

Western Canada

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Seaside cities, snowy peaks and rustic villages are just some of Western Canada's major scenic draws. In addition to these attributes, filmmakers are lured by the region's great infrastructure, close proximity to L.A., experienced crews and state-of-the-art production facilities. And since the region enacted its incentives much earlier than most of its competitors, it remains as one of the most popular filming destinations worldwide.

THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

The greatest perk of filming in the Northwest Territories is the flexibility to film in five different regions with varied communities: the North Slave, South Slave, Dehcho, Sahtu and Inuvik. "Each region has its own uniqueness and beauty, and a government-run regional office of industry and tourism contact that supports filming-related projects through the Northwest Territories," says Carla Wallis, film commissioner of the Northwest Territories Film Commission. "Regional Tourism Officers are well-established and eager to assist with potential projects in their areas or communities. Also, there are no licenses or permits required to film in the Northwest Territories, which makes filming easier."

The Northwest Territories Film Commission links film industry professionals with local contacts. For example, an online "Suppliers Guide" that identifies cast and crewmembers available for local projects can be found through the film commission's website, along with an image database and other resourceful links. "The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has focused on finding better ways to promote diversification of our economy while continuing to promote and support development opportunities in all communities," says Wallis. "The [Support to] Entrepreneurs and Economic Development [SEED] Policy intends to replace the existing Business Development Fund and Grants to Small Business Programs to focus more on the smaller communities. This element of the SEED Policy is meant to replace Grants to Small Businesses with contributions up to \$5,000 for self-employment activities, aimed at traditional economy, arts, film and similar self-employment activities." The second season of "Ice Road Truckers" and first season of "Ice Pilots" have filmed in the region, and local filmmakers continue to take advantage of the Northwest Territories' scenic landscapes and friendly communities.

Filmmaker Jay Bulckaert, whose films include *Ciest to Lie* and *Triumph of the Chill*, has worked in Toronto and Montreal, but he specifically moved to Yellowknife for work. "It's way more laid back here yet full of talented people," says Bulckaert, who is associated with the website www.collective9.com. "The stories, legends, landscape and people here are by far way more intriguing than anywhere else I've lived — and I've lived all over Canada, France and Asia. It's the perfect mixture of having all you need as a filmmaker — technology- and skill-wise — yet small enough to make deals over a beer and a handshake, and all of that [is] wrapped up into a general old-school, Wild West kind of vibe. This place is almost entirely without any pretension, something that was sadly abundant in the big cities."

Bulckaert shot his 20-minute 1930s supernatural film *Ciest to Lie* with about 100 actors and extras for less than \$1,500. "That means that this entire town was behind the production in any way they could," he notes.

“Triumph of the Chill was less intense in that it didn't have costumes or hundreds of extras, but it has had even more support. Both films premiered at the local theaters and were each sold-out venues. There is a spirit of community and creative collaboration here in Yellowknife that is extremely rare these days, and because of it I have faith that Yellowknife/NWT is poised to become a little Mecca of underground filmmaking in the years to come.”

SASKATCHEWAN

Unlike other tax credit programs, Saskatchewan's incentives are available for each production — without any obligation to film additional projects in the province — to qualify for an additional rebate, and there are no financial caps per production. The Saskatchewan Film Employment Tax Credit Program offers a tax credit of up to 55 percent on eligible labor. According to SaskFilm and Video Development Corporation, Saskatchewan's base tax credit is a rebate of 45 percent of the total wages of all eligible above-the-line and below-the-line Saskatchewan and deemed labor. Deemed labor can include non-Saskatchewan labor that provides mentorship to a Saskatchewan resident. Eligible salaries are limited to no more than 50 percent of a production's total eligible budget, and 25 percent of a production's total labor costs are eligible for deeming.

There is an additional five-percent bonus of total production expenditures for productions that film in smaller centers and rural areas (25 miles or more from Regina and Saskatoon) within the province. Productions can gain another five-percent incentive through the key position bonus, which is designed to encourage the hiring of specific Saskatchewan crewmembers and technicians in below-the-line positions. Productions with budgets of CDN\$3 million or more are eligible on projects that attain six out of 10 points on positions specified by the program. “Saskatchewan's tax credit program is one of the most competitive programs in North America, and is a significant factor in attracting foreign producers to the province,” says SaskFilm CEO Susanne Bell. “Saskatchewan is uniquely positioned in Canada due [to] our modern production facility, the Canada Saskatchewan Production Studios, our famously hardworking crews and our low cost of doing business. We consider all of those factors to be our competitive advantage.”

Along with the unique incentives, Bell cites Saskatchewan's experienced production partners, enthusiastic crews, unexpected locations and an overall lower cost of doing business as the province's benefits for filmmakers. “Within the province, we are currently operating at approximately three crews,” says Bell. “We have simultaneously hosted a major international co-production [of Terry Gilliam's *Tideland*] right next door to Canada's number-one comedy series “*Corner Gas*” in the Canada Saskatchewan Production Studios (CSPS). One of the benefits of being a smaller center is that our crews have amassed experience in both television and feature film. We recently wrapped a Hallmark movie called *A Dog Named Christmas*, which was receiving rave reviews across all media, including *Variety*, the *Wall Street Journal* and more. In addition, we continue to attract foreign service productions, treaty co-productions and more.”

The Canada Saskatchewan Production Studios is located in Saskatchewan's capital, Regina. According to CSPS, the facility contains four stages of varying sizes totaling 30,475 square feet and has 42-foot-high ceilings. Modern production offices and a complete array of support facilities and services can also be found on-site, including art department, carpentry, paint, makeup/hair/wardrobe, set storage and breakdown areas, camera lockup, green rooms, lunch space and a cafeteria.

MANITOBA

According to the Manitoba Film & Video Production Tax Credit, productions can receive a credit of up to 65 percent. The base credit is 45 percent, and just like United Airlines offers frequent flyer miles, Manitoba offers a frequent filming bonus of 10 percent on the third film shot within a two-year period. Producers can also access this particular credit by working with someone who already has the bonus.

The five-percent Manitoba Producer Bonus requires a co-production with a Manitoba producer. Another five percent is granted through the Rural and Northern Bonus by shooting at least 50 percent of Manitoba production days at least 35 kilometers (approximately 22 miles) from Winnipeg's center. The cap is 30 percent of true Manitoba labor expenditures. "Manitoba has one of the leading labor-spend credits in the country that when combined with the lower costs of filming in Manitoba, makes our province a strong competitor for production," says Tannis Scott, communications and marketing representative of Manitoba Film & Sound. According to Scott, *Shadow Island Mysteries*, a series of two television MOWs [movie of the week] produced by Manitoba's Buffalo Gal Pictures and Toronto's Breakthrough Films & Television, is currently shooting in Manitoba. *And Lockdown*, a feature film by Buffalo Gal, Original Pictures and Deco Entertainment, is expected to shoot in early 2010.

Jeff Levine, head of production for Gold Circle Films, has made two movies in the Winnipeg area. "Manitoba has become our 'go-to' location for any film that fits the broad range of looks offered by the province," he says. "I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with some of the best technicians there, and always think of Manitoba first when budgeting. The two films I did there were very different; one was a horror genre film that included significant night work, the other a 'snow movie.' We got exactly the look we needed both times, and the crew was top-notch. Everyone, from the good folks at Manitoba Film & Sound, from Buffalo Gal, and all the way through the crew was a complete pleasure to work with."

BRITISH COLOMBIA

British Columbia attracts foreign production like Hollywood attracts Greyhound buses. In 2009, the province captured over 250 productions last year, including the feature films *The A-Team*, *Tron Legacy*, *Sucker Punch* and *Twilight: New Moon*. According to the British Columbia Film Office, the British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit is available for film, television and animation productions in B.C. The tax credit is made up of four components: the 25-percent base credit of qualified B.C. labor expenditures; the six-percent regional tax credit, prorated by the number of shooting days in B.C. outside of the designated Vancouver area to the total days of principal photography in B.C.; the new 6-percent distant-location tax credit, which is added to the regional tax credit for filming done outside of the Lower Mainland Region (north of Whistler and east of Hope), excluding the Capital Regional District; and the 15-percent digital-animation or visual-effects tax credit.

Karen Lamare, the British Columbia Film Commission's manager of strategic planning and stakeholder relations, says that tax incentives are a major factor in attracting production to B.C. However, many other factors boost B.C. as a main filming location, such as an experienced talent and crew base; diversity and accessibility of B.C. locations; high-quality studios; and a "solid reputation and track record" for delivering excellence, both in terms of production value and quality and B.C.'s exceptional quality of life. "[All this creates] a pretty compelling reason for filmmakers to choose B.C.," says Lamare. She also reports that production activity has been strong for the last decade, reaching a high of \$1.4 billion in 2003, and that B.C. has the capacity to crew and service over 35 projects simultaneously.

B.C.'s film professionals are prolific and possess a positive attitude that sets them apart from the competition. "British Columbia's position as the third-largest center for production in North America is built on our reputation for exceptional customer service," says Lamare. "This quality extends from our cities, to local residents and businesses and to municipal film offices that welcome production activity and understand that flexibility and effective communication are essential to the success of on location filming. Filmmakers who have shot in British

Columbia keep coming back knowing that B.C. has a 'World of Looks' for their motion picture projects and the support network that makes it all happen.

The gem of British Columbia is Vancouver Film Studios (VFS). According to Executive VP and COO Pete Mitchell, the feature films 2012, Twilight: New Moon, The Twilight Saga: Eclipse, Diary of a Wimpy Kid and Sucker Punch were all shot in the facility, as well as the TV series 'Fringe' for Warner Bros. and Universal's 'Caprica' and 'Eureka.' Like many other studios that have taken the appropriate measures to 'go green,' VFS is environmentally conscious. 'Vancouver Film Studios is a carbon-neutral facility, meaning we have measured our carbon footprint, adopted a reduction plan and then purchased carbon offsets against our remaining emissions,' says Mitchell. 'We have also adopted a number of recycling, composting and energy-saving programs. We encourage car pooling, [and] the use of transit and alternate modes of transportation by our employees to the point where up to 50 percent of our employees travel in the summer months is by non-single-occupancy travel.' Along with a recently upgraded on-site gym, VFS features include a fully licensed helipad and a fiber-optic network connecting each building on the lot.

ALBERTA

Alberta's popularity soared when it hosted the Ang Lee film Brokeback Mountain. "All you have to do in Calgary is show up, get off the plane and you have a great crew waiting for you," says Lee.

According to Alberta Film Commissioner Jeff Brinton, the province's crews have more Academy and Emmy Award nominations than any other, which he attributes to their experience and professionalism. "These resources — combined with the very competitive production incentive [and] no provincial sales tax in a film-friendly environment — [provide] a very attractive location for productions of all size and scope," says Brinton.

The Alberta Film Development Program is a grant that provides producers with a contribution of up to 29 percent of all eligible production expenditures made within the province (equivalent to a labor tax credit of 36 to 53 percent), and up to CDN\$5 million per project. The grant increases with Albertan ownership and the employment of local key-creative personnel. Productions must have a local minimum spend greater than \$25,000. "Alberta benefits from being one of the most unique jurisdictions for film production with every type of location — from prairie fields, deserts [and] ranch lands to woodlands, mountains [and] sub-alpine — all within a one-hour drive from one of two major cities with a population of one million," adds Brinton.

Filmmaker Christopher Johns is developing his horror film Shadow Shift in the small town of Canmore. "Canmore's versatility as a small town allows me to dress it up to convey the feelings of eeriness and solitude that I need for my film," says Johns. "Sure, there are hundreds of other quaint towns throughout Canada, but Alberta has a trusting and knowledgeable crew that can save you a lot of time on your project. To add to that, Alberta has the most beautiful scenery, such as national parks and the Rocky Mountains, which makes it easy to find natural sets."