

# Stay Classy

*With 70 miles of beaches, 323 days of ideal weather and an eager film commission, San Diego is ready for its close-up*

By Todd Longwell

**Location manager** It Jones can't say exactly why director Michael Bay needed to dangle a car from a CH-53 Sea Stallion Navy helicopter circling Coronado Bay for the upcoming DreamWorks sequel "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen." Details about the film's plot are being kept under wraps — "If I told you, I'd have to kill you," Jones says. Bay just needed it done.

But that meant getting a pile of clearances from various businesses and government agencies operating in the harbor, including the Coast Guard, which had to control traffic in the bay to "make sure we didn't drop a car on a fishing boat," Jones says.

Fortunately, Kathy McCurdy, director of features for the San Diego Film Commission, was able to step in and provide him with the names and numbers of all the proper authorities. It might seem like a no-brainer, but Jones says not all local film offices are similarly well-prepared.

"Some of them are extensions of the convention and businesses bureau and don't necessarily have a film background, so you find yourself having to do more of the legwork yourself," Jones says. In San Diego, "They clearly have a detailed knowledge of the film industry, so they know what we need."

Of course, location managers will typically

Exteriors from "Some Like It Hot" were shot at the Hotel del Coronado on San Diego's Coronado Island.



San Diego offers producers desirable California weather, which hovers around the 70s throughout the year, "but it hasn't been over-shot," location manager Ilt Jones says.

**SAN DIEGO FILM COMMISSION**  
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say nice things about a city and its production infrastructure, if for no other reason than they want to be on good terms in case they return for another shoot. But Jones' enthusiasm for San Diego seems genuine, and it's echoed by numerous others, including Jim Sharp, executive vp production for 20th Century Fox Television, which shot its short-lived series "The Ex List" in the city last year.

Sharp says San Diego's affable can-do attitude extends from the crews and the public to the Navy and the Marines, which operate seven bases in the county with 95,000 uniformed personnel. "They're willing to help you try to do whatever you're trying to do," says Sharp, who was able to help secure a nuclear submarine from the Navy for the Season 6 finale of Fox's "24."

Comparing San Diego to Hollywood, he says, "It's just harder to operate in Los Angeles. There are a lot of restrictions, and there are a lot of people who have gotten tired of having to stop what they're doing to help you, and down there it's really easy."

In addition to hospitality, San Diego boasts reduced hourly rates for below-the-line union workers; free permits; a wealth of free city, county and port locations; and a program that provides a 15%-50% discount on hotel rates.

"I just did a budget for one of the big studios and, per one-hour episode, we were \$189,000 less than if they shot in L.A.," says Joan Etchells, vp at Stu Segall Prods., which owns the studio complex where "Ex List" was filmed.

The only problem is studios aren't so crazy about California, either. Etchells believes that, in the end, the series she was bidding on did what so many other film and TV projects do these days — it

went to a state with a rich incentive package, like Michigan, which last year enacted a 40%-42% refundable tax credit.

After years of pressure from studios, labor unions and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, this month the California legislature finally passed the state's own production incentive package, featuring a 20%-25% tax credit. San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders is optimistic it will inspire more producers to stay in California, and his city will get a piece of the action.

"San Diego is a convenient city for (productions) because all the places they want to shoot are pretty close to each other, unlike Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay Area, where it's spread out over a huge area," Sanders says.

California's incentives don't go into effect until July 1. In the meantime, San Diego is feeling the effects of the exodus. According to commission statistics, film and TV productions spent more than \$42 million in the 2008 fiscal year, down from a peak of \$100 million in 2005 and the lowest since 1994.

Still, the numbers are much better than they were in the good old days. While films have shot in San Diego as far back as "Street Scene" in 1898, the detective series "Harry O," starring David Janssen, came in 1973 and quickly pumped \$1.5 million into the economy.

That wasn't an easy shoot: The producers encountered numerous obstacles, including lengthy delays in the permit process and a variety of arbitrary fees, and after filming 14 episodes (and two pilots) in the city, it relocated to Los Angeles. Upset, leaders in the production and business communities put pressure on local government officials to create an entity to help streamline the process, and the

San Diego Motion Picture and Television Bureau, as it was originally known, was formed in 1976.

During the next decade, production spending grew steadily, from less than \$500,000 annually in 1977 to \$6 million in 1985, the year "Top Gun" shot there.

The '90s brought such films as "Almost Famous" and "Bring It On" (both released in 2000), an economic impact of about \$45 million annually, as well as the emergence of Stu Segall Prods., which single-handedly turned the city into a television production center with a string of series, including "Silk Stalkings" (1991-99) and "Renegade" (1992-97).

One of Segall's big selling points was that it ran a nonunion shop.

"That was the reason I went down there initially," says Stephen J. Cannell, creator of "Renegade" and "Silk Stalkings." "I was able to make shows as cheaply in San Diego as I did in Canada."

Segall became an IATSE union signatory in 2003. Today, it has its own 22-acre studio complex. Although the studio has been busy in recent years with shows like UPN's "Veronica Mars," its stages now sit dark.

When business gets too slow in town, local film and TV professionals travel north to the film capital. "There's a lot of crew that works up in Los Angeles, has L.A. cell phone numbers, but lives down here," says Brent Altomere, owner of the San Diego-based production company Groovy Like a Movie.

The good news is they may soon have a reason to stick close to home. Sharp says that Fox is considering basing a new CBS series from writer-producer Shawn Ryan ("The Shield") in the city, and San Diego talent agent Carol Shamon Freitas says she recently received inquiries from the producers of the upcoming Werner Herzog film "My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done."

If they do come to town, one can be assured the film commission will be there, ready.

"We'll get calls on BlackBerrys at midnight on the weekends, and we work with these people to get them filming," San Diego Film Commission CEO and film commissioner Cathy Anderson says. "Of course, it doesn't cost them anything, so you know they're not shy about asking for help." **THR**



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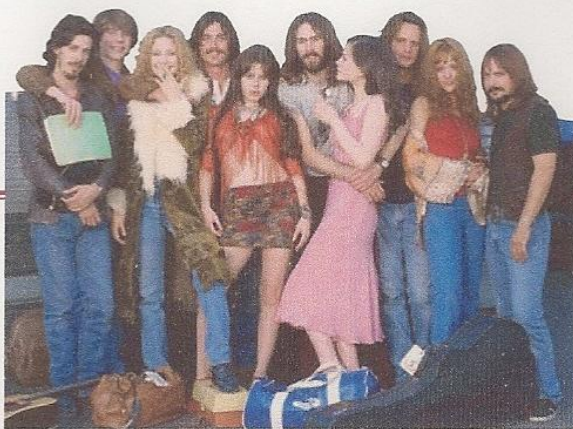
ON FILM

## San Diego

### “Almost Famous”

(2000)

Cameron Crowe's coming-of-age-on-a-tour-bus tale employed local O.B. (Ocean Beach) beach bums as extras, while the San Diego Sports Arena stood in as a 1970s concert venue.



### “Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy”

(2004)

The San Diego Film Commission lured producers away from Portland, Ore., to Southern California, where former local news anchor Jack White consulted on the Will Ferrell nightly news spoof.



### “Top Gun”

(1986)

Tom Cruise's Maverick hones his pilot skills at the Naval Training Center and Miramar Naval Air Station, and croons “You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling” with Goose at the Officers' Club at Naval Air Station North Island on Coronado Island.

### “Traffic”

(2000)

Catherine Zeta-Jones lives the high life as a drug dealer's wife in the posh San Diego enclave of La Jolla, before her husband is brought to trial at the San Diego courthouse.

—Michelle Grabicki



“Okay we need 12,  
no make that 25  
*flat-topped* MIDGETS,  
7 *flame-throwing* NUNS,  
a dozen *bearded* GRANNIES  
and 5 RABBIS willing  
to pose *nude* for scale.

Got any problems  
with that?”

—Producer

“No.”

—Tina

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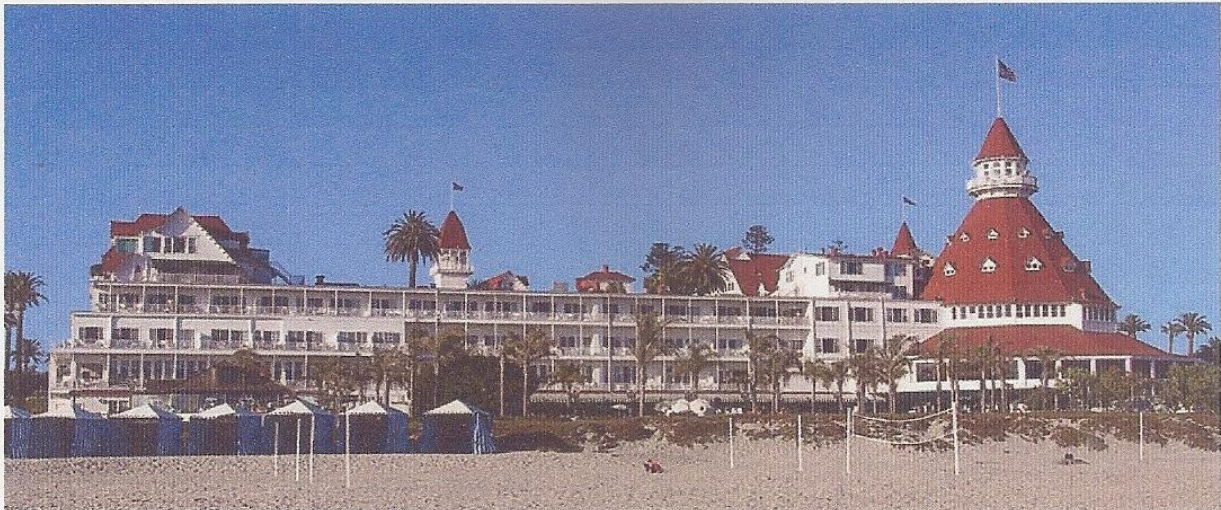
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Made in San Diego

location report

# California Dreaming

Nobody does Hollywood R&R like the Del



Every year, fans of Billy Wilder's 1959 comedy "Some Like It Hot" come from around the world to the Hotel del Coronado to walk the sprawling grounds where the film's cross-dressing stars, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, tottered on high heels, and to sun themselves on the beach where Marilyn Monroe frolicked. So enchanted are they by the film's reality, some refuse to believe it when staffers tell them that — while the Coronado Island hotel played itself on the outside — the interiors were shot on a Hollywood soundstage.

"You can't really talk to people about it," hotel historian Chris Donovan says. "They say, 'I know everything was shot here.'"

But one can rest assured that, since open-

ing its doors in 1888, the storied Victorian structure has seen more than its share of show business action, both as a getaway for generations of stars from Charlie Chaplin to Jack Nicholson, and as a featured location for productions ranging from 1918's "The Married Virgin," starring Rudolph Valentino, to 1980's Oscar-nominated "The Stunt Man" with Peter O'Toole.

Liberace was discovered while playing piano at the Del, and Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz fine-tuned their "Ricky and Lucy" personas while performing there in 1950. In the 1940s, "All the Hollywood stars would go to the Del and recoup after their facelifts," Donovan says.

Over the years, the Del has had its own share of work done, including a recent \$150 million makeover that included the addition of a luxury spa and Beach Village, a development of 78 cottages with private pools and ocean-view balconies.

But the Del is not afraid to show its age. Donovan says the luxury resort is planning a big celebration in September to mark the 50th anniversary of "Some Like It Hot," and it is hoping to invite Curtis as well as other surviving cast members.

"With so many movies, there's nothing left, because everything is fabricated," Donovan muses. "It's a wonderful legacy."

— Todd Longwell

# R<sub>x</sub>

Prescription:

## San Diego on location filming\*



\*Side effects include:

- \*Free permits
- \*Free public locations
- \*Free beaches and parks
- \*Diverse locations
- \*24/7 Film Commission assistance
- \*Hotel discounts
- \*Staying on budget
- \*Feelings of satisfaction lasting more than four hours

Contact the San Diego Film Commission at 619.234.3456 or at [www.sdfilm.com](http://www.sdfilm.com)

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