

A burgeoning film location

By **PETER BUSUTTIL**

FILM COMMISSIONER, MALTA FILM COMMISSION



PETER BUSUTTIL has been actively involved in the local theatre scene since 1981 and in television since 1986. He has produced, directed and hosted a number of television shows, from entertainment to drama, documentaries and films for television; he has also worked in the Italian Film Industry. He has a degree in education from the University of Malta and a professional qualification from the Piccolo Teatro di Milano in the Performing Arts. In 2011 he was appointed Film Commissioner of the Malta Film Commission by the Minister of Finance, the Economy and Investment.

The film industry is an important contributor to the Maltese economy and the Maltese Government believes that its success in attracting foreign productions to Malta is the result of working together with local film stakeholders at all levels, to ensure through various initiatives that productions do come, and that when here to show that Malta is a genuinely film-friendly destination. Catering for film productions is a driving force for the economy of any country, Malta included. A typical production involves a substantial cast and crew and can have a duration ranging from a couple of days to a number of months, resulting in the creation of jobs and the generation of economic activity. This is the reason that the Malta Film Commission works progressively towards marketing Malta as a unique and dynamic film location, and is constantly in contact with production houses in a number of countries about potential projects that can be shot here. Despite stiff competition from other film locations, at least 100 feature films, in a span of 86 years, have been shot in Malta, either entirely or partially, with the earliest known film going back as far as 1925 with *Sons of the Sea* directed by H. Bruce Woolfe and more recent *World War Z* directed by Marc Forster.

Many filmmakers who have come to Malta praise the islands as an ideal place for filming. Good available lighting and a high percentage of sunny days are key elements for exterior location shooting. The sun shines for an average of 8.35 hrs per day, and allows for 12 shooting hours of daylight in the summer and 10 hours in the winter. The diversity of locations that Malta can offer is vast. Since productions have strict deadlines, time schedules and budgets, proximity and ease of access are some of the main factors that need to be taken into consideration when deciding where to film. Being an island, everywhere is close and being geographically located in the middle of the Mediterranean puts Malta just a couple of hours away from major European cities. In addition to this, everyone can speak English and the crew rates are competitive when compared to other European countries.

The financial incentives, introduced in 2005 were one of the first approved film incentive schemes to be operating in Europe. The current scheme offers a maximum cash rebate of 22 per cent of eligible expenditure to qualifying companies on production expenditure in Malta, with qualifying EU expenditure on the island also being eligible. The Malta Film Commission helps and assists all productions at application stage to ensure that all productions get



Photo: www.airphoto.com.mt © 2012

On the set of the 2000 Hollywood epic *Gladiator* which was shot in Malta

the maximum benefits from the incentives.

As competition increases in the television and film industries, Malta must remain attractive to film producers. Investing in the creation of a skilled labour force can provide quality assurance to international productions, thus maintaining and increasing Malta's competitive edge. In line with its objective to create training opportunities to cater for the needs of the film industry, the Malta Film Commission has been awarded €500,000 as part of the European Social Fund Cohesion Policy Operational Programme II 2007-2013, which aims to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and aid the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce. The Malta Film Commission will be initiating a certified training programme encouraging individuals of all ages to further their studies, as well as develop their skills in order to increase their opportunities for employment within the film servicing industry.

The MFC also organises a number of workshops, masterclasses and seminars to help cater for the needs of the industry. Recent activities included a Location Management & Scouting Seminar, FilmSpeak2012 (the very first cross-industry convention), TorinoFilm Lab (FrameWork 2012 Workshop), a series of information sessions in relation to the fund application process for the Malta Film Fund 2012, a talk and Q&A session with Katie Newman (Executive Producer of *Drama for Impossible Pictures*), as well as a masterclass on scripting and directing for the screen industries with filmmaker and lecturer Sandra Scibberas.

This year will see Malta hosting the prestigious 25th European Film Academy Awards 2012 at the

Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta, on 1 December 2012. This annual awards ceremony will this year recognise achievements in European cinema in 17 categories, including European Film, European Director, European Actress and European Actor.

The hosting of this event will present a unique opportunity to develop Malta's relationship with the Academy and subsequently promote the island to the event's illustrious international audience. In addition, the prestigious nature of the awards and the invariably high quality of the productions nominated, as well as the calibre of the filmmakers involved and recognised annually by the Academy, will allow for further exposure to the top echelons of the European film industry, that are amongst the most respected worldwide. The awards are the first in the film industry's awards season, and are considered to be Europe's version of the Academy Awards. The ceremony will be televised on satellite television to over 50 countries, reaching millions of viewers across the continent. It is estimated that around 900 to 1,000 people will visit Malta to attend this year's event, whilst approximately 250 recognised journalists from the international media will also be present to cover the this prestigious and important event.

The Malta Film Commission (MFC) is responsible for the promotion, development and support of the audiovisual industry, including the film servicing industry, in Malta. In addition, the MFC is also responsible for developing an indigenous film industry through training programmes and the Malta Film Fund. To find out more about the Malta Film Commission, visit www.mfc.com.mt or send an email to commissioner@mfc.com.mt

**Since 1925,
over 100
feature films
have been
either entirely
or partially
shot in Malta**

Photo: Nick Wall



On the set of *Sinbad*,
TV series produced for
Sky and BBC Worldwide