

Beat: Business

Sequels to be filmed in New Zealand in return for tax

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USPA News - The three sequels to the science fiction action movie "Avatar" will be filmed and produced in New Zealand, director James Cameron announced on Monday after the studio reached a deal with the government that will result in a significant tax rebate. Twentieth Century Fox announced in August that there will be three "Avatar" sequels which will be filmed simultaneously, with annual December releases starting with the first sequel in December 2016. The movies will be produced by Cameron and Jon Landau, with screenwriters Josh Friedman, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver and Shane Salerno collaborating on the screenplays for the three films.

Cameron, along with Kiwi officials, announced Monday that a memorandum of understanding had been signed that will see the sequels being made in New Zealand. This will allow Twentieth Century Fox and production company Lightstorm Entertainment to qualify for a tax rebate of 25 percent. "This is excellent news for the New Zealand screen industry. The Avatar sequels will provide hundreds of jobs and thousands of hours of work directly in the screen sector as well as jobs right across the economy," said Economic Development Minister Steven Joyce. "They will be a very big boost to the screen industry while we look to develop more New Zealand-sourced productions." As part of the agreement, the parties agreed to spend at least 500 million New Zealand dollar (412.9 million U.S. dollars) on production activity in New Zealand, including most of the live action shooting and visual effects. It will also result in New Zealanders serving in senior positions and compromising about 90 percent of live action crew members. "The filming of the Avatar films will be of substantial benefit to New Zealand economically and culturally," said Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Christopher Finlayson. "Besides the confidence being shown in the talented people who work in the our screen industry, the commitment [of the parties] to work with the Government to help grow the local industry is significant and will help ensure it is sustainable longer term." As part of the agreement, New Zealand will also host at least one official red carpet premier and a featurette on New Zealand will be included on DVDs and Blu Rays. Cameron and Landau have also offered to serve as founding members of a new screen advisory board that will provide advice and guidance to screen and film makers from New Zealand who are looking to succeed internationally. Few details about the upcoming sequels have been released so far, but Cameron confirmed in late October that actor Stephen Lang will return as Colonel Miles Quaritch for all three films. "I'm not going to say exactly how we're bringing him back, but it's a science fiction story, after all," he said at the time. "His character will evolve into really unexpected places across the arc of our new three-film saga." After its release to critical acclaim and commercial success in December 2009, "Avatar" quickly surpassed "Titanic" to become the world's highest-grossing film ever, currently standing at \$2.7 billion. The previous holder of the title, the romantic disaster film "Titanic," has grossed more than \$2.1 billion since its release.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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