

# Why Iceland is a New Hub for Film Production

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Several movies and shows are shot in Iceland. From incentives to gorgeous landscapes, here's why Iceland is an up-and-coming film hub.



In *Game of Thrones* Season 2, Jon Snow finally ventures beyond The Wall into the wild and mysterious North. The Northmen know not what terrors await them among the expanse of snow and rock. This hostile icy landscape was filmed on an Icelandic glacier, where the cast and crew faced freezing temperatures to capture the isolated and barren land that makes up what lies North of the Wall. There was no need for CGI to evoke the vastness of this fantasy landscape.

Iceland has its own film productions winning awards internationally, but is also increasingly home to studio productions finding their ideal settings in the glaciers, geysers, waterfalls, lava fields, black sand beaches, and northern lights. A land mass about the size of Kentucky nestled into the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, Iceland is a country that holds many geographical wonders and landscapes that transform through the seasons providing locations that can be the setting for another planet like in *Interstellar* and *Star Wars: Rogue One* or a harsh medieval fantasy world like for Netflix's *The Witcher: Blood Origin*. Even shows like *Succession* have found their ideal setting in Iceland for an episode or two.

The landscapes aren't the only compelling factor, as Iceland's Film Commission offers enticing production incentives for filming there and has a variety of production companies versed in working in the country's terrain.

## Beautiful Geography



Season 2 of HBO's *Succession* opens with Kendall at a rehab clinic, in a modern pool surrounded by an imposing and bare Icelandic terrain. This setting creates a sense of isolation with the contrast of sleek luxury and rugged landscape starting the season premiere off on a dramatic note. Iceland's

volcanic activity produces geothermal springs and pools, harnessed by resorts such as The Blue Lagoon, which make an intriguing setting.

The black sand beaches in South Iceland are world-famous for the entire beach being produced from ground-down volcanic rock. Parts of Game of Thrones Season 7 were filmed at the black sand beaches for the setting for East-watch by the Sea. One of the country's most famous waterfalls, Skogafoss, which has a nearly 200-foot drop, was a filming location for Season 8, where this surreal setting was the backdrop to an intimate scene.

The lava fields also make a convincing feel of an entirely different planet for sci-fi films. Director Christopher Nolan of *Batman Returns*, *Interstellar*, and *Star Wars: Rogue One* describes the Icelandic landscape as ideal for filming as "it's one of the few places in the world where you can get two or three very different, extreme looks, within the space of a couple miles."

### **Incentives for Filming in Iceland**



The Icelandic Film Center offers productions strong incentives to co-produce and film on location in Iceland. Feature films, documentaries, short films, and television shoots can apply for up to a 35% tax rebate on production in Iceland.

For this top rebate, there are requirements in terms of minimum production costs spent in Iceland, days shooting in Iceland, and the number of employees taxed in Iceland. Projects that do not meet these requirements can still be eligible for a 25% tax rebate on productions. This is a strategic move for Iceland to grow its own economy through the film industry and is a great situation for production companies on a practical level looking to manage production costs while accessing jaw-dropping locations.

### **Production Teams**



When filming on such specific and potentially dangerous terrain, it is particularly helpful to have well-adapted Icelandic production companies at hand. Pegasus Pictures, TrueNorth and Hero Productions are a couple of the biggest production companies working with major U.S. companies

to safely and effectively film in Iceland. There are three specialized aerial filming service companies to capture establishing landscape shots, such as the shots of glaciers used in Robert Eggers's Viking epic *The Northman*.

Eggers notes how he was inspired by Iceland to write *The Northman* and met his future collaborators for the film while on his trip there. Iceland also has its own casting companies for actors and extras to involve local talent in projects. For example, Eskimo Casting, based out of Iceland's capital Reykjavík, were involved in casting for Netflix's Sci-Fi movie *The Midnight Sky*, Darren Aronofsky's biblical epic *Noah* and Ben Stiller's *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, all of which filmed portions in Iceland including local talent.

### **Iceland's Local Film Industry**



Iceland's own film industry is making its mark internationally. Netflix has released three seasons of the Icelandic-language series *Trapped*, which plays into a timely sociopolitical divide in Iceland paired with a detective murder-mystery thriller made ever more haunting by the frozen snowstorms of the remote Icelandic setting.

SXSW film festival 2023 will see the premiere of *Northern Comfort*, produced by Iceland's Neotop films in collaboration with UK and German production companies, a comedy/drama about a group on a fear of flying course whose last challenge is to fly to Iceland, but find everything taking a turn for the worse upon their arrival.

The film industry in Iceland is at an exciting point of acceleration in terms of both international productions making use of otherworldly landscapes and clever incentives, as well as Iceland bringing their own content and talent towards the world stage. Be on the lookout for the lava fields, waterfalls, and black sand beaches popping up on the big screen.