



Malta Looks to Change the Game With 40% Tax Rebate and New Stages

Nick Vivarelli | November 10, 2019



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The Mediterranean island nation of Malta has long been attracting international film and TV productions mainly for tales with either a strong marine or biblical element, and often for limited portions of the overall shoot.

Now Malta is trying to make a quantum leap to lure a wider scope of productions for longer stays. And Hollywood is keen for that to happen, but conditions aren't quite there yet.

"I was in L.A. two weeks ago, making the rounds. I saw roughly 20 companies and producers, and 75% of them, they all asked me about Malta," says prominent German line producer Holger Reibiger who in July was on the island for two weeks shooting the second season of Sky Germany's high-end TV series "Das Boot."

"They are all interested in Malta, but they need stage space," Reibiger notes. "Hollywood producers are not thinking about: 'We just want to shoot there for 12 days,'" he adds. "They are thinking they want to shoot [there] longer."

"Das Boot," which in 2018 used Malta in season one for a two-week shoot, returned to the island last July, again for just two weeks.

One big difference this time around is that the Malta Film Commission in January 2019 raised the cash rebate from 27% to 40%.

The "Das Boot" team used Malta's water tank — one of the world's largest — but they had to build their own green-screen stage because they couldn't find a proper warehouse that was suitable. They also had their offices in portable containers since new offices by the tanks were being built.

"The 40% tax rebate combined with new stages. That would be a game-changer," Reibiger points out. In interview with *Variety*, Malta Film Commissioner Jonah Grech vowed that he is planning to build "the first sound stage" in Malta by the end of next year. (See Q&A).

Local line producer and director Simon Sansone ("Troy"), who is president of Malta's producers' association, says the increased incentive — the boost makes it among the best in Europe — has already had an impact in terms of attracting more productions, which in turn "brings its own difficulties in terms of crewing." Availability of local crews is another aspect where Malta has room for improvement. According to Reibiger you still have to bring your main crew from abroad.

That said, roughly half of the 230 crew members on the Malta shoot of the second season of "Das Boot" were Maltese. "Das Boot 2" generated an increased Malta spend of around €3 million (\$3.3 million). And it went very smoothly. "The improvements are still work-in-progress, but you can feel that something is happening," says Reibiger.

The current state of progress is perhaps best exemplified by what's going on at Malta Film Studios in Kalkara, which are the water tanks Malta is best known for on the South-Eastern side of the island. Some of the buildings there have been demolished, a dirt road that once led to them has been paved, and there are plans to build new offices and also to revamp the tanks.

The most recent international production to set up camp at the Malta Film Studios, albeit once again for two weeks, is Netflix original feature film "The Incredible Story of Rose Island." It is a comedy, directed by Italy's Sydney Sibilia, based on the true story of engineer Giorgio Rosa, and the independent micronation he founded in 1968 off the Rimini coast, outside Italian territorial waters. The pic is produced for Netflix by Matteo Rovere's Groenlandia shingle.

There are also plans to improve and upgrade and refurbish Fort Ricasoli, Malta's primary backlot area for biblical films and building sets, which has been used for "Gladiator," "Troy" and more recently "Game of Thrones," just to name a few of the shoots that have helped put Malta on the global locations map.

Revamping of the water tanks and the existing backlot will help sustain what already exists. But creation of a proper studio that is lacking on the island "would definitely help to encourage productions to shoot a bit more in the country, or

even shoot productions here in their entirety,” notes Sansone, echoing a common refrain.

Sansone would also like the film commission to consult a bit more with producers about their needs. “But I would say the

energy and the money being put behind the incentives and infrastructure is definitely moving things in the right direction,” he says. Stay tuned. ■