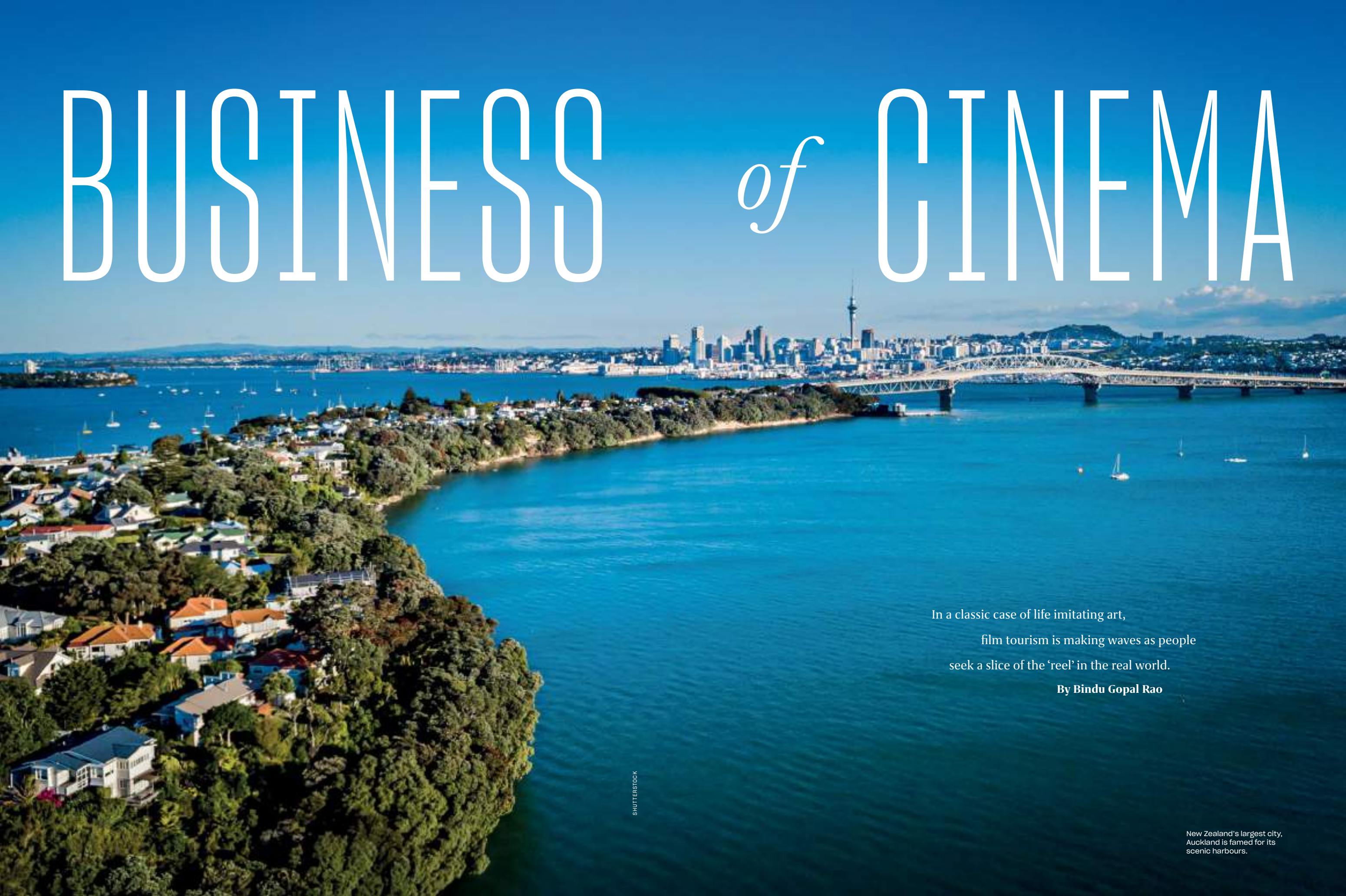




BUSINESS *of* CINEMA

In a classic case of life imitating art,
film tourism is making waves as people
seek a slice of the 'reel' in the real world.

By Bindu Gopal Rao

SHUTTERSTOCK

New Zealand's largest city,
Auckland is famed for its
scenic harbours.



The illuminated Taj Lake Palace floats serenely on Lake Pichola in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

When Delhi-based media consultant Naina Sharma saw Zoya Akhtar's *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* in 2011, she knew Spain would be her next holiday destination. "I was simply blown away by how the film showcased Barcelona, Costa Brava, Buñol, Seville, and Pamplona." During her two-week-long trip, timed with the famed La Tomatina festival in Buñol, she even went skydiving in Seville. "It was a surreal trip that I have the fondest memories of," she laughs, adding, "to think it was a movie that started it all."

Sharma is not alone. In fact, she is one of many people fuelling what is now known as 'film tourism'.

Wanderlust Calling

With films investing heavily in visual appeal, locations are everything. A case in point is the recent series *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, shot in Paris. Travel aggregators have reported a 211 per cent surge in flight searches to the French capital. Even before this, Paris enjoyed a tourism boost with the success of the Netflix series *Emily in Paris*, which drew significant footfall to iconic Parisian landmarks.

Film producer and founder of the Children's Oncology Support Fund (COSF), Thomas Pierce, agrees: "Cinema can change the trajectory of a destination. Dubrovnik became a global hotspot after *Game of Thrones*, while New Zealand continues to thrive on the legacy of *The Lord of the Rings*."



Setenil de las Bodegas in Spain is famed for its unique homes built into massive rock overhangs.

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF THE VILLA ESCAPE



A still from *Housefull 2*, shot in Mauritius.

In India, Rajasthan—particularly Udaipur and Jaipur—saw a resurgence after films like *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *The Darjeeling Limited*. "These are places that already had history and beauty, but film reframed them for a new audience," adds Pierce. Cinema has long played a decisive role in shaping tourism trends. Auli and Rishikesh in Uttarakhand gained the spotlight following films like *Student of the Year* and *Kedarnath*. Similarly, Pangong Lake in Ladakh became a household name almost overnight after *3 Idiots*.

"Filmmakers have a unique way of showcasing a place from a fresh perspective—highlighting its charm, stories, and settings in ways that spark curiosity," says Sanjeev Kumar, General Manager, Naukuchia House. "Earlier this year, for instance, when a series was shot in Nainital, we noticed a visible rise in guest interest to experience those cinematic backdrops for themselves."



Above: Georgia's cinematic landscapes have featured in global productions, from spy thrillers to historical epics. Below: Kalpa village shrouded in mist and clouds on a beautiful morning.

For filmmakers, it goes deeper than merely placing a pretty location on screen. Locations are not just backdrops—they're characters. "They set the mood, hold the silences, and amplify the emotions. That's why

I'm always drawn to discovering the unseen—the hidden valleys, the quiet corners, the places the world hasn't yet put on a postcard," says producer, writer, actor and Managing Director of Baweja Studios, Harman Baweja.

When audiences fall in love with a place they've never even heard of—and it turns into the next travel dream—that is the true power of cinema.

Trade Speak

Cinema and streaming platforms have become powerful tourism catalysts, spotlighting destinations from New Zealand (*The Lord of the Rings*) to Ireland and Croatia (*Game of Thrones*), and Indian favourites like Himachal Pradesh, Goa, and Rajasthan.

"At Thomas Cook, we see travellers actively seeking out film trails and experiential engagements—whether it's a meal at an iconic café featured in a hit show or a guided tour sharing behind-the-scenes anecdotes," says Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head—Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India).

That's why they've curated specialised itineraries like *The Sound of Music* trail in Austria and Salzburg, enabling guests to relive their favourite on-screen moments in an immersive way.

Even the influence of Korean pop culture is on the rise, with travellers eager to explore Seoul's streets as featured in their favourite K-dramas and music videos. And this trend isn't limited to millennials or Gen Z. "We see honeymooners, families, groups of friends, and solo travellers all opting for set-jetting holidays. They want to immerse themselves in the story—tasting dishes from memorable scenes, visiting iconic cafés, or booking royal stays and curated location tours," says S.D. Nandakumar, President & Country Head—Holidays & Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel.

Creating Impact

Films can dramatically reshape a destination's perception and global visibility almost overnight. Skellig Michael in Ireland became a must-visit after its appearance in *Star Wars*.

"The *White Lotus* Season 3, filmed across stunning resorts in Thailand including Four Seasons Koh Samui and Anantara properties, led to a 40 per cent surge in enquiries and bookings in those locations after the show aired," says Amrit Rajaratnam, Managing Director of Island Life, Sri Lanka.

Likewise, Mauritius has benefitted immensely from Bollywood films such as *Housefull 2*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and *Go Goa Gone*, which showcased its lagoons, beaches, and resorts—transforming them into aspirational destinations for Indian travellers.

"Locations in Tokyo and Kyoto gained visibility after *Your Name* and *Memoirs of a Geisha*. In Japan, anime and cinema fans create their own trails," says Sunil Mathapati,

Director, AllKnown Marketers Pvt. Ltd. "For example, travellers flock to the Suga Shrine staircase in Tokyo to recreate the final scene of *Your Name*, or book guided tours of Kyoto's Gion district after watching *Memoirs of a Geisha*. These aren't just tours—they're emotional experiences."

Above: Gangnam District in Seoul has featured in numerous K-dramas and K-pop videos; Below: Tokyo's Suga Shrine staircase became a pilgrimage site for fans of the anime film *Your Name*.



Georgia has increasingly featured in Indian and international productions.



FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF ALLKNOWN MARKETERS PVT LTD

COURTESY OF GEORGIAN NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

The Script

This isn't just about getting a selfie at a landmark. Travellers want to step into the story. Film trails, curated heritage walks, and immersive experiences are booming.

"A 2024 Booking.com survey found that 44 per cent of Indian travellers chose a destination after seeing it on screen—whether in films, shows or celebrity content. Rajasthan's 2025 Film Tourism Promotion Policy offers subsidies of 30 per cent or more, fast-tracked permissions, and additional incentives for stays in government hotels," says Arjun Baljee, Founder of ICONIQA and President of Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd.

Film enthusiast Richa Kapur agrees it's magical to walk the same streets or stand at the same spots seen on screen. "It almost feels like stepping into my favourite and cherished movie moment," she says. This emotional connection is the game-changer—film tourism makes travel more meaningful and memorable than traditional sightseeing.

"There are travellers who say that such cinematic destinations provide a fresh perspective—mixing cultural experience with something deeply personal like nostalgia and excitement," says Alok K Singh, Chairman and CEO, Travomint.

Aspirational Trails

One of the newer destinations receiving a film tourism boost is Georgia. Productions like *Special Ops Season 2* and *Billa II* have embraced Georgia's visual appeal, filming across its vibrant cities.

Blockbusters such as *Sye Raa Narasimha Reddy* and *Mom* have utilised Georgia's versatile terrain to craft epic narratives—blending alpine landscapes with urban charm. "This impact is deeply rooted in experiential content. Viewers want not just to see but to live the stories they've watched unfold on screen," says Maia Omiadze, Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration. "During the release of *The Night Manager*, which featured Jetwing Saman Villas as a key location, we welcomed several fans of the show who were eager to experience the setting firsthand," says Hashan Cooray, Director of Marketing & Development, Jetwing Hotels.

Another notable fact of the growing connection between cinema and tourism would be the latest collaboration between Netflix and India's Ministry of Tourism to promote India's tourist destinations by integrating them into the platform's creative storytelling. For Netflix, the tie-up represents its first venture with a South Asian tourism body.

The Math

The global film tourism industry is expected to grow from



Château d'Ouchy in Lausanne is a cinematic lakeside castle-hotel that exemplifies how heritage locations in Switzerland have gained popularity through Bollywood's lens and global film shoots.



Above: The medieval town of Cefalù in Sicily glows at sunset, offering a timeless Mediterranean charm. Left: Auckland's Harbour Bridge and skyline form a striking panorama, especially vibrant at dawn and dusk.



\$66.2 billion in 2025 to \$145.9 billion by 2035, at a CAGR of 8.2 per cent, according to a report from Future Market Insights.

At the 7th Global Film Tourism Conclave—organised by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India—cinema's pivotal role in promoting global tourism was spotlighted.

Melbourne has become a magnet for filmmakers thanks to strategic support from Visit Victoria and VicScreen, alongside world-class infrastructure. "Initiatives like the Victorian Screen Rebate provide up to 10 per cent back on eligible production expenses, with additional incentives for post-production, animation, and VFX. Supported by state-of-the-art studios, skilled local crews, and the \$79.3 million VicScreen Strategy 2021–2025, Melbourne has firmly established itself as a global production hub," say Huzan Fraser and Beena Menon, Representatives, India, at Visit Victoria.

The surge in film tourism can be attributed to the inherently visual nature of both travel and film—perfect partners in storytelling. Destinations around the world are rolling out the red carpet for filmmakers, offering attractive incentives to showcase their locales. Countries such as the UK, Ireland, and Canada are leading the charge with tax reliefs that significantly reduce production costs—the UK offers 25 per cent tax relief, while Ireland's generous 40 per cent tax credit is a major draw.

"Meanwhile, the Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) between India and Switzerland has been a game-changer for filmmakers like Yash Raj Chopra, who helped put these stunning destinations on the tourist map," say Suchna Hegde and Yogi Shah, co-founders of The Villa Escape.

Popular films and shows are inspiring a new generation of travellers—and the real star is the destination itself. So who's ready for a cinematic adventure? 🌐

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