

Georgina Pope
Japan : Becoming a dynamic location destination

Firstly, I would like to thank the Cabinet, Intellectual Property Policy Office, for giving me this unique opportunity to speak to such an influential group of people, many I believe focused on the common goal of improving the world of international production, here in Japan.

1. Introduction

My name is Georgina Pope, I am from Australia. I have been shooting in Japan for 30 years – huge high-profile Hollywood films with casts and crews in the hundreds, high-end international episodic television, international commercials, small award-winning European films and even low budget music video.

I have been lucky enough to have filmed in almost every prefecture in Japan.

In March last year I formed a joint venture with Toho Company with the express intention of creating the best production service company in Japan.

2. Global Interest in Japan

Right here, right now, we are all in a very good position. Why? Because the world is in love with Japan!

There is massive global interest in everything Japanese, art, fashion, youth culture, food and IP such as manga, animation and film, and you just have to glance out the window..... there are thousands of international tourists everywhere.

How do we harness this interest and improve and fully establish Japan as a location destination for high-end international production?

All sorts of producers, directors and creators dream of shooting here. My desk is covered with scripts from every corner of the world. From sci-fi projects to historical drama. Big budget to low.

I have never worked with an international crew who did not want to come back to Japan again. Since I first hosted international crews I have many, many repeat clients.

Let's ride this wave of great interest. I would now like to outline some areas where I think we can improve.... in order to become a stronger production destination.

3. Improving Infrastructure

I believe we need to improve production infrastructure.

Tokyo is a stunningly visual city. Always ready for her close -up. You can point a camera in any almost any direction and you have an interesting shot.

I show the visiting directors all sorts of neighbourhoods Shimo Kitazawa, Shimbashi, Ikebukurobut at the end of the day most directors circle back and want to shoot in Shibuya and Shinjuku. Almost every time!

Yet the days I put on my work boots and go to work shooting in those areas I am made to feel like a criminal!

I don't have a proper permit to be shooting at Shibuya Crossing, or on Yasukuni dori.

It is extremely stressful.

There is not a proper location permitting system in place, it is all run and gun.

Fingers crossed we don't get shut down, asked to move on. It's all so very risky, especially with a large crew.

Yet over and over, these are the areas that foreigners want to see in their films and dramas.

Can we not put a proper permit system in place?

I would certainly make shooting more secure, as well as safer.

What else?

We need more infrastructure in terms of police and fire department co-operation, making shooting on the street, and road work in particular, safer for both my crews and the general public.

I get weary of hearing 'It's a grey area'. This sort of thing can't be grey if the industry is seriously going to be allowed to blossom: it must be black and white.

Almost every film or drama requires some sort of road work, characters moving around the city, actors speaking in cars, on bicycles. Therefore a nationwide system of permitting would be very helpful.

There are other safety measures to consider.

A couple of years ago I was shooting a large tv drama for one of the big American streamers.

The location was a lovely, charming temple complex in the mountains of Gunma. The head priest was very helpful and co-operative. The script called for one character to burn some clothing in a little fireplace in front of the 700-year-old wooden structure.

Of course, I had the best special effects guys in Japan on the job and they were meticulous in checking wind conditions and being fully prepared. But really, all we had was a bunch of guys with buckets of water.

As we were shooting I realized if I was doing this scene in any other country, I would have 3 fire trucks behind me, not a bunch of guys with buckets. I would also have physical support and advice from the fire department. Luckily the temple survived, but the point is: It's a super stressful way to work. It is not complicated to improve these methods of working.....and keep up with international standards of safety and security.

And productions are happy to pay for police and fire services as is normal overseas. We are not looking for freebies.

4. Promoting Shooting in Rural Japan

Speaking of Gunma, let's promote shooting in rural areas, and perhaps, like many other countries, provide improved incentives to shoot in regional areas that might benefit from the wide-spread economic uptick that film crews bring.

It does cost production to shoot in the country-side. The film industry is centralized to Tokyo meaning we have to take all gear, and all crew from Tokyo. But in Japan we are blessed with amazing transportation infrastructure with the train, takkyubin and road systems.

It is possible to move a large crew and gear from one end of the country and be up and shooting in no time.

This is unique to Japan.

Shooting in rural Japan is truly a delightful experience and valuable economically, in fact hugely important to regional Japan, which we know is facing aging and declining populations....

It is in the countryside where we really see Omotenashi in the film world.

I have experienced hotel owners in small towns lending us their cranes and trucks in order to achieve a high shot, local film commissioners making bbq lunches for all the crew. I have so many wonderful stories of kindness and generosity shooting in small towns and rural areas. Let's take this further.

It is fantastic that we now have a network of local film commissions around the country, and the stronger they become and the more they support production the better.

We need really good quality photographs of their locations accessible on-line, bi-lingual websites, and information about their local attractions. The basics are there, but there is so much room for further growth.

5. Incentives

My next topic concerns Incentives.

I know that many people here in this room have put in a lot of work establishing a national incentives system, and some of my projects have

benefitted from the pilot schemes of the last few years, yet we are so far behind, compared to others.

And be under no illusions: others in our nearby areas, especially in southeast Asia are big, clear, looming competitors for our Japan-based production industry.

A lottery system does not work. A shared purse does not work. Producers need a predictable, robust, easy to understand system like that in the United Kingdom, Australia, NZ or our fiercest competitor, Thailand.

Last year I took an American group – a well-known showrunner, his producers and studio executives on a location scout. They were up front with me and told me they were also considering Thailand, as well as Japan to shoot the entire season of their very successful award-winning drama. The show creator however really loves Japan and was determined to shoot here. Creatively Japan made sense.

Oh, it was a great scout, we saw some absolutely stunning locations, all around Honshu. The showrunner loved it all.

But one afternoon on the location bus everyone's phone 'pinged'.

It was the Thai production company informing them that the Thai government had just announced a renewal and improvement on their film incentive system. A 30% rebate. At least US \$4.4m would go to support their show. In yen that is 'Roku Oku !'

Everyone looked at me in sympathy, as at the time in Japan we had no film incentive system in place at all. I could not respond with a concrete answer. Just 'maybe's, we don't know yet, it will be

announced soon' And all I could hear was WHOOSH the sound of a \$35 million dollar project flying out of the window of our location bus.

Of course , they decided to shoot in Thailand. We lost a very big piece of business that day that would have kept Japanese crew engaged for 11-12 months of big budget work. It would have been a 6-month shoot. Such a pity. That sadly is not an isolated incident.

Financiers and producers need a simple, predictable system they can bank on, and plan for.

The current system is very unclear for foreign producers. If multiple projects are received, the money must be shared between them. But that makes no sense to the international industry and does not help producers at all.

Nor does having deadlines for paperwork tied into government fiscal schedules. We must adapt to the needs of the industry we are trying to support.

Studies carried out in NZ and Australia, which both have robust, well-used systems, have shown the - Return On Investment is for every dollar spent on incentives the return is \$5-6 for the economy. Some research indicates it is even much higher than that.

This positively impacts many industries: employment, travel, construction to name a few.

6. Immigration

Immigration. Again another 'grey area'.

Of course for long shoots a visa is a necessary thing and generally for movies we have time to arrange properly. However sometimes actors

are cast at the last minute and it becomes difficult as the process is so slow and complicated. Not to mention expensive.

So many of our location scouts and our shoots are short. Sometimes the overseas crew is in town for less than a week. Do they need a visa to look at locations?

The really difficult area is for the short shootsespecially commercials. The crew are often already travelling outside of their home countries making it difficult for them to get to an Embassy or Consulate to get the paperwork done. Often the crew are attached to the project at the last minute.

As the incoming crew are not earning any income in Japan do they really need a visa?

Everyone I ask gives me a different answer.

Production service companies want to follow the correct procedures but the system especially in terms of timing does not work for our industry.

7. Public awareness

Moving onto the next topic of public awareness.

In Australia many years ago when it was realized that becoming a destination for international film production was an important, actually a new industry creating specialist, well-paid employment and injecting large amounts of cash into communities....

A public awareness campaign was undertaken to show ordinary Australians that having an American film crew working in your community was a good thing : they do not pollute the rivers, or dump toxic waste and it does create excellent work opportunities for the community and big injections of cash. And most importantly a

continuous up-skilling of film crew in every job, at every age and level of importance, and a continuous improvement in domestic film infrastructure that attracts subsequent film projects.

This enables a virtuous cycle of improved economic outcomes for the country, for participating regions and for a highly skilled, well-paid workforce.

Plus of course opportunities for the hotel and travel sector, as well as all kinds of local businesses such as construction, food vendors, equipment rental houses, transportation providers, and post-production companies.

8. Human Resources

Human resources are another issue.

There is a shortage of young people wanting to join the film industry and in particular a shortage of bilingual crew. In order to attract young, skilled staff we must make working conditions better, and work environments more pleasant, and create a system where people can advance and move up the ladder.

There are relatively simple solutions : Perhaps a program where young Japanese film workers could be attached to an off-shore film for a few months. The benefits a young location manager or a costume supervisor working on a large Hollywood film are huge. They would bring back much knowledge and understanding of systems to share with their teams here.

At the same time, we must consider film education.

Every year I interview many young people wanting to be in the film business and I always ask them what is their dream job or ambition?

Everyone wants to be the director. But not everyone can be the director.

We must re-educate young film people that being, for example, a first assistant director, being a location manager, a designer, a producer or production manager is a creative, honorable, fulfilling and well-paid career that can include working on domestic and high-profile international projects.

These jobs are not steppingstones to becoming the director.

At Toho we are looking at ways to align ourselves with film educators and help develop a dynamic workforce for the future generations of overseas producers wanting to shoot in Japan.

I think my time might be up. There is much more to discuss. I am available and happy to continue to discuss these matters with any interest groups.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I look forward to future collaboration.

Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu

Georgina Pope
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