

Set-Jetting to the Islands of the Bahamas

Placing a destination in a film is the ultimate in tourism product placement, and no destination demonstrates this better recently than the Bahamas

It's the Bond films that really put the Bahamas on the filming map, with now a total of seven Bond's being shot there from the magnificent underwater scenes in **Thunderball** starring Sean Connery right through to the fast action 'parkour' (freerunning) chase sequences of **Casino Royale**.



In fact it is the dive sites that are the most popular film tourism attractions in the Bahamas. Stuart Cove, who is a regular stunt diver for the Bond movies, takes 50,000 divers and snorkelers every year to his diving/film location on the south coast of New Providence Island. He says, "Production of film, TV and commercials is a very important part of our business. We emphasize the connection to film and television in all of our marketing material - in the brochures and on the Web site. Divers just love the connection to the James Bond movie sites, and our monthly news releases consistently refer to films and TV programs being made here."

Wreck divers regularly visit the 120-foot freighter that was sunk for the movie *Never Say Never Again* and the Valkin Bomber airplane from *Thunderball*.

Stuart Cove attempts to keep movie locations and memorabilia to attract more tourists and also to add to the quality and difference of their diving experience. The film, **Flipper** was based at his site and he manages to keep his dock much as it was in the movie: "We have learned our lesson with the movie sets. The producers destroyed the set for **For Your Eyes Only** but since then we have tried to negotiate right from the start to keep any sets used in movies." Photographer, Claudia Pellarini says that 80-90 percent of divers purchase photographs and some spend hundreds of dollars. "Some of the most popular photographs are those of divers in the film sets. For example, they just love their photo taken in the *Thunderball* set."



Movie producers were attracted to the Bahamas initially for various economic reasons and environmental exigencies. The perfect location and natural beauty of the Islands is a terrific pull – the Bahamas sells itself – and being very close US, less than an hour flight from Miami, for ease of access for film-makers by air and sea.

Fine examples of the crystal clear underwater locations also featured in the treasure heist **Into the Blue** with Paul Walker and Jessica Alba in 2005.

The film **After the Sunset** starring Pierce Brosnan and Salma Hayek in 2004 produced maximum exposure for the destination, in particular at Atlantis Paradise Island where major scenes were shot in the hotel's Royal Bridge Suite. You could stay there too for a mere \$25,000 a night.

Pirates of the Caribbean II and III were two more great additions to the movie portfolio with much of the pirate ship battle scenes featuring The Endeavour and Black Pearl were shot in a specially created ocean tank on Grand Bahama Island while the “treasure” was buried in the fine white sands of the island of Exuma.

While shooting the Pirates movies Johnny Depp must have fallen in love with the islands as he now has his very own private island in the Exuma Cays, as do Nicholas Cage and the magician David Copperfield.

Even those incurable romantics, the Italians, have fallen for the Bahamas with **Matrimonio alle Bahamas** – translating in English to Bahamas Wedding, filmed in the summer of 2007 in Exuma. Bollywood has hit the Bahamas too – last year Indian producers shot a movie called “**Blue**”, starring popular Indian actor Ashkay Kumar, at various locations around New Providence.



It's great fun recognising locations when watching a movie but even more fun to be there on Bay Street in Nassau, where James Bond ran through the Junkanoo festival crowds, gaze up at the Royal Bridge Suite at Atlantis as you enjoy the water park below ... or laze on the beach at Hope Town Harbour Lodge in the chairs where the cast of **Scrubs** waited for their scenes to be shot last year.

Photo: The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism

By Julie Angove

The Bahamas Film Commission website features projects recently and currently in production with shots of the sets and movie stars in action and at leisure.

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