



Eat Pray **Film**

After the success of *Eat Pray Love*, the country is trying to attract new blockbusters to shoot in Indonesia.

BY RACHEL WILL

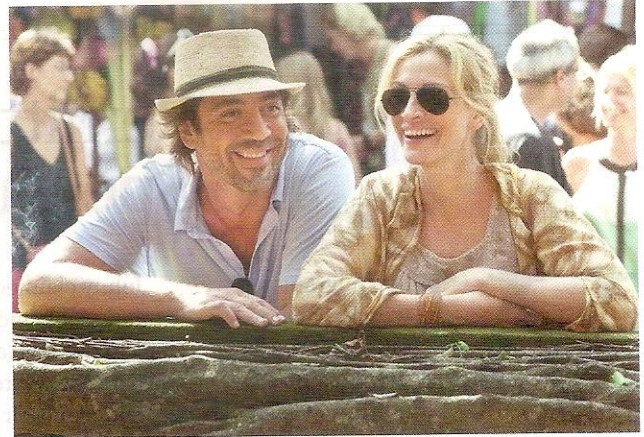
THE 2010 FILM *EAT PRAY LOVE* SPARKED A MOVIE tourism craze in Indonesia. With travel groups offering packages retracing star Julia Robert's steps on the beaches of Bali, all the way to visiting the actual fortune-teller portrayed in the film, no detail of the plot was spared. Shot on location in Bali, the movie is practically a free Hollywood advertisement for the island.

Tourism aside, what about Hollywood itself? Big studios are seeking exotic locales, cheap labor, and government cooperation. If Indonesia can meet these conditions it will create a major business opportunity for the country. The production

of *Eat Pray Love* in Bali generated \$12.5 million for the local economy, according to Deborah Gabinetti, director of the Bali Film Center, a private company that assists international filmmakers. "It's such a small industry and everyone knows that we pulled *Eat Pray Love* off. The film was beautiful and it's creating a huge draw [for Indonesia] now," says Gabinetti.

During the three-month shoot, the film created 300 local jobs directly and indirectly through equipment rentals, stage leasing, location fees, ground transport, security and accommodation among other costs. In comparison the most expensive Indonesian film production ever, the *Merah Putih* trilogy, cost \$6 million to produce or about half of *Eat Pray Love*'s Bali expenses. Despite the benefits, Indonesia still has a long way to go to attract new big-budget movies to film in the country.

Indonesia faces stiff competition from regional filmmaking giants such as Thailand, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The last major Hollywood film shot in Thailand, this year's *Hangover Part II*, has earned \$252 million in box office so far, according to the International Movie Database (IMDB). The 2000 film *Castaway* starring Tom Hanks earned \$234 million and was shot in the Philippines. Even a movie set in Jakarta, the 1982 film *The Year of Living Dangerously* starring Mel Gibson, was shot primarily in the Philippines.



Javier Bardem, Julia Roberts, and director Ryan Murphy at a Balinese ceremony (left); Scenes from the film *Eat Pray Love* shot in Bali (left page and top).

Thailand has perhaps the most aggressive international film industry in Asia. Last year, 530 movies were filmed in Thailand, earning the country \$60 million in 2010. That's double the \$30 million it generated in 2009, according to data from the Thailand Film Office. The country also offers monetary incentives for international production companies including a full value-added tax refund when companies shoot in Thailand a second time and income tax exemptions for foreign actors. "Thailand already has a long relationship with Hollywood, it is aggressive in making deals and has a proven cooperation with the studios," says Lalu Roisamri, director of the Jakarta International Film Festival.

While Indonesia does not offer fiscal incentives, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is working to cut red tape and streamline the process of applying for visas in Indonesia. The ministry does not charge a duty on any filming equipment brought from overseas, so long as it is brought back when the filming ceases. The ministry does have a branch dedicated to film affairs, however it's difficult to compete with the resources of organizations such as the Thailand Film Office and Hong Kong Film Services Office. The Bali Film Center, run by Gabinetti and local partner Ineke Indriyani, is the only internationally focused film making organization in the country. The small, privately run company is government endorsed, but it receives no government funding.

Although there is much competition from Indonesia's neighbors, it is often preconceived notions about the country as a whole that deter studios from scouting the location. For any film to be produced, it needs insurance, and due to the 2002 Bali and 2009 Jakarta bombings, Indonesia ranks as a high-risk and thus expensive place to film. However, Gary Hayes, executive producer of SyZyGy Productions and the local producer for *Eat Pray Love* maintains that Indonesia is a harmless place to film. He also notes that only a month before *Eat Pray Love* was set to begin shooting, the 2009 Marriott

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Hotel bombing occurred, causing the head of Sony's film security division to fly to Jakarta and assess the safety situation. "And what did he conclude?" Hayes says, "That Indonesia is a very safe place to film because the Indonesian government is so sensitive to terrorism and keen to prevent it."

Despite these issues, Indonesia's prestige as an international film location may be on the rise. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism receives about three requests a day for visas for film crew members. This year there will be seven international films shot in Indonesia with crews ranging from 30 to 100 people. Actor Richard Gere has just announced he'd like to make a movie here. Most notably, Indonesia has welcomed another big-budget film to be shot this year with *The Philosophers*, a futuristic thriller that takes place at a Jakarta international high school. The production employs a staff of more than 200 local and international crew members and has brought big name talent including actress Bonnie Wright of the Harry Potter franchise.

Indonesia's presence has been popping up at international events and film festivals, most recently Gabinetti visited Los Angeles in April for the Film Locations Trade Show. Through such platforms and the success of *Eat Pray Love*, Indonesia is establishing itself as a country willing and eager to work with international productions. The one big advantage, says Gabinetti, is that Indonesia's natural beauty sells itself to film industry types. "The hardest thing is just getting them here," she says. "Once we get them here, they're hooked." 