

Now Malta markets itself to Bollywood

There is a common thread running through classics like Ridley Scott's 'Gladiator', Stephen Spielberg's 'Munich' and Wolfgang Petersen's 'Troy'. All three films were shot in Malta, which is marketing itself as a cheap and diverse European film shooting destination to Indian filmmakers.

Luisa Bonelo, who heads the Malta Film Commission, a nodal agency which coordinates film-related activities in the small Mediterranean country, told IANS that it's time India started looking beyond Switzerland.

'Malta is not new to cinema. We have been hosting shoots since the 1950s. Malta can double up for virtually any other country in the Mediterranean. We have a diverse landscape,' said Bonelo who is here to attend the ongoing 40th International Film Festival of India (IFFI).

She added that the immensely famous water tanks along the sea, maintained by the Mediterranean Film Studios, had witnessed the shooting of mega budget Hollywood films like 'The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen' and 'Troy'.

Explaining the edge Malta has over other countries in Europe, she said it was cheaper and English is a commonly spoken language.

'We also have skilled technicians with a lot of experience and ready infrastructure for shooting films,' she said.

Speaking about the financial incentives to movie producers, Bonelo said that the cash incentive offered by Malta was the biggest draw for most filmmakers.

'We offer up to 22 percent of the eligible expenditure that can be obtained as a cash rebate by a qualifying production company once filming is complete,' she said.

There is a rider though -- as per the European Film Commission norms, to avail of the rebate, films to be shot in Malta need to first clear a culture test.

'The films have to pass a culture test -- the film needs to have some sort of a link with Europe,' said Bonelo, adding that the filmmakers intending to shoot there had to have a European element woven into the storyline.

Bonelo said that the first Indian movie to be shot there was Tamil film 'Vinnai Thandi Varuvaya'. 'It was shot earlier this year. That was a beginning for us,' she said.

When asked what exactly was her business pitch to Bollywood, Bonelo said: 'We value Bollywood as a film market. We would love to have lots of Bollywood shoots in Malta. But song and dance sequences could be a problem in Malta because of the culture test.'

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