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With *Avatar*: The Way Of Water finally in cinemas – 13 years after the franchise’s first instalment, *Avatar* – director James Cameron’s lush landscapes are back in the spotlight. Mainly set on Pandora – a habitable moon in another solar system inhabited by the Na’vi tribe and being colonised by humans – both films were produced with cutting edge CGI and technology to create the humanoid aliens and their world. Pandora is an abundant, flourishing environment, brimming with greenery and dramatic landscapes – and, though it is otherworldly and digitally created, these are the real locations that inspired Pandora here on Earth. Read the C&TH Responsible Tourism Guide The Real Locations That Inspired Pandora in *Avatar*: The Way of Water There are six key locations across the globe that inspired Pandora, according to Dream World Worldwide. These are: Zhangjiajie National Forest Park and the Huangshan Mountains in China, Glowworm Caves in New Zealand, Mount Roraima and Angel Falls in Venezuela, and the Hawaii’an tropical rainforests. As well as this, the earthy Northern Lights phenomenon is thought to have inspired the skies on Pandora. Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, China Situated in Hunan, China, one of the mountains in the Zhangjiajie National Forest park has been renamed ‘Avatar Hallelujah Mountain’ in honour of Cameron’s first *Avatar* film. Perhaps the most famous of the real locations that inspired Pandora, the park is comprised of dense forest, deep ravines and canyons, caves, and strange pillar-like rock formations unique to China and formed by erosion. With a blankie of mist, these pillars appear to float, creating their iconic, unearthly look. Can you visit Zhangjiajie? Yes, there are plenty of guided tours and walks, as well as the famous Bailong Elevator, the highest and fastest outdoor elevator in the world. Huangshan Mountains, China With a similar look to the Zhangjiajie mountains, the Huangshan Mountains are another real location that inspired Cameron’s creation of Pandora. Literally meaning ‘Yellow Mountains’, the Huangshan Mountains is well-known for its dramatic scenery, often seen in traditional Chinese paintings. Can you visit the Huangshan Mountains? Yes, the Huangshan Mountains are one of China’s most popular tourist destinations, with cable cars, paved walkways and thousands of stone steps snaking through the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Glowworm Caves, New Zealand Brimming with a glowworm species found only in New Zealand, the Waitomo Glowworm Caves might seem familiar if you’re an *Avatar* fan. When Jake Sully first interacts with woodspirits in *Avatar*, he is awed by their strange glow against the dark of the nighttime forest. Can you visit the Glowworm Caves? Yes, there is a visitor centre at the Waitomo Glowworm Caves and even boat rides through the caves so you can similarly be surrounded by otherworldly glowing creatures. newzealand.com Mount Roraima, Venezuela Over in South America – at the junction of Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana – sits Mount Roraima, a giant, flat-top mountain that, rising from the Venezuelan rainforest, appears to float. Composed of ancient sandstone, the landform dates back to the Proterozoic Eon (1.7 to 2 billion years ago), making it one of the oldest rocks in the world. Can you visit Mount Roraima? Yes, though this is more of a labour intensive experience; you can hike to the top of the mountain, usually across an expedition period of approximately two to six days. Angel Falls, Venezuela Considered one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the world, Angel Falls is the world’s largest uninterrupted waterfall, dropping over the edge of the Auyán-tepui mountain situated in Venezuela’s Canaima National Park. One of the original real locations that inspired Pandora, with its dramatic drop and surrounding scenery, you might recognise Angel Falls from the first *Avatar* movie, particularly when Jake and Neytiri try to catch the bird dragon. Can you visit Angel Falls? Yes, you can visit Angel Falls! However, because Angel Falls is in a protected reserve, you will need to join a tour. Trips are taken by boat. Alakai Wilderness Area Hawaii’an Tropical Rainforests, USA Ahead of the creation of *Avatar*, Cameron and his production team travelled to Hawaii to look at the rainforests. The lush greenery and prolific wildlife there were a key inspiration for the settings Cameron wanted his team to create. Spread across the eight island of Hawaii and isolated for over 28 million years by the vast swathes of ocean, these rainforests are home to a plethora of varied endemic species. Can you visit the Hawaii’an rainforest? Yes, numerous companies offer guided tours of the Hawaiian rainforest. Featured image courtesy of Disney. As Liz Lemon once said, “I want to go to there.” That “there” is Pandora – aka the world of *Avatar*. Anyone who has seen the first *Avatar* film or plans to see *Avatar*: The Way of Water in theaters can agree that Pandora is a breathtaking and gorgeous location. While most of the actual *Avatar* filming locations are movie sets and CGI, *Avatar*’s Pandora was inspired by real locations you can visit. For those wondering where *Avatar* was filmed, you may be disappointed to hear that the two main filming locations for The Way of Water were MBS Media Campus in California and New Zealand at the Stone Street Studios and Kumeu Film Studios. If you visit those places today, you most likely won’t be able to see any floating mountains and bioluminescent waters. However, Pandora was also inspired by real locations around the globe that should be on everyone’s wanderlust bucket list. From glowing caves in New Zealand to rainforests in Hawaii, here are the real-life locations you should visit if you’re a fan of the *Avatar* films. Hongjie Han/Moment/Getty ImagesThe main source of inspiration for Pandora is the Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in Zhangjiajie, China, according to USA Today. The mountains that fill the park look almost identical to the floating ones you see in *Avatar*. To get the best view during your visit, take the cable car to Huangshi Village. From the top of the mountain, you’ll be able to snap gorgeous pics and take stunning videos to share on Instagram and TikTok. The cast of *Avatar*: The Way of Water and director James Cameron reportedly prepped for filming by going on a “sense-memory odyssey” in Kaitai, Hawaii. By spending “a few days” in the Hawaiian rainforest, the actors were able to get a feel of what it would be like to actually live in Pandora. Since Hawaii provides the same experience as Pandora, you should add it to your list of *Avatar* locations to visit IRL. While you’re in Hawaii, feel free to spend as much time as you’d like on the beach. After all, *Avatar 2* follows the Metkayina, who are the ocean-based Na’vi on Pandora. Matteo Colombo/Moment/Getty ImagesAnyone who has been to Pandora – World of *Avatar* at Walt Disney World knows that, other than the floating mountains, the most beautiful thing about Pandora is its bioluminescence. It’s what makes the land glow at night in magical ways.Even though *Avatar* was filmed on studio sets in New Zealand, the country did provide some inspiration for Pandora as well. The Waitomo Caves on the North Island are a great example, because they are home to one of the most popular bioluminescent destinations in the world. Similar to the Na’vi River Journey attraction at Disney, you can take a boat tour through the Waitomo Caves to see its bioluminescence – which are actually glowworms. Also in New Zealand, you’ll find the Waipoua Forest, which is supposedly another location that inspired Cameron when he was creating Pandora. The Tāne Mahuta, which is the largest kauri tree in New Zealand, is located in the forest. It’s like the real-life version of the Tree of Souls from the first *Avatar*. Chengfeng Chiang / EyeEm/EyeEm/Getty ImagesOf course, the Tree of Souls actually looks more like Ashikaga’s wisteria tree in Japan. This massive purple and pink tree in the Ashikaga Flower Park is a must-do if you’re planning a trip to Japan. However, you’ll only want to visit when the wisteria is in full bloom. That will be in the spring, from April through May. Luckily, that is also cherry blossom season in Japan, so if you’re thinking pink, you can check off a few Barbicore destinations while you’re there as well. Angel Falls in Venezuela is also a location that inspired Pandora, according to Travel + Leisure. Disney fans will instantly recognize this famous waterfall as the inspiration for Paradise Falls in *Pixar’s* *Up* as well. So, if you’re like Carl and Ellie, you may want to save up some money in your own Paradise Falls jar so you can also visit this *Avatar* location. Stocktrek Images/Stocktrek Images/Getty ImagesAnother stunning bioluminescent location that inspired some scenes in *Avatar* is the Luminous Lagoon in Jamaica. Since *The Way of Water* takes place in the ocean more than in the first *Avatar* film, it may just inspire you to book a trip to Jamaica to see the glowing water for yourself. The best time to visit the lagoon is when it’s not going to rain, which means you should try to avoid going any time between June and November. Apparently, full moons will also dull the glow of the bioluminescence as well, so be sure to check the lunar calendar. This article was originally published on 12.19.22by the first to know what’s trending, straight from Elite Daily.Suggested Reels Pandora is one of the world’s most recognizable fictional planets. From the imagination of James Cameron comes a fantastical landscape of jutting and flora-covered mountains. And while the Na’vi people in 2009’s *Avatar* and 2022’s *The Way of Water* are decidedly alien, the landscape of Pandora—a habitable moon in a faraway galaxy—has its origins on Planet Earth. The most recognizable inspiration for Pandora is China’s Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, located in the country’s northwestern Hunan province. But that’s not all. There are two other locations that will make you feel like you’re venturing through Pandora. Vietnam is home to Ha Long Bay, while Chile is home to the lesser-known Torres del Paine. All three locations offer an otherworldly view into our planet’s strangest natural formations. Though I only spent a week in Ha Long Bay almost a decade ago, I remember the trip in great detail. The most memorable part of the trip was the experience of zipping between mist-covered, emerald islets, along with watching the stunning and beautiful rock formations around Cat Ba. It’s no surprise that these three locations inspired such an epic and fantastical tale. Best of all, they make it easy for hardcore *Avatar* (and Pandora) fans to step into an alien world. Ever dreamed of becoming Jake Sully or Neytiri? Here’s where to go. Photo by Alexander Schimmeck on Unsplash Year-round humidity feeds the lush greenery of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park. This destination is characterized by towering and narrow pillars, which are the result of water erosion. These towers—made partly of sandstone—are so tall that the upper portions are only accessible via an industrial elevator. Aside from its large-scale elevator, visitors can use two other lifts to explore Zhangjiajie’s canopy level. There’s also an extensive cable car track that weaves between the mountains. Best of all for fans of *Avatar*, there’s an official tie-in to the franchise. Back in 2010, the National Park opted to name the tallest pillar ‘Avatar Hallelujah Mountain’ in honor of the film’s release. Along with the stunning sandstone pillars, you might also recognize a few other tourist hotspots in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park. Ever seen videos of tourists clambering half-terrified over a glass bridge in China? Some of these videos are from the world’s longest pedestrian glass bridge, located in Zhangjiajie, which opened in 2016. (In case you didn’t know, glass bridges are big in China.) Zhangjiajie Utopia Hotel Homeward Mountain Resort-English Speaking Traveler Photo by Lewis J Goetz on Unsplash In terms of places that look like Pandora, Ha Long Bay might be the most well-known to Westerners. This chain of exotic islands is located in the South China Sea in Northern Vietnam, accessible from Hanoi. The 2,000-odd islets are formed from limestone karsts and earned the term ‘Ha Long’, which means descending dragon. Most travelers head to Cat Ba Island for lodging. I stayed here over Christmas back in 2012; it was a sleepy and misty experience that I thoroughly enjoyed. Because of the overcast weather, the islands and their vegetation weren’t particularly bright. That being said, there were few tourists, which is always a huge plus for me. Hotel Perle d’Orient Cat Ba The Moon Boutique Hotel Cat Ba Photo by Claudio Mota Is a trip to China or Vietnam a little too far from home? Consider hiking down to Chile instead. This country is home to some truly stunning mountain views and otherwise rugged landscapes. Torres del Paine National Park takes that rugged moniker to another level. Unlike Zhangjiajie and Ha Long Bay, Torres del Paine’s jutting rock formations aren’t layered with lush greenery. They rise into the sky like snow-covered giants. Seriously, the scale is hard to fathom. These formations are also a bit harder to get to. Unlike the regions listed above, Chile’s Torres del Paine National Park isn’t too accessible to the average tourist—which means only dedicated and sporty tourists make it there. But those who do are offered the spoils of Patagonian luxury. Ecocamp Patagonia Pampa lodge *Avatar*’s stunning visuals are due in large part to the real-world locations that inspired its alien world, Pandora. The bioluminescence featured in *Avatar* is inspired by real world sites such as Jamaica’s Luminous Lagoon and New Zealand’s Waitomo Glowworm Caves. China’s Zhangjiajie National Forest, Venezuela’s Mount Roraima and Angel Falls, and Japan’s Ashikaga Flower Park also provided inspiration for the breathtaking landscapes of *Avatar*. The vibrant world of James Cameron’s *Avatar* movies is a stunning work of special-effects mastery, but it wouldn’t be possible without the real locations that inspired it. The natural beauty of *Avatar*’s alien world, Pandora, is essential to the film’s success. Not only does it provide a stunning backdrop to the mythic story of Jake Sully’s gradual embrace of the Na’vi way of life, but the striking beauty of Pandora is one of the largest factors in Jake’s choice to fight for the planet. It’s necessary that the audience is able to recognize this beauty in order for *Avatar* to work. *Avatar* is a movie decades in the making. Cameron dreamed up the concept in 1995, but his ambitious vision for the film caused him to wait until digital technology caught up with his ideas. There’s an endlessly vast lore to Pandora, one that will certainly be explored further in the upcoming *Avatar 3*, as well as other sequels. However, the core of Pandora’s appeal lies in its familiarity. Rather than depicting a remote alien planet with an unfamiliar ecosystem, Cameron’s *Avatar* world functions by expanding on the vivid beauty of the real world. To do this, the *Avatar* team took influence from some of the most magnificent sites on Earth. 1 Luminous Lagoon, Jamaica Daniel Gillispia”> Daniel Gillispia Bioluminescence is one of the most striking features of *Avatar*’s Pandora. In *Avatar*: The Way of Water, the vibrant glow of algae gives many of the underwater scenes an otherworldly beauty. However, the feature originates on Earth. Jamaica’s Luminous Lagoon is likely the inspiration for *Avatar*’s glowing water. The meeting of two bodies of water creates the perfect living conditions for bioluminescent microorganisms, which cast a blue glow when disturbed. There are only four known sites in the world where this phenomenon occurs, and Luminous Lagoon is the most famous – and the only one where the reaction can be seen 365 days out of the year. Boris G”> Boris G”> The introduction of *Avatar*’s floating Hallelujah Mountains incite an important character moment for Jake Sully, whose journey to joining the Na’vi begins when he starts to understand the staggering natural beauty of Pandora. The moment wouldn’t be possible without the visual inspiration of the mountains of China’s Zhangjiajie National Forest. The *Avatar* team confirmed that the mountains, which appear to float when clouds of mist obscure the bases of their pillar formations, served as an influence for *Avatar*’s floating mountains (via Gizmodo). In 2010, one of the 3,500-foot pillars was even renamed ‘Avatar Hallelujah Mountain’ in honor of the blockbuster. Bathany Cullio”> Bathany Cullio Another prominent bioluminescence site is the Waitomo Glowworm Caves in New Zealand. While *Avatar*: The Way of Water heavily features water luminosity, the phenomenon is first encountered on land in the original *Avatar*. The glowing nightlife is one of the first things Jake notices about the alien planet, and it’s this distraction that gets him into trouble with some of Pandora’s most powerful creatures. The Waitomo Caves are among the most famous bioluminescence sites in the world, with their distinctive glow caused by a type of glowworm found only in New Zealand. *Avatar* filming took place in New Zealand, so the team was likely familiar with the location. Martin Gysler”> Martin Gysler Another geological feature the *Avatar* design team confirmed as an influence on their floating mountains is Mount Roraima, one of the flat-top mountains of Venezuela. These stunning landforms are topped by totally flat plateaus that go on for miles, often enriched by trees and lush greenery. The largest and most well-known Tepui is Mount Roraima. The mountain’s extreme elevation often places the top of its plateau over the clouds, forming another illusion of a floating mountain like Pandora’s Hallelujah Mountains. The unique mountain has also served as inspiration for other works of fiction, including *Pixar’s* *Up* and the Arthur Conan Doyle novel *The Lost World*. ENT108”> ENT108 The vast scope of Pandora’s natural landscape encouraged Cameron and the *Avatar* team to take reference from real-world locations with their own imposing scale. One such spot is Venezuela’s Angel Falls, the site of the world’s largest uninterrupted waterfall. Before Jake captures the flying Toruk beast in *Avatar*, he first has to learn to fly an ordinary ikran. The sequence in which he does takes place in an environment heavily reminiscent of Angel Falls. The extremely long, uninterrupted waterfall in the background subtly enhances the dizzying height of the environment, thus heightening the tension of Jake’s first flight. Afāno Tomikawa”> Afāno Tomikawa The most sacred Na’vi location in *Avatar* is the Tree of Souls. The enormous tree, draped with luminous, purple-hued tendrils, allows the Na’vi to interface with Pandora’s sprawling and interconnected biosphere. The tree’s aesthetic is heavily influenced by the Japanese wisteria, a plant with long, leaning tendrils that flower into great tendrils of vibrant white, pink, and purple. The great wisteria tree at Japan’s Ashikaga Flower Park is particularly comparable to the tree of souls. The tree, which is dated to 1870, is the largest wisteria in Japan. Its vast canopy and draping purple flowers are intensely reminiscent of the Tree of Souls. Archives New Zealand”> Archives New Zealand For the rich forests of Pandora, *Avatar* draws inspiration from numerous forests throughout the world. One forest on the North Island of New Zealand, where much of *Avatar* was filmed, likely influenced *Avatar*’s home tree. While every Na’vi clan in *Avatar* has a home tree, the movie focuses on that of the Omaticaya clan. The massive, thousand-year-old tree is the generational home of the tribe. The Waipoua forest, which was taken from New Zealand’s indigenous Māori people, is home to the rare and culturally important kauri tree. Significantly, the forest houses the largest kauri tree in New Zealand, dubbed “Tāne Mahuta” or “God of The Forest.” William English”> William English The dense, lush greenery and varied ecosystem of the Kauii rainforest served as a direct inspiration for Pandora’s own rainforest. Cameron even chose the forest as the site of a so-called “sense-memory odyssey.” The director told Variety that he took several *Avatar* actors to the Hawaiian island, where they “lived in the rainforest for a few days,” cooking in underground fire pits and drinking water from leaves. Cameron reports that his intention was to give the actors as much sensory detail as possible, so that they could summon the memories of being in a real rainforest when acting on *Avatar*’s blue-screen soundtrack. Source: Gizmodo, Variety Image Credit: 20th Century FoxAt this point, I’d be willing to bet that virtually everyone reading this saw *Avatar*, a movie that came out back in 2009. I’m sure that many of you have fallen in love with the plight of the Na’vi against the greedy humans. I remember that, after it came out, there were news reports of many people who desperately wanted to go to Pandora and live in the same beautiful landscape that the Na’vi did. Well, do I have some news for you. You can go to Pandora!However, it might not be exactly what you expected it to be. Nevertheless, you can indeed visit...assuming you have a few spare years and a spacecraft up your sleeve.A PLACE UNLIKE ANY OTHER:But I would like to begin by having a look at the image that goes along with this article. If you glance at the image, it has a representation of Pandora, which is a moon orbiting its host planet, Polyphemus. The planet that Pandora is orbiting looks like Jupiter, although a different color (obviously). For the sake of ease, I’m going to just assume that, because it looks like Jupiter, it’s about the same size and composition, (it even has the Great Red [blue] Spot!).*Avatar* Concept Art by Seth Engstrom (Larger Image)Thinking about this logically, neither this planet nor its moon can be inside of our solar system (obviously). But if it was actually Jupiter, then the moon would just be a frozen rock, due to its distance from our sun. As it turns out, in the movie, it is orbiting Alpha Centauri A. It is also mentioned in the movie that the gravity is lower on Pandora as well. Through some further research, I found that it is about 20% lower, as the moon is not much smaller than the Earth (this is a BIG moon).So far, we have learned that Pandora is a moon slightly smaller than the Earth, it orbits a gas giant called Polyphemus which, in turn, orbits Alpha Centauri A. We know that Alpha Centauri is about 4.2 light years away, and that it’s about a 7 year trip to there on the humans ships... clearly they’re FAR more advanced than we are now. In the beginning, however, I did say that we could go to Pandora with a spacecraft and a few spare years, and I was not lying; it’s just \*another\* Pandora that we can get to, not the one orbiting Alpha Centauri. And unfortunately, the Pandora used in the movie *Avatar* is far from the reality of the real Pandora—which exists in our solar system right now. Drum roll please...Image Credit: NASAProbably not what you all were expecting to see. In all seriousness, it looks like nothing more than a giant 94 km (52 miles) across pitted potato that orbits around Saturn. Yes peoples, meet the Lord of the Rings!The reason for the name is quite simple, a good majority of the moons and planets that have been named within our solar system come from ancient mythology from several different cultures. Although we’re typically accustomed to the Ancient Roman mythology of its rings, and today can drive winds and volcanic eruptions on its moon Titan.The draw that Pandora has for humans is a naturally occurring ore dubbed “unobtainium,” an old in-joke in science fiction for materials with physically impossible qualities. (Technically, since it’s a mineral, it might better be called “unobtainite,” but that’s a pretty nerdy quibble.) Unobtainium is the best superconductor known, and apparently works at room temperature. Just as real-world superconductors can float in the presence of a magnetic field, mountains on Pandora apparently float with unobtainium can float in the powerful magnetic pockets that dot the moon’s surface. The films show these magnetic fields can interfere with technology, just as they would in real life – although, apparently, not whatever wireless links which allow the main characters to link with their “avatars.”High technology!The devices that give the film its name are avatars – artificial bodies the main characters operate wirelessly by thought alone. The bodies in question resemble the native blue-skinned humanoid race, the Na’vi, although they are hybrids that incorporate the DNA of their operators. Building a body that weaves together human and alien DNA might be far-fetched. Even if aliens have DNA, humans would probably have more in common with corn or anything else on Earth than with life on Pandora. Still, scientists in real life are making advance after advance when it comes to brain-computer interfaces to control robot arms and type and speak through machines. Even without brain-computer interfaces, telepresence units are now allowing surgeons to perform life-saving operations from afar.The humans also operate AMP suits, robotic exoskeletons that mimic their drivers’ moves and give them incredible strength to handle giant cannons and fight dinosaur-sized aliens. The U.S. Army has been developing exoskeletons for years to amplify a soldier’s strength using combustion engine-driven hydraulics that behave as artificial muscles.The aliens!Life is often huge on Pandora, with giant dragon-like flying creatures, skyscraper-high trees, and the blue-skinned Na’vi, who grow some 10 feet tall. The gravity on Pandora is said to be lower than on Earth, which probably helps explain why everything is so outsized there, as they have less weight dragging them down.Most of the animal life on Pandora is hexapodal – that is, six-limbed, for most species of either arms, legs or wings. One might expect six legs or more to be the norm on higher gravity worlds, to help them support their weight, but hexapods make up more than half of all known living creatures on Earth – the insects – so widespread hexapody falls within the realm of possibility.The Na’vi are tetrapods, or four-limbed just like humans are, which at first makes them stick out like sore thumbs. Still, there are other tetrapods shown in the film – their flying mounts, the banshees or ikran, possess four wings as their limbs. This might intriguingly suggest the Na’vi are more closely related to these dragon-like animals than any of the land-dwellers shown in the film, although either Na’vi or banshees or both species might in fact come from a hexapodal lineage and merely shed two limbs, just as snakes got rid of their legs.Apparently every living organism on Pandora is bioluminescent, meaning it can produce light. Bioluminescence is also seen on Earth, with fireflies and sea algae, among others. Many of the animals seem to possess two pairs of eyes – on Earth, insects not only have a pair of compound eyes, but a number of simple eyes as well.The ‘nostrils’ of Pandoran animals are often located on their bodies instead of their faces, and they often have more than two. This suggests that instead of coupling the digestive and respiratory tracts together as humans and other tetrapods do – which can dangerously lead to choking – wildlife on Na’vi may separate these systems as insects do, which breath through holes dubbed spiracles.The biggest stretch of the imagination when it comes to biology on Pandora might actually be the Na’vi. Barring their blue skin and tails, they look remarkably human, with four limbs, nostrils on their face, and an upright posture that might not be aply suited for a life spent mostly in the trees. The females even have breasts, even though Cameron admits they aren’t placental mammals, and we’re extraordinarily lucky to find them when they are at a comparable level of intelligence as us – they might as easily fallen anywhere between animals barely capable of language to hyper-advanced cyborgs. Still, one might forgive a little poetic license in a film that in other ways apparently tried hard to get the science right might. Liuqi Pavillion in the snow of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Liuqi Pavillion in the snow of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Liuqi Pavillion in the snow of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in snow and mist in central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in snow and mist in central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in snow and mist in central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Peaks and sandstone pillars inspiring the sci-fi movie ‘Avatar.’ /CMG Peaks and sandstone pillars inspiring the sci-fi movie ‘Avatar.’ /CMG Mist shrouds the sandstone pillars in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Mist shrouds the sandstone pillars in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Sea of clouds in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Peaks and sandstone pillars inspired the sci-fi movie ‘Avatar.’ /CMG Sea of clouds in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Sea of clouds in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, central China’s Hunan Province. /CMG Amid the mist-shrouded peaks, Zhangjiajie in central China’s Hunan Province stands as a masterpiece of nature, with its otherworldly quartz sandstone pillars inspiring the first-ever 3D sci-fi blockbuster: *Avatar*. The mysterious and mesmerizing world of Pandora, as envisioned by director James Cameron, draws direct inspiration from Yuanjiajie Scenic Spot, located in the heart of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park within Wulingyuan Scenic Area. Towering with approximately 3,000 quartz sandstone pillars reaching into the sky, this surreal landscape served as the real-world shooting location for the legendary Hallelujah Mountains seen in the film. Zhangjiajie is not just a marvel of nature – it is a living, breathing masterpiece of landscape artistry. For centuries, this land has preserved rich geological wonders, folklore and the cultural heritage of the Tujia ethnic group, giving it a unique soul. Mist drifts between the towering peaks, rising and falling like the breath of the earth itself, adding an ethereal, dreamlike quality to the scenery.In 1992, Wulingyuan was officially recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, securing its place as one of the world’s most extraordinary natural treasures. And in 2004, Zhangjiajie was designated as one of the world’s first UNESCO Global Geoparks, recognized as a quintessential representation of quartz sandstone peak forest landscapes. Today, Zhangjiajie continues to captivate visitors from around the globe, sparking boundless imagination about the harmony between nature and fantasy. Whether standing atop Yuanjiajie’s peaks, gazing at the breathtaking landscape, or strolling along Golden Whip Stream, immersed in the serenity of nature, every moment spent there is a conversation with the soul of Earth itself. (All images taken by Zhang Hongtao) Back in 2009, James Cameron’s ethereal vision propelled “*Avatar*” into becoming the highest-grossing movie of all time. An unforgettable moviegoing experience, the film was teeming with technological firsts which attributed to its success. The immersive world of Pandora (which you can visit now, by the way), along with its otherworldly scenery, flora, and fauna, as well as the 3D graphics on the silver screen, ensured that “*Avatar*” would climb to the top of the charts everywhere. The epic sci-fi film follows humans struggling with a severe energy crisis on Earth after having depleted the planet’s natural resources. In an attempt to mine the valuable mineral unobtainium, they travel to Pandora – a habitable jumble moon of a gas giant in the Alpha Centauri star system. Scientists genetically engineer humans in the body of the Na’vi (a clan of sentient extraterrestrial humanoids native to Pandora) so they may interact with the natives and eventually, colonize their home. James Cameron’s fictional paradise is a highly immersive fantasy world, and the Pandoran biosphere is full of mystical landscapes, bioluminescent plants, and other animal species. The Valley of Mo’ara and the floating mountain ranges, AKA the “Hallelujah Mountains,” are the moon’s striking visual features. Despite Pandora being the product of Cameron’s filmmaking efforts and vivid imagination, one very real-life location contributed to the idea for the floating mountains. Watching “*Avatar*” for the first time at the movie theater was an out-of-body experience, as was stepping on the grounds of Pandora for the first time for Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and other characters in the film. A glance at the awe-inspiring floating mountain ranges reveals gigantic, green-speckled rocks with waterfalls cascading over the sides. The massive scale of the landscape is a sight to behold, and you can see them looming over Pandora from anywhere. Interestingly, most people don’t know that the stunning CGI mountains were modeled after a real place, the peaks belonging to the Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in the Chinese province of Hunan. The forest features pillar-like rocks, much like the ones seen throughout “*Avatar*.” The gorgeous quartz-sandstone pillars of Zhangjiajie are not floating, though – they’re the result of many years of erosion. These mountain formations are a hallmark of Chinese landscape and are featured in several ancient Chinese paintings. One of the peaks in particular – a 3,544-foot high mountain known as “Southern Sky Column” inspired James Cameron to put together the “Hallelujah Mountains” of Pandora. After “*Avatar*” was released, the mountain changed its name to the one seen in the film to reflect the impact the location had on Cameron’s labor of love. At one of the viewing points at the forest park – which has become a popular tourist spot since – there are even lifelike Na’vi models for visitors to take photographs of. There have been parallels between the lush biodiversity in Pandora and Zhangjiajie, which also hosts astonishing biodiversity, including endangered animal species, rare trees, dense forests, complex geological structures, and other peculiar landforms such as large karst caves. It’s the closest we can get to Pandora on this planet! *Avatar*’s immersive world is based partly on a real place!Image. Daily Record!The incredibly vibrant 3D world of Pandora is based on a real national park.Anyone who has seen the latest *Avatar* film will almost certainly have been blown away by the incredible beauty of the world it’s set on.Pandora is rich with alien types of flora and fauna, while like marine creatures which patrol the teeming oceans, and stunning rock formations.The world has recently been recreated at Disney’s Animal Kingdom theme park at the Walt Disney World Resort in Bay Lake, Florida.While *Avatar* megafans may find their desire to be immersed in the spectacular land of James Cameron’s imagination is satiated by the Disney park, it’s not quite the same.READ MORE: Sleep among the leaves in an amazing treehouse with its own hot tubThe majestic Zhangjiajie National Forest Park!Image: Getty Images/Stockphoto)Although Pandora itself can’t be visited in real life, the locations which helped to inspire its designs can.One of them is the majestic Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in Hunan Province, China.The UNESCO World Heritage Site is said to be a direct influence for the films, with *Far Out* Magazine claiming that Cameron “filmed footage of the mountains before editing them into the final movie in the form of the Hallelujah Mountain.”Plus, the Southern Sky Column in Zhangjiajie was even renamed *Avatar Hallelujah Mountain* back in 2010 in commemoration of the film, according to the BBC.When you see photographs of the area... it’s easy to see where its influence was drawn into the film.Within the park are a series of fascinating geographical features, most notably tall, pillar-like rock formations that tower high into the sky.The influence of the towering rock formations is clear!Image: Getty Images/Stockphoto)They rise next to shocking cliffs that seem to stand alone against the enormity of the park.The spindly columns are formed by the weather in the area – usually from the freezing and expansion of ice in the winter and plants that grow within the cracks.Gazing at the massive columns of stone covered in dense vines it’s easy to see how they would have inspired the floating Hallelujah mountains seen on Pandora.The enormous park was China’s first recognised national forest park and covers a huge 11,900 acres.If you do visit Zhangjiajie there are plenty of ways to experience the natural scenery.The Bailong Elevator is the world’s tallest outdoor lift and stretches along the stone pillars to give visitors the best view.It stands at 1,070m tall and its name means the Hundred Dragons elevator.Footage of the mountains were used in the production of the film!Image: Getty Images!You need to be fairly stout of heart to give it a go as the elevator has a glass face designed to give riders the best views and was constructed on a carefully chosen quartz sandstone cliff.The lift takes just one minute and 32 seconds to reach to apex of the cliff!You can also gaze around from the Zhangjiajie Glass Footpath – a skywalk bridge which will make many people’s stomachs ill with butterflies at the thought of crossing it.Those not afraid of heights can also take one of three gondola list systems in the park which let you ride among the mountains on a cable car.The UK government does not currently advise against travel to China, but it’s important to note that the nation is experiencing “its largest Covid outbreak” and “there may be an increased risk of infection”.Tourists will need to take a PCR test to enter the country.READ MORE: Inside the amazing Santorini hotel which has secret tunnels in guests’ roomsREAD MORE: Inside the mega music festival held up a snowy mountain that ‘feels like Disneyland’READ MORE: Hotel guests enjoy breakfast in bed outside in the snow at lavish ski resortREAD MORE: Two national parks in UK revealed as the best in Europe for hikers – see the full listREAD MORE: Chessington’s World of Jumanji snax peak as park prepares first new coaster in 17 years While snaps and pics of different bioluminescent beaches can pique your interest, there’s nothing like seeing bioluminescence IRL. So, you may want to add one of the most popular bioluminescent destinations to your bucket list, ranked by the number of Instagram hashtags by travel company Next Vacay.