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**RESORTS AND FILM COMMISSIONS:  
DEVELOPING A LOCATION FILMING PROGRAM**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

California, New York and Florida are the most active states in feature film production, the most expensive and glamorous component of the industry. In addition to expenditures, tax revenues and jobs, movies provide a unique way to market a resort. The purpose of this research was to identify information needs of film industry decision makers and to analyze the organizational structure and marketing strategies used by film commissions and resorts. This research, which utilized and embedded, multiple-case study design, describes the marketing strategies, including materials, amenities and incentives, used to attract film production and makes explicit numerous issues critical to the development and implementation of comprehensive on-location film development program.

**INTRODUCTION**

United States film and video production, with annual expenditures of over eight billion dollars, is big business (19) and California, Hollywood's home state, leads in feature film starts. Feature films are the

most expensive and glamorous component of an industry that includes commercials, still photography, music videos, commercial and public television, documentaries, industrial filming and multi-media productions. They are often shot on location instead of in a production facility or studio.

Through the years, as the cost of doing business in Los Angeles has increased and film-making has become more international, areas of California outside of Hollywood, other states and other countries have pursued production personnel in an effort to recruit location filming into their jurisdictions (14). Film commissions serve as liaisons between the film community and the local area.

On-location expenditures for feature filming exceed \$29,000.00 per day (15), so it is easy to see why location scouts and production personnel are aggressively recruited. Further, with almost 25% of the on-location expenses devoted to lodging, any resort has an economic incentive to recruit production filming. Nonetheless, a recent poll of Resort and Commercial Recreation Association (RCRA) resort recreation directors, which was conducted in

conjunction with this research, documented that only 23% and 39% of the resorts had been used for feature film or television production, respectively. Fewer than 50% have housed production crews.

Movies provide a unique way to promote a resort and unusual entertainment opportunities for guests. For example, the video version of "City Slickers" carried ranch resort information from three western states to 7 million United Kingdom residents (5). The cruise industry has steadily expanded due, in part, to the television series, "The Love Boat." The Mammoth Mountain/Lakes area, with a location service housed within a resort, hosted more than 46 production companies in 1990 while providing entertainment for thousands of guests to this rural resort area (11). Perhaps a Colorado AAA auto travel manager said it best: "If you really want to increase tourism, have Kevin Costner film a movie (9, p. 80)."

So how can resort recreation programmer assist in securing this lucrative form of group business while providing entertainment for other guests on-property? And why should the already overly-busy resort recreation programmer consider finding the time to be the "point person" for the resort? These questions are examined in this investigation. Understanding the inner workings of the film industry and the liaison system is a point of departure. Further, the special event and group recreation planning and skills of the resort recreation director are well suited for the needs of the film industry.

## PURPOSE

Despite the economic value of on-location filming, virtually nothing is known about the relationship between potential locations and "the industry." An exhaustive review of the research literature revealed no systematic examination of this growing phenomenon. Only two articles examined this activity in a recreation and leisure context. Doss and Kelley (2) described the experience of Oak Park during the filming of *Backdraft*. Although there were some rough spots, they concluded that the benefits outweighed the risks for local parks and recreation departments. This brief article provided some useful guidelines for policies and procedures. More recently, Riley and Van Doren (12) discussed movies as a destination promotion tool. This conceptual piece developed a rationale for the allure of movies. In brief, movies can provide a magnetic "pull" to direct the more general "push" or desire to travel. The authors illustrated their argument with numerous examples from Australia and the United States. Although it was not the intent of the Riley and Van Doren article to discuss film commissions, they did recommend that these liaisons include the tourism 'ripple effect' in their economic significance documentation. In 1991, Tyrrell (14) described the economic impact of the Rhode Island Film Commission by estimating the spending and wage benefits associated with film production. This article also provided a good description of the services offered by this state film office.

This investigator found no published research about the relationship of the film

industry and resorts in the United States. Only Cromer (1) specifically addressed the housing needs of production companies. Accordingly, this research describes the film liaison system in the United States and analyzes the organizational structures and marketing strategies used by film commissions and resorts.

Specifically, this research: 1) describes the film liaison system, 2) identifies the information needs of production decision-makers and the marketing materials and programs used to promote an area or property for location filming, 3) delineates the film policies and procedures of selected resort and hotels, 4) develops a rationale for resort and recreation department involvement in the film recruitment efforts, and 5) outlines selected resort recreation programming opportunities. An objective of this research is to provide resort recreation directors with information to assist them in participating in the film liaison system and in developing procedures to manage filming on property.

## METHODOLOGY

An embedded, multiple-case study research strategy was selected because it allows an investigator to utilize a variety of sources and to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its actual context (16-18). Primary data sources included structured interviews conducted in 1991 with film commissioners in ten California cities. The cities ranged in size from 25,000 to over a million in population and were geographically dispersed throughout northern and southern California. Secondary data sources included an ongoing review of industry literature and

interviews with state-level film office personnel in three of the top five feature film states.

A second series of interviews was conducted with resort and hotel professionals throughout the spring and summer of 1993. Film liaisons were interviewed at several resorts with film credits. The hospitality interviews covered three areas: procedures, publicity and programming. These sources included rural and urban properties. The liaisons were interviewed in-person or by telephone.

To assist in the interviewing, two semi-structured interview schedules were developed after a thorough review of existing literature about location filming and discussions with film industry professionals. A draft of the instrument was reviewed by a state film commission director and piloted with the head of a film commission in northern California. After a minor re-ordering of the question prompts, the interview schedule was finalized. The film commission instrument contained sections on agency demographics, the origin and evolution of the film recruitment program, staffing and funding provisions, permits, policies and public safety, record-keeping and recent production activity, location services, amenities and incentives, marketing and promotion, and coordination with other economic and tourism development agencies. The resort version of the interview included additional sections on recreation programming, preservation, protection and publicity.

In-person interviews ranged in length from two to four hours and often included conversations with other film office staff persons, industry representatives and visits

to movie sets. Note-taking was aided by an extensive, ten page data recording form for film commissions (local or state level) and a 12 page form for resorts. Special attention was devoted to the promotional materials in each office. When available, archival materials were reviewed. After each interview, documents and materials were audited and cataloged into the case study database. These database materials (policy and marketing materials, industry periodicals and archival data) provided additional support for and clarification of the interview data.

The case study quality control mechanisms developed by Yin (18) and Lee (6) increased the validity and reliability of this research. Construct validity was addressed with a review of the interview questions by industry experts, the use of triangulated data sources and the development of a chain of evidence. Internal and external validity were addressed through explanation building and via replication logic across cases. The use of a case study protocol, the development of the interview schedule and the creation and maintenance of a case study database increased the reliability of this research. Yin's techniques were supplemented with an evaluation protocol (6) that employs the criteria of falsifiability, logical consistency and explanatory fit to validate the major findings of this study.

## RESULTS

The purpose of a state level film commission is to market the state as an attractive site for location filming. Although film industry professionals are not required to contact either state or local film commissions, these liaisons are adept at

coordinating the myriad of forms and functions that accompany feature filming. It is a complex system, difficult to describe concisely. In an effort to introduce tourism and hospitality professionals to this emerging form of business travel, the results of this investigation are presented in several categories.

A description of the film liaison system is followed by a discussion of film industry information needs, marketing materials, administrative structures, services and policies, and incentives. A rationale for resort and recreation department involvement in the resort's film recruitment efforts is derived from the literature and the hospitality representatives. Finally, resort programming opportunities are described in three areas: guest services, recreational activities and group events.

### The Film Liaison System

At the macro level, the state film commission coordinates a state wide system of local (micro-level) liaisons. Most commissions were established in the 1980s to recruit the film industry. In California, the situation was reversed and the California Film Commission created by the California Department of Commerce in 1985 in an effort to stop "runaway (out-of-state) production" (State share, 1991). Most state film commissions concentrate their activity in the areas possessing greater concentrations of equipment, technical personnel and artistic talent. The state commissions generally expand their effectiveness through a network of industry professionals and local (micro-level) commissions for a state-wide coordination of effort and efficiency.

A true liaison, a state office provides services to the professional film community as well as to areas and agencies interested in recruiting the film industry. The services provided by or co-ordinated through a typical state office can be categorized in three areas: production assistance, liaison support and marketing.

Film commissions provide many types of production assistance, most at no cost. Location scouting, or helping production personnel to find 'just the right spot', is the primary service provided by all film commissions. State level offices maintain a location library, providing a first-stop source of photographs and videotapes of the various locations throughout the state. Some commissions provide tools and technology for scouting (e.g. airplanes, cellular telephones, computerized location systems). Other services include assistance with fees and permitting (permission to film forms), coordination between representatives of all levels of government as well as the private sector, assistance with special staffing such as police, fire, security and safety personnel, and general troubleshooting.

Liaison support involves helping the local liaisons to educate their home communities about the benefits and challenges of having a production unit in the area, helping the liaisons to understand the needs of the industry, and providing the city or county contact person, often a tourism and economic development professional with many other duties, with updates and summaries of industry issues. Information about the economic significance of location filming and strategies for promoting the area for filming are two frequent topics of interest. Another important liaison support

role is that of 'better business bureau' to help ascertain the legitimacy of various 'players'.

Marketing and 'positioning' the state is another function. The state office usually hosts a booth showcasing the state at the location shows and expositions. It also purchases advertising in industry periodicals and develops material for direct-mail campaigns. This same office often produces a state-level production guide promoting the state and its production talent.

At the micro-level, the local film commission serves as a liaison between film industry personnel and the local community. The first point of contact is often a staff member of the convention and visitor bureau (CVB). In areas without a CVB, the contact person usually works in a Chamber of Commerce (3) or other economic or community development organization. Film activity is seldom sufficient to create a full-time job at the local level so the contact person is often assisted by a local film commission whose members are political appointees or volunteers.

Although most local film commissions are administered through a destination marketing or economic development agency, the internal organizational charts and lines of authority are varied. The inception of each film commission can usually be categorized as either opportunistic (e.g. being discovered as an attractive filming location) or originating from the interest in a local elected official. Funding levels vary from staff time only to six figure budgets. Success or capture rates at securing location filming are similarly varied but not necessarily correlated with budgets and staffing.

All local film commissions offer, at the minimum, the following free services: location scouting, assistance in obtaining permits and local troubleshooting. Although it is standard to have these services available, the quality of service delivery is not uniform. Fees for filming are less prevalent outside urban or well-established film areas. Processing for film permits varies from 48 hours to three weeks (both instances are too lengthy from a producer's perspective). Production companies are required to maintain liability insurance and to list the local government agency as an additional insured. Production companies are required to pay for police, highway patrol and fire personnel salaries, often at the overtime rate.

### **Information Needs of Film Industry Personnel**

Location scouts and film directors responsible for site selection and other pre-production activity need specific types of information to evaluate the feasibility of filming at a particular location. The primary information need of location scouts and production personnel is visual. Without the desired "look", nothing else matters. Once a suitable location is found, information about travel distance, cost, site accessibility, accommodations, the availability of experienced technical crews, attitudes toward filming held by elected officials and the local citizenry and weather information are all important.

Most micro, or local-level film commissions maintain picture files in two locations, the state film office and the local film commission office. Not surprisingly photograph file formats vary at the local level although the state film commission

location libraries require local submissions to be prepared in a uniform manner. In addition to the location files, several commissions have "picture pieces" similar to a fashion model's composite, highlighting a variety of interesting area images. Other marketing strategies utilized by film commissions include direct mail campaigns, trade shows and trade publication advertising. Each film commission has a folder of information about local filming procedures and policies. Hotels and resorts often finance the development and distribution of these materials.

### **Location Filming Policies and Procedures at Selected Resorts**

Before describing the policies and procedures governing filming at resorts it is important to add a qualifier. Everything except compromising a guest's stay is negotiable. The growing recognition of the publicity value of films is changing the relationship between the lodging and film industries very quickly. Property placement and syndication rights are two crucial elements that influence the resort's position about policy exceptions.

In some cases, the resort film initiative predates city or county film recruiting. Since production personnel are not required to register with state or local film commissions they often contact the resorts directly. In areas just beginning to attract film-makers' attention, coordination with the film commission is more common.

Most properties with a location filming history have an information packet. In addition to the policies and procedures, these packets contain color or black and white photographs of the property. If the

resort has a book about the property, it is often included to show a variety of shots and angles. A summary of the property's film experience is usually included as well.

Resort procedures are very similar to those of film commissions. Fees are paid, in cash, in advance. Inside filming rates range from \$500.00 to over \$3000.00 per day. Fees for outside filming range from \$250.00 to \$1500.00 per day. Fees for preparation (dress or prep) and breakdown (strike) days range from no charge to 1/2 the regular rate. All resorts required proof of production company liability insurance and property damage insurance. Resorts are listed as an additional insured. Hold harmless agreements are also required. Damage and advance deposits are common and often are replenished as the production crew "draws them down."

The Location Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding clearly articulates the resort's film policies. Prepared by the resort's legal department, these documents address a variety of topics such as damage, disruption, and disturbance clauses, expectations about film company and hotel guest interactions, script review, use of the hotel name, policies about equipment, especially generators, and required personnel (electricians, resort consultants). Catering, laundry and other services provided by the property are mandatory and generate additional revenues.

Each resort has a film liaison, usually an upper-level manager or public relations professional. Communication lines of authority are very similar to those of a disaster plan (e.g. one spokesperson, regular briefings with internal department heads and

external constituencies such as the press and bordering properties).

### **Rationale for Resort and Recreation Department Involvement**

Working with location film crews is exacting and exhausting. Why do certain hotel and resort properties actively recruit the film industry? Two reasons: visibility and money. The visibility is beyond price and often re-appears for many years and in international markets through syndication. Tiny Roslyn, Washington is a frequent stop for Japanese tour companies due to the television program, "Northern Exposure" (10). The Ponderosa set near Lake Tahoe is an established attraction that will endure at least as long as 'Bonanza' remains in syndication. Fifty-five years later, a northern California community still celebrates its heritage as the site of the classic film "Robin Hood".

Money also motivates. Location fees can be substantial and lodging expenses, about 25% of the total location budget, are the second largest portion of location filming expenses. Sixty or more rooms for six weeks to six months is a good piece of business, even if it is steeply discounted off the rack rate. Add catering and other food and beverage purchases, laundry and dry cleaning, and incidental spending and a very lucrative picture emerges.

From the production company's perspective, there are many advantages of filming at a resort. Generally, resorts are located in beautiful areas that are well-maintained with adequate infrastructure and a high degree of security. The climate that makes the resort an attractive destination is also a climate that

is advantageous for filming. Much of the resort's appeal to location scouts and film professionals will be based on the outdoor resort environment, the domain of the resort recreation staff. These outdoor environs are often "hardened" sites, with paths and pavement, relatively unharmed by heavy traffic. There is generally adequate space for large production vehicles.

Resort areas typically have many hotel rooms and an extensive assortment of amenities. Resorts are designed for privacy and longer occupancies. Further, when a crew is on location, production personnel need amenities, including room service and recreation, at unusual hours of the day and night, services a resort is well-equipped to provide.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, resort staff understand the need for rapid, excellent service. Resort professionals have large group and conference expertise. "No" is not in their vocabulary. This is critical because nowhere is the truism 'time is money' more accurate. Although location filming is not just another special event, the logistical support needed to host a film crew resembles that required for a special event or conference group. Like special or other large group events, on-location filming is episodic but the planning and need for prompt and responsive service is continuous. The need for unobtrusive crowd control and site security is also similar to a special event.

### **Recreation Program Opportunities**

In terms of guest entertainment and recreation program planning, little matches Hollywood's enduring appeal to people of all ages. Selected programming

opportunities are developed in three categories: guest services, recreational activities and group recreation programs.

Guest services are available to all of the resort's visitors. Site tours can include highlights of the resort's film history. These tours include anecdotes from the resort's film history and are sometimes enlivened by long-term (in the hospitality sense) employees sharing eye-witness accounts of the events. Permanent displays inform guests of the resort's unique relationship with Hollywood. Memorabilia is often sold in the gift shops.

If a production company is filming on-location, other guest service opportunities can be utilized. For example, the evening 'turn-down' can include a note summarizing the day's activity and outlining upcoming facets of the filming. This serves two purposes. First, the guests know what, if any, spectator opportunities await them and second, minor inconveniences related to having a production company in residence seem less catastrophic. In addition, a written note provides an opportunity to inform guests about the special requirements of working film crews.

Recreational activities are also available. Brochures for self-guided walking or biking tours, focusing on historic film locations, provide an unusual way to get guests to explore the property. If the resort has a video library, locally filmed movies will be popular. The recreation department might even create a rental 'costume and prop' kit for guests to recreate great film scenes. Similarly, if games are available to guests, make an explicit connection between the televised game shows and the resort's board versions.

Group recreation activities can be designed with a "Hollywood" theme. The themed meal opportunities are limited only to the creativity of the recreation programmer! For example, one coastal resort is home to a nesting colony of pelicans. The Pelican Brief (4), likely to be a major motion picture, could be easily re-scripted to feature local ecology on a murder mystery format for a corporate group. Of course the CEO is the guilty party! Or is s/he the dead party? Recreation interns could play the basic parts and the corporate guests could guess 'whodunit'. One property created a theme party to capitalize on the highly celebrated ghost of a hotel guest murdered at the turn of the century. The same property has hosted movie-themed fund-raisers for charity and reaped significant publicity benefits. Many reclusive film celebrities, contemporary or retired, will consider making an appearance to raise funds for a worthy cause.

For the children's program, create a resort version of Hollywood. The children can write the script, construct the props and produce the event. All you have to do is invite the parents with the video-cameras. Hollywood novelties such as miniature clapboards or photo frames make superb souvenirs of a great event.

## DISCUSSION

If there is no existing feature film recruitment program in place, and the resort recreation director wants to be proactive, what is the first step? Actually, there are several. First, communicate internally. All efforts must be coordinated with upper management, public relations and the legal department. Like most innovations, without

the support of upper management, starting a location filming initiative is difficult. Second, get information about the existing state or local film commission. Table 1 contains telephone numbers of most of the state-level commissions in the United States and Table 2 contains international contacts. Telephone the appropriate film commission and ask for an information packet or a referral to the nearest local commission. Third, become more informed about the industry. Location Update and Locations, two trade publications, are particularly useful. Secure a comprehensive glossary of terms; like any profession, the film industry has its own jargon. If the state film commission publishes a lay person's guide to the industry, get it. Fourth, create an informational packet about the resort. Contact corporate headquarters to see if materials already exist. Omni, Hilton and Holiday Inn are among the corporations that have marketing efforts to recruit the film industry. Fifth, get involved. If the recreation director is the property representative on the local film commission, opportunities to network with other hospitality providers, economic development specialists and film industry professionals can provide good exposure for the resort and the recreation director thereby linking the resort with the local community for other special events. In short, good public relations for the property and the recreation professional. Sixth, be patient. It can take three to four years before a property becomes a 'known' entity within the film community. In the feasibility study for one state film commission a ten-year timeline was estimated between initial funding for the commission and consistent, cost-effectiveness figures (14).

This research describes the marketing

strategies, including materials, amenities and incentives, used to attract film production and makes explicit numerous issues critical to the development and implementation of comprehensive on-location film development program. Resort recreation personnel interested in

representing their properties to the film industry must understand film industry needs and participate in the liaison systems that are being developed to support on-location filming.

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TABLE 1  
 UNITED STATES FILM COMMISSION CONTACTS (STATE-LEVEL) a

State	Telephone Phone
Alabama Film Office	(205)242-4195
Alaska Film Office	(907)562-4163
Arizona Film Commission	(602)280-1380
Arkansas Motion Picture Development Office	(501)682-7676
California Film Commission	(213)736-2465
Colorado Motion Picture & TV Comm.	(303)572-5444
Connecticut Film Commission	(203)258-4301
Delaware Development Office	(302)739-4271
Washington, D.C. (Mayor's Office of TV & Film)	(202)727-6600
Florida Film Bureau	(904)487-1100
Georgia Film & Videotape Office	(404)656-7830
Hawaii Film Industry Branch	(808)586-2570
Idaho Film Bureau	(208)334-2470
Illinois Film Office	(312)814-3600
Indiana Tourism & Film Development Division	(317)232-8829
Iowa Film Office	(515)242-4726
Kansas Film Commission	(913)296-4927
Kentucky Film Office	(502)564-3456
Louisiana Film Commission	(504)342-8150
Maine Film Office	(207)289-5707
Maryland Film Commission	(410)333-6633
Massachusetts Film Office	(617)973-8800
Michigan Film Office	(517)373-0638
Minnesota Film Board	(612)332-6493
Mississippi Film Office	(601)359-3297
Missouri Film Office	(314)751-9050
Montana Film Office	(406)444-2654
Nebraska Film Office	(402)471-3368
Nevada Motion Picture & TV Development	(702)486-7150
New Hampshire Film & TV Bureau	(603)271-2598 x 108
New Jersey Motion Picture & TV Commission	(201)648-6279
New Mexico Film Commission	(505)827-7365
New York Governor's Office for Motion Picture & TV Development	(212)929-0240
North Carolina Film Office	(919)733-9900
North Dakota Film Commission	(701)224-2525
Ohio Film Office	(614)466-2284
Oklahoma Film Office	(918)581-2806
Oregon Film Office	(503)373-1232

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State	Telephone Phone
Pennsylvania Film Bureau	(717)783-3456
Puerto Rico Film Institute	(809)758-4747
Rhode Island Film Commission	(401)227-3456
South Carolina Film Office	(803)737-0490
South Dakota Film Commission	(605)773-3301
Tennessee Film, Entertainment & Music Commission	(615)741-3456
Texas Film Commission	(512)463-9200
U.S. Virgin Islands Film Promotion Office	(809)775-1444
Utah Film Commission	(801)538-8740
Vermont Film Bureau	(802)828-3236
Virginia Film Office	(804)371-8204
Washington State Film & Video Office	(206)464-7148
West Virginia Film Industry Development Office	(304)558-2286
Wisconsin Film Office	(608)267-3456
Wyoming Film Commission	(307)777-7777

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a Adapted from material compiled by *Location Update*, 6922 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 612, Hollywood, CA 90028. Telephone: 213-461-8887.

TABLE 2  
SELECTED CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL FILM COMMISSION CONTACTS a

Country/Province	Telephone
Argentina (Santa Monica, CA)	(213)394-1670
Australian Film Commission	(8)22 6615
Austria/CineAustria (Los Angeles, CA)	(213)477-3332
Bahamas Film Promotion Bureau	(809)326-0635
Barbados (New York, NY)	(212)986-6516
Bermuda	(809)292-0023
British Virgin Islands	(809)494-3701 x221
Canada/Alberta Economic Development. & Trade	(403)427-2005
Canada/British Columbia Film Commission	(604)660-2732
Canada/Location Manitoba	(204)947-2040
Canada/New Brunswick Film/Video Commission	(506)453-2553
Canada/Newfoundland Dept. of Development	(709)729-2800
Canada/Film Nova Scotia	(902)424-7185
Canada/Ontario Film Development. Corp.	(416)314-6858
Canada/Quebec Film & TV Office	(514)873-7768
Canada/Saskatchewan Film & Video Development Corp.	(306)347-3456
Canada/Yukon Film Promotion Office	(403)667-5400
Cayman Islands Dept. of Tourism	(809)949-7999
Chile	(2) 229-7212
Costa Rica	011-506.32.3883
England Birmingham Media Development Agency Ltd.	44-21-766-8899
France, South of France Film Commission	(33) 94-04-4070
Germany, Munich Film Information Office	49-89-381-90432
Scotland, Scottish Screen Location	44-31-229-1213
Guatemala Tourist Commission	(502)231- 1333
Holland	(213)399-11 01
Hong Kong( Los Angeles Film Liaison)	(310)208-4582
Israel (Los Angeles, CA)	(213)658-7924
Jamaica Film Office	(809)926-4613
Luxembourg( San Francisco, CA)	(415)788-0816
Mauritius (Los Angeles, CA)	(213)445-8600
Mexico, Consejo Estal De Cine Teatro y TV	52-73-129071
New Zealand Film Commission	(4) 859-754
Norway, Scanfilms Norway	(47) 56-73059
Peru (Hollywood, CA)	(213)465-8900
Poland, AMPOL-Film/TV Liaison (Pacific Palisades, CA)	(310)573-1815
Spain, Catalonia Film Commission	(34)3-418-2206
Thailand Film Promotion Center	(66)2-223-4690

a Adapted from material compiled by *Location Update*, 6922 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 612, Hollywood, CA 90028. Telephone: 213-461-8887.