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Cinematic Paradise

By Jenny Quill

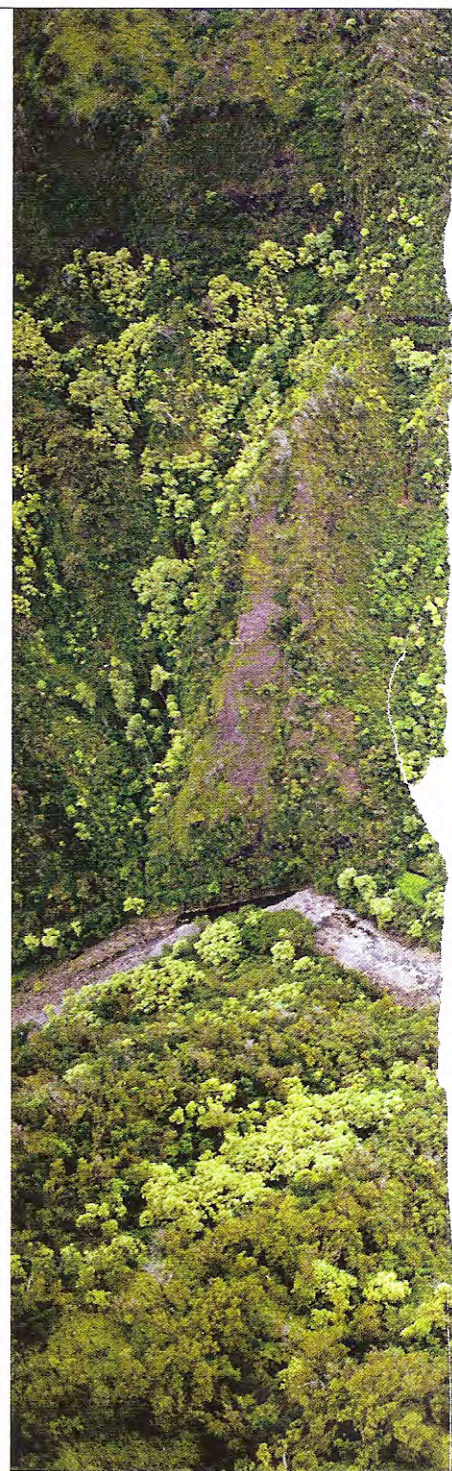
In a scene from *Jurassic Park*, a helicopter carrying guests to a wealthy entrepreneur's dinosaur theme park descends upon the lush, precipitous coastline of Isla Nublar, a fictional island off Costa Rica. Ivan Reitman's romantic comedy *Six Days/Seven Nights* chronicles the adventures of an unlikely couple stranded on a deserted South Seas island. In a flashback scene during an episode of the television drama *Lost*, "Oceanic Six" member Sayid Jarrah shadows a Russian man into his apartment in Moscow.

What do these three diverse scenarios have in common? They were all filmed in Hawai'i. Often referred to as "Hollywood's tropical back lot," the Aloha State has long been a popular filming location for movies and TV shows. The Hawaiian Islands' diverse terrain, idyllic weather, skilled local film crews and favorable tax incentives make this popular vacation

destination a paradise for the film industry, as well.

THE EARLY YEARS

The first Hollywood productions to be shot in Hawai'i, *Hawaiian Love* and *The Shark God*, were filmed in Honolulu in 1913. The two one-reelers—short motion pictures contained on one reel of film, which were popular during the silent-film era—showcased the then-exotic locale with high-drama story lines involving forbidden love



Left: Like the original *Hawaii Five-O*, the new series has an ensemble cast, exciting story lines and gorgeous scenery. Right: Kauai's remote Manawaiopuna Falls were featured in the movie *Jurassic Park*.



GARY BRAASCH / PHOTOLIBRARY

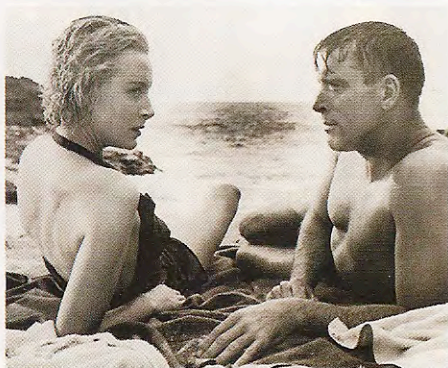
and ancient superstitions.

Over the next two decades, Universal, Paramount, Fox, Metro and other movie studios shot 17 films in Hawai'i, including the tremendously popular *Bird of Paradise*, which was released in 1932 by RKO. Starring Dolores del Rio and Joel McCrea, the movie follows a beautiful Polynesian girl

and a man from a distant land as they fall in love. But their romance is cut short when the girl is chosen as a sacrifice to the volcano god. The movie was such a big hit that 20th Century Fox released a remake in 1951.

With the 1953 release of *From Here to Eternity*, a Hawai'i-filmed movie soared to

new heights. Shot on O'ahu, the film won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director (Fred Zinnemann), Best Supporting Actress (Donna Reed) and Best Supporting Actor for Frank Sinatra, making the singer a bona fide movie star. While Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr didn't win Oscars for their



performances, their classic love scene filmed at Hālonā Cove—during which the couple embraced as the waves washed over them—is an iconic Hollywood moment.

In the years that followed, 10 other movies shot in Hawai'i earned 33 Academy Award nominations and five Oscars. Those films included *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953), which was filmed on Kaua'i; *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), which has scenes shot at Pearl Harbor; *Mr. Roberts* (1955), which

Above: *Lost*'s six seasons were almost entirely shot on O'ahu. Black-and-white photos, top to bottom: Dolores del Río performs a ritual dance in *Bird of Paradise*. Deborah Kerr and Burt Lancaster's famous love scene in *From Here to Eternity* is an iconic Hollywood moment. The original *Hawaii Five-O* TV series starred Jack Lord as ex-naval officer Steve McGarrett. James Cagney and Jack Lemmon were part of an all-star cast in *Mr. Roberts*.



In *Blue Hawaii*, Elvis Presley (with Joan Blackman) played Chadwick Gates, a young man who returns to his Hawai'i home after serving in the army.

was filmed in Honolulu; and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958), which was partly filmed in Kona on the Big Island.

In 1961, millions of theatergoers were introduced to the magic of the Hawaiian Islands through the musical *Blue Hawaii*, in which Elvis Presley croons *Can't Help Falling in Love with You*.

TELEVISION BREAKTHROUGH

One of Hawai'i's biggest Hollywood hits came in 1968, with the TV series *Hawaii Five-0*—a quick success that brought the islands and its people into homes across the country every week. Starring Jack Lord as ex-naval officer Steve McGarrett, the show was the first TV series to be shot entirely on location, and it went on to become one of the longest-running police dramas in U.S. television history, ending in 1980. The opening theme music, com-

posed by Morton Stevens, is just as famous as the show, and “Book ‘em, Danno” has become one of TV history’s most memorable catchphrases.

Endearing the current generation to McGarrett and his crew is the new *Hawaii Five-0*, which was resurrected in September by CBS. The adaptation, which also is filmed entirely on the islands, is a sleek, action-packed version of the original, offering the same theme song (with some tweaks), exciting story lines and panoramic vistas.

“The state of Hawai'i is so excited about the new *Hawaii Five-0* because you get to see these incredible shots of Hawai'i,” says Chuck Boller, executive director of the Hawaii International Film Festival (HIFF). “You can be sitting anywhere in the world, where it [might be] winter, and you're watching these beautiful shots of Hawai'i.”

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the original *Hawaii Five-0* is the filmmaking infrastructure it established, including the Hawaii Film Studio. The state-owned facility, built in the mid-1970s at the foot of Diamond Head, comprises a 16,500-square-foot soundstage, production offices and storage facilities. The series also inspired a generation of trained crew people, many of whom later worked on

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the sets of *Magnum, P.I.*, *Baywatch Hawaii* and *North Shore*.

“There’s a very highly trained, educated core of people here,” says Boller.

Hawai‘i’s reliable, knowledgeable crews have played a role in the islands’ being chosen as a filming location for many films, including *Waterworld* (1995), *Godzilla* (1998), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *Planet of the Apes* (2001), *50 First Dates* (2004), *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End* (2007) and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008).

A POSITIVE IMPACT

Naturally, Hawai‘i’s bustling film business is a boon to the local economy. According to Georja Skinner, chief officer for the Creative Industries Division/Hawaii Film Office, State of Hawai‘i, estimated production expenditures—the money that production companies spend in pre- and postproduction and while they’re filming—reached \$407 million in 2010, with a total economic impact of roughly \$639 million.

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To attract big-budget movies, it helps to remain competitive in the global marketplace, which the State of Hawai'i has done through attractive tax incentives for film production. “Any state that doesn't offer some sort of tax-rebate program isn't on Hollywood's radar,” says Skinner. She adds that just like other industries, the film-and-entertainment sector has suffered in the recent recession and is looking for ways to improve its bottom line.

Dan Krech, president of Hawaii Animation Studios, a digital-media company that opened in Honolulu in February 2009, was initially drawn to Hawai'i's shores by the state's tax breaks, but found that

doing business in the islands has many other perks.

“At one point in time, Hawai'i was in the middle of nowhere, and now it's in the middle of everywhere,” says Krech. “You have Asian culture, mainland culture, Polynesian culture. You have the best of [many] worlds mixed together, and it forms a very friendly business environment.” He adds that three-quarters of his company's employees are native to Hawai'i.

HOMEGROWN TALENT

One of the biggest benefits of Hawai'i's growing film industry is the development of local talent. According to Boller, interest in the film industry has spread to area

colleges, and the state now has some of the country's best-equipped film schools, including the Academy for Creative Media (ACM) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Plus, having productions on-island allows for hands-on learning through filmmakers' lectures arranged by HIFF; internships with local companies, including Krech's Hawaii Animation Studios, which currently has a dozen interns; writing gigs with local TV shows; and the opportunity to show films at HIFF, which hosted an ACM night this past year that featured six student works.

Students aren't the only ones getting in on the action—area filmmakers have been busy making movies. One recent example

is *Ecila*, the first feature film by local director, writer and editor Darius Legg. The movie was produced by Robert Campbell, who also works on *Hawaii Five-0*. Another example is *Get a Job*, a comedy written and directed by Maui resident Brian Kohne, the founder of Malama Pono Productions. The film features local musicians Willie K and Eric Gilliom, and special appearances by two Maui residents, Willie Nelson and Mick Fleetwood.

FILMING IN PARADISE

While many films and TV shows shot on-island have been set in Hawai'i, the Aloha State has proved itself a capable stand-in for many other destinations. *Jurassic Park* and *Six Days/Seven Nights*, for example, were set in Central America and Tahiti, respectively, but were partly shot on Kaua'i. And *Lost*, which was



filmed almost entirely on O'ahu, used the island as a backdrop for diverse locations, including New Orleans, London and New York City.

“You can make [Hawai'i] look like Connecticut or Australia,” says Boller. “You can shoot anything in Hawai'i. I think

In addition to being shot on Kaua'i, *Jurassic Park* was partly filmed in the lush Ka'a'awa Valley on O'ahu's windward coast.

because of *Lost*, people realized you can shoot anything here.”

In addition to this chameleonlike flexibility, another reason for Hawai‘i’s appeal as a filming location is its near-perfect year-round weather, which means few rain delays.

“It’s sunny most of the year here, and our weather is a big contributing factor to our popularity,” says Skinner of the Hawaii Film Office.

When cast and crew arrive, they’ll be greeted with more than just lei; they’ll find that Hawai‘i has all of the amenities they might want.

The islands also enjoy a convenient location that is only about a five-hour flight from the mainland, making it fast, safe and affordable to send cast, crew and equipment from the mainland to the movie set. And when cast and crew arrive, they’ll be greeted with more than just lei; they’ll find that Hawai‘i has all of the amenities they might want, from luxurious hotels and fine dining to convenient transportation.

With 10 feature films—including the highly anticipated *Descendants*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* and *Battleship*—shot on location in Hawai‘i in 2010 alone, it’s certain that the islands will be coming soon to a theater near you. ▲

Jenny Quill writes from her adopted hometown of Honolulu.

GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines offers daily direct service to O‘ahu, Kaua‘i, Maui and the Big Island. To book an Alaska Airlines Vacations package to Hawai‘i, go to alaskaair.com or call 800-468-2248.