



Lights, Camera, Action

Everything you wanted to know about film production in western Canada but were afraid to ask **BY SHERI RADFORD**

Big productions mean big bucks: in 2009, more than \$1.3 billion was spent in BC on film and TV projects, while over \$89 million was spent in Alberta. Thousands of British Columbians and Albertans work the film industry, in roles such as costume designers, grips, location scouts, actors and extras. Thousands more benefit indirectly through industry spending on local hotels, restaurants, taxis, caterers and building material suppliers.

On film, BC has portrayed everything from a quaint small town to a bustling metropolis, from a tropical jungle to the surface of Mars. Locals have become skilled at identifying their province in films as varied as *Watchmen*, *Elf*, *Hot Tub Time Machine*, *Frankie and Alice*, *Charlie St. Cloud*, *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, the *X-Men* series and the *Twilight* series. Several TV shows have been filmed in BC, too: *Fringe*, *Smallville*, *Stargate*, *The X-Files*, *Battlestar Galactica*. Occasionally filmmakers don't even try to disguise BC,

such as in *Rumble in the Bronx*, which includes background images of Vancouver's distinctive BC Place Stadium and North Shore mountains.

Alberta most often fills in for cowboy country, in movies such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Unforgiven*, *Shanghai Noon*, *Open Range*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and *River of No Return* (starring Marilyn Monroe), as well as miniseries such as *Broken Trail*. Brad Pitt obviously enjoys Canada's cowboy country, since he filmed *Legends of the Fall* in Alberta and later returned to shoot *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, leading to many sightings of Pitt and Angelina Jolie with their brood in tow, visiting local attractions such as Drumheller's Royal Tyrrell Museum. But the province shouldn't be pigeonholed: it has portrayed Mexico, Vietnam and even Afghanistan on film. Non-cowboy movies shot in Alberta include *Inception*, *Superman*, *Passchendaele*, *Rat Race*, *RV* and *The Edge*.

Weather Woes

Unlike Hollywood, BC and Alberta have unpredictable climates. Snow in Alberta is ideal for movies such as *Cool Runnings*, *Snow Dogs* and *Mystery, Alaska*, but can prove disastrous for those set in sunnier climes. In BC the scourge is rain — though the province gets nowhere near the “400 inches of rain a day” claimed by *X-Files* star David Duchovny. Sometimes the weather even cooperates. In February and March 2007, *Juno* filmed in Vancouver on a tight 30-day schedule. The city delivered an array of weather — everything from rain to sunshine to a freak snowstorm — making it easy for the filmmakers to portray all four seasons referenced in the script. The original plan had been to import fake (i.e., expensive) snow for the winter scenes.

» Filmed in western Canada (from top): Paul Gross directs *Passchendaele*. Caroline Dhavernas and Paul Gross in *Passchendaele*. Burr Steers directs *Charlie St. Cloud*. Zac Efron in *Charlie St. Cloud*. Chris Weitz directs Ashley Greene, Kristen Stewart and Taylor Lautner in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. Taylor Lautner, Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. David Slade directs Kristen Stewart in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*

How to Find a Film Shoot

Visit bcfilmcommission.com and albertafilms.ca, both of which post lists of all movies and TV shows currently in production in the province.

Check Twitter and listen to local radio stations for up-to-the-minute information on where filming has been spotted around town.

On local streets, look for signs with neon arrows and (to thwart autograph seekers) strange codes that keep each movie's title a secret. In Vancouver, production signs for *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* read TSE, while signs for *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* went one step further with the subterfuge, reading USM, short for *Untitled Sports Movie*.

Follow the signs until you spot a parking lot filled with big white trucks. Other indications of filming in progress: lots of bright lights and frazzled-looking people dressed in black, wearing headsets and carrying duct tape.

Look for the huddle of polite Canadian looky-loos staying out of the way and not saying a word but surreptitiously snapping dozens of photos on their phones and updating their Facebook status: “I can't believe I just saw Reese Witherspoon!”





Mediocre Movies

Western Canada used to be known for low-budget sequels and direct-to-DVD stinkers. *Scary Movie* and its three sequels, *Final Destination* and its two sequels, and *Air Bud* and its five sequels were all filmed in BC. More embarrassing, three of the five films nominated for worst picture at the 2004 Razzie Awards (razzies.com) were shot in Vancouver: *Catwoman*, *SuperBabies: Baby Geniuses 2* and *White Chicks*. Alberta had a similar reputation, churning out forgettable fare: *Good Luck Chuck*, *Intern Academy*, *Exit Wounds*, *Excess Baggage*. Quality has improved in recent years, however, with Oscar winners such as *Juno* and *Brokeback Mountain*, as Hollywood executives have realized that western Canada isn't just a cheap location to shoot unmemorable movies. The West

boasts talented workers and generous tax incentives. As a bonus, BC is in the same time zone as California, and Alberta is just a one-hour difference; both are a quick plane ride from Hollywood. This region has become the third-largest film centre in North America, trailing only California and New York.

« Filmed in western Canada (from top): Halle Berry in *Frankie and Alice*. David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson in *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*. Ashley Judd in *Helen*. Jessica Biel, Wesley Snipes and Ryan Reynolds in *Blade: Trinity*. Will Ferrell and Ed Asner in *Elf*. Samuel L. Jackson in *Snakes on a Plane*. Robert Englund and Ken Kirzinger in *Freddy vs. Jason*

Where the Stars Are

Hotel concierges have a wealth of knowledge about where the hot celebs congregate. Top-drawer restaurants, especially those with private rooms, and expensive hotels and spas are always a safe bet, along with private boxes at NHL games. Shops such as The Vancouver Cigar Company attract stars such as Ice Cube and the original "Shaft," Richard Roundtree himself. In Calgary, Italian restaurant Osteria De Medici has hosted the likes of Anthony Hopkins, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Tom Selleck. In Vancouver, Pierce Brosnan has enjoyed the West Coast cuisine at West, and Wesley Snipes and Vin Diesel have supped at Brix. So keep your eyes peeled in BC and Alberta — you never know which celeb or film shoot you might stumble upon. **RM**

» Prominent Passengers

The fifth season of the reality TV hit *The Bachelorette* featured Alberta's lovelorn Jillian Harris. She rode the Rocky Mountaineer for one entire episode through BC and Alberta scenery. Well-known film and television actors have ridden the Rocky Mountaineer rails:

- › **Anna Faris** (*The House Bunny*, *Lost in Translation*)
- › **Morgan Freeman** (*Million Dollar Baby*, *The Shawshank Redemption*)
- › **Reba McEntire** (country music star, *Reba*)
- › **Carlo Rota** (*24*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*)
- › **Patrick Stewart** (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *X-Men*)
- › **Molly Sugden** (*Are You Being Served?*)
- › **Alan Thicke** (*Growing Pains*)

Other VIP guests include Microsoft founder **Bill Gates**, champion skater **Katarina Witt** and Israeli President **Chaim Herzog**.

