

Indian film buffs boost Britain's tourism revenue

Film aficionados from all over the world, including India, keen to visit locations where popular films have been shot, have boosted tourism in Britain to the tune of 1.8 billion pounds, according to newly released official figures.

The large number of Indian films being shot here has prompted Britain's tourism authorities to bring out a 'Bollywood map' depicting the locations where popular films have been shot. Visiting such locations are a must for the thousands of Indian tourists who flock to Britain every year.

Separate figures for Indian films-related tourism are not available, but overall, films and their locations in Britain have contributed 1.8 billion pounds, according to the report titled 'Stately Attraction - How Film and television programmes Promote Tourism in the UK'. The report was commissioned by the UK Film Council.

Films such as the Harry Potter series, 'The Da Vinci Code', 'Gosford Park' and 'Pride and Prejudice' and television programmes including 'Balamory and Monarch of the Glen' have been identified as providing a huge boost to British tourism.

Many British locations have experienced a dramatic rise in visitor numbers thanks to being shown on the silver or small screen. 'Bend it like Beckham' raised the profile of Britain in the Far East. It suddenly placed the west London town of Southall on the international tourist map.

It was the first commercial Western film to be shown in North Korea and in China and changed the perception of Britain. The film also prompted a surge of interest in women's football including the founding of the first women's football league in India, the report says.

Some of the most popular locations for Indian films have been Trafalgar Square, Natural History Museum, Tower Bridge, the Royal Albert Hall, Millennium Dome, the houses of parliament, Nelson's Column and the London Eye.

Some of the London locations where films were shot are:

--The Waterloo Station, Britain's largest station, covering an area of 24.5 acres. In 'Jhoom Barabar Jhoom' (2007), it is the key location around which the story revolves, including a dance sequence starring Amitabh Bachchan. Complex scenes were filmed early on weekend mornings, but the majority were shot during the day while amazed passengers looked on.

--The London Eye is one of London's most popular filming locations thanks to its unique silhouette against the capital's skyline. Shoots include 'Bride and Prejudice' (2004), 'Wimbledon' (2004) and 'Thunderbirds' (2004).

--Southall is home to one of the largest Indian communities in London and was the setting for Simran's home in 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' (1995). The external shots were filmed in Southall but the internal shots were filmed in Film City, Mumbai.

--The Albert Memorial is located in Kensington Gardens and was commissioned by Queen Victoria in memory of her husband in 1861. It features in 'Mujhse Dosti Karoge' (2002) and also appears in

'The Jokers' (1967), starring Michael Crawford and Oliver Reed, and 'Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes' (1984).

--Hyde Park was one of one of the locations for a song in 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham'. The song culminates with an early morning dance sequence shot at the British Museum.

John Woodward, chief executive of the UK Film Council, said the effect of film tourism was long lasting. 'British films and television programmes play a powerful role in showcasing the UK to the rest of the world and that is boosting tourism.

'There are countless examples of visitors flocking to locations they've seen in films or on TV and the effect can last for years,' he said.

Said Minister for Film and Tourism Margaret Hodge: 'We have beautiful scenery and awe-inspiring buildings across the length and breadth of Britain. And our thriving film and television industries provide a platform to show the rest of the world just how much we have to offer.

'It is a terrific benefit that not only are our films successful, but their locations are becoming destinations in their own right as people seek to relive their favourite movie moments.'

Local officials in Yorkshire estimate that during the IIFA weekend alone in June, the region's economy gained by nearly 10 million pounds.

Prasun Sonwalkar (© IANS / India eNews)