotearoa New Zealand as a premiere destination for storytelling, innovation, and Indigenous partnership.

The NZFC's Inbound Productions team understands the unique needs of overseas filmmakers, assisting with location galleries and scouting, HoD connections, production and infrastructure overviews, regulatory navigation, and introductions to Māori creatives and advisors. Our approach is collaborative, helping shape your vision for success in both local and global markets.

Commercial and Creative Impact

Productions that engage meaningfully with Māori culture consistently perform well. They open doors to funding, co-production, and distribution opportunities that value responsible Indigenous storytelling. They also attract festival attention, critical acclaim, and audience loyalty.

The NZFC's Te Rautaki Māori strategy specifically supports projects with authentic Māori involvement, offering pathways to resources that enhance both creative and commercial outcomes. This isn't just about meeting cultural obligations; it's about unlocking the full potential of your story.

Case Study: Official Co-Productions with Māori

Cultural Integrity Meets Global Success

International co-productions that meaningfully engage with Māori culture are proving to be both creatively rich and commercially successful. Three recent films *The Convert*, *We Are Still Here*, and *Holy Days* demonstrate how collaboration with Māori creatives can elevate storytelling, attract global attention, and unlock funding and distribution opportunities.

The Convert (NZ-UK-Australia): Directed by Lee Tamahori, this historical drama centres Māori perspectives and earned international acclaim, with support from NZFC.

We Are Still Here (NZ-Australia): A bold Indigenous anthology featuring Māori and Aboriginal filmmakers. It premiered at Sydney Film Festival and won Best Dramatic Feature at imagineNATIVE, highlighting global demand for Indigenous-led narratives.

Holy Days (NZ-Canada): A heartfelt road film blending Māori spirituality and modern production innovation. It created industry pathways for Māori talent and secured international distribution. These films affirm that co-productions grounded in Māori collaboration are not only culturally respectful but commercially strategic. They attract diverse audiences, international funding, and festival attention, proving that Indigenous engagement is a creative and economic asset.

4. Ready to Film in Aotearoa New Zealand? Make Culture Your First Connection

The New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) can connect you with cultural advisors, funding pathways, and cultural talent who bring depth, truthfulness, and resonance to your story. Authentic collaboration with Māori creatives can transform your project.

Start the conversation: enquiries@nzfilm.co.nz

Your next film could be more than a cinematic achievement, it could be a taonga, a cultural treasure that speaks across generations and borders.



5.

Additional Resources

Core NZFC Resources

New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC):

General info, funding, incentives, co-productions, and cultural guidance

www.nzfilm.co.nz

Te Rautaki Māori Strategy:

NZFC's strategy for supporting Māori filmmakers and culturally aligned projects

[Te Rautaki Māori - NZFC](#)

NZFC Co-Production Guidelines:

For official co-productions under treaty agreements

[Co-Production Guidelines](#)

New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR):

Learn about financial incentives available for international productions filming in New Zealand, including eligibility criteria and application processes.

[NZSPR - International Productions](#)

International Production Showcases:

Case studies and behind-the-scenes features from films made in Aotearoa New Zealand

[International Showcases](#)

Māori Screen Industry Networks

Ngā Aho Whakaari - Māori in Screen:

Advocacy, resources, and the Māori Screen Directory

www.ngaahowhakaari.org

Māori Screen Directory:

Find Māori creatives, advisors, and crew

[Directory via Ngā Aho Whakaari](#)

Urutahi Koataata Māori Guide:

Practical guide for working with Māori in screen production

[Working with Māori in Screen Production](#)

Indigenous Film & Talent Development

Māoriland Film Festival & Indigenous Co-Lab:

Indigenous-led film festival and talent development programmes

www.maorilandfilm.co.nz

Te Māngai Pāho & NZ On Air - Reo Māori Content Co-Fund:

Funding for Māori language and culture-based screen content

[Reo Māori Content Co-Fund](#)

At A Glance: Filming in Aotearoa New Zealand with Cultural Integrity

Whether you're planning a large-scale production or a small independent film, here are a few key things to know before you begin:

1. Start with a Conversation

Before scouting locations or finalising your script, reach out to the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC). Our international team is your first point of contact and can guide you through:

- Filming protocols
- Cultural considerations
- Permitting processes
- Māori engagement pathways

2. Understand the Relationship to Whenua (Land)

In Māori culture, land is not just a location, it is a living ancestor. Some filming locations in Aotearoa hold deep cultural and spiritual significance. Even if your project doesn't involve Māori characters or stories, filming on or near culturally significant sites may require:

- Consultation with iwi or hapū
- Permissions or cultural protocols
- Guidance from local advisors

This is why early engagement with NZFC is essential. We make it easy for you to navigate these respectfully and efficiently.

3. Plan for Tikanga (Protocols)

Māori customs and protocols may influence how you approach:

- Pōwhiri/mihi whakatau (welcoming ceremonies) On-set practices such as karakia (acknowledgements) and respecting tapu (restricted significant cultural) areas
- Representation of people, places, and stories

These are not barriers; they're opportunities to build trust and ensure your production benefits from aligning with local values.

4. Mutual Respect is the Foundation of Filming in Aotearoa

You don't need to collaborate deeply with Māori communities to film in New Zealand. But you do need to:

- Be aware of cultural sensitivities
- Follow established protocols
- Seek cultural advice when filming near Māori communities or incorporating Māori content

NZFC can help you do this with clarity and confidence.

5. Why It Matters

Respectful engagement in Aotearoa New Zealand isn't just about meeting expectations; it's about unlocking the deeper potential of your story. When filmmakers take the time to understand the cultural landscape they're working in, they tap into a creative energy that is rooted in ancestry, place, and community.

Films like *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *A Minecraft Movie* and *Heart of the Beast* honoured the stories, people, and whenua (land) of Aotearoa. Even productions that don't centre Māori themes benefit from recognising the cultural significance of the locations they film in and the communities they engage with.

In New Zealand, storytelling is a living tradition. When you approach it with care and curiosity, your film becomes more than a production, it becomes part of a legacy that connects across generations and cultures.

6. Your Next Step

To begin your consideration of New Zealand and production planning, contact the NZFC. The inbound production team understand what's needed, can connect you with the right people, and ensure your production is set up for success contact NZFC early:

Email enquiries@nzfilm.co.nz or visit www.nzfilm.co.nz to begin your engagement.



Glossary of Māori Terms

Aotearoa: The Māori name for New Zealand, meaning “land of the long white cloud”.

Hapū: Sub-tribe or clan.

Iwi: Tribe or tribal group.

Kanohi ki te Kanohi: Face-to-face engagement.

Kaitiakitanga: Guardianship of land and knowledge.

Kotahitanga: Unity and shared purpose.

Mahi Tahi: Working together in collaboration.

Manaakitanga: Hospitality, generosity, and respect.

Mana whenua: Local iwi or hapū with ancestral authority over land.

Mātauranga: Māori knowledge systems.

Pōwhiri: Welcoming ceremony.

Reo: Language; specifically Te Reo Māori.

Taonga: Culture treasure; something highly valued.

Tāngata: People.

Tāngata Whenua – Natural / Home people – referring to Māori tribal groups as first nation in Aotearoa

Tapu: Restricted access / Cultural restrictions placed on people, places and interactions

Tikanga: Protocols and customs guiding respectful behaviour.

Whanaungatanga: Relationships connection through kinship or shared experiences.

Whenua: Land; considered a living ancestor in Māori culture.

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