

# DXB AND THE BATTLE TO SAVE THE WORLD

Ahead of Dubai International's appearance in the *Independence Day* sequel this month, we take a look at how Dubai is now a hot destination for Hollywood's finest filmmakers

Words: Louise Quick



If you've seen the trailer for the long-awaited *Independence Day* sequel, you might have spotted a few familiar sites among the CGI'd mayhem. Not only does the Burj Khalifa come crashing down onto central London, but DXB also makes an appearance, its iconic air traffic control tower becoming a target for the invading alien forces.

But while you may have Jeff Goldblum to thank for making your flight today, what's not in doubt is that Dubai is rapidly becoming attractive real estate for moviemakers the world over.

Roland Emmerich, the legendary director behind the epic 1996 sci-fi movie, began work on the mega follow-up to

*Independence Day* six years ago and spotted the potential in Dubai even then, explaining that, "in the film business we're always looking for new frontiers".

The current alien invasion isn't the first instance of Dubai's skyline in the movies, of course, and *Star Trek Beyond* – also out this month – shot some great scenes here in late 2015. The all-star cast – including Chris Pine, Simon Pegg and Idris Elba – were in town and used hundreds of local extras in their street scenes. The crew allocated Dh\$118 million (US\$32.13 million) to the filming in Dubai, making it the biggest-budget shoot in the city to date. Executive producer Jeffrey Chernov explained the decision, stating, "We came searching for

the future and found it in Dubai."

The location shift isn't confined to Dubai either. The UAE as a whole is making its mark and Abu Dhabi's Liwa Desert was recently the set of Jakku in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, while the capital was also the set for some big-time boy racing in *The Fast And The Furious 7*.

Back in Dubai, however, it seems that in recent years the plan has shifted from it simply being a viable Middle Eastern film location – the 2005 thriller *Syriana* turned Dubai, very briefly, into Iran – to being a major character in its own right. The Burj Khalifa even landed a spot in a 2013 episode of *The Simpsons*.

The city's real debut on the big screen



**Opposite page:** Burj Khalifa crashes into London in *Independence Day: Resurgence*

**Left:** Tom Cruise clings to Burj Khalifa

**Right:** Dubai's iconic tower has even made it into *The Simpsons*

**Below:** The *Star Wars* and *Fast and Furious* franchises have both shot scenes in Abu Dhabi recently



came in 2011, when audiences watched with baited breath as Tom Cruise appeared to precariously hang off the Burj Khalifa in *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol*. According to reports, the four weeks it took to film these scenes brought US\$28 million into Dubai.

A year after the film's release, the Dubai TV And Film Commission was created. Its intention was – and is – to authorise filming permits but, most importantly, to raise the emirate's profile as a hot filming destination. Initially it even offered incentives of up to 50 per cent rebates to potential production companies.

Speaking last year when news of *Star Trek's* filming was announced, Jamal Al Sharif, chairman of Dubai Film And TV Commission and managing director of Dubai Studio City, said, "Not only will this [movie] shine the spotlight on Dubai and the UAE's excellent locations, infrastructure and flexibility, but it will significantly boost the UAE's economy, tourism and entertainment sectors."

Emirati film director and CEO of D-SEVEN Motion Pictures, Nayla Al Khaja, agrees, "I do believe that the local film industry can benefit from having international productions in Dubai," she explained to *Dubai Voyager*.

"Last year we were hired to shoot behind the scenes for *Star Trek Beyond*, and as a UAE national, my company benefited from

that financially. Perhaps more importantly, we also benefited by working with, and being exposed to, a really high-end level of professionals from different departments of that filmmaking arena."

In both *Star Trek's* latest instalment and *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol*, Dubai's architecture is glorified, while in *Independence Day: Resurgence* its role is a little different, with its main purpose in the film being a target of the alien attack. As Jeff Goldblum's character David Levinson says, "They like to get the landmarks."

But then you'd expect nothing less from Emmerich. The director dominates the epic disaster movie genre, with an impressive portfolio including *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Godzilla, 2012* and *White House Down*. In fact, for a building to be the focus of Emmerich's CGI destruction is a nod to how iconic it is. This is the man who, through his movies, has blown up the White House twice.

Over the last five years, Dubai has fought to raise its game and become a real player in the film industry. It's a bold move that has an impact on the economy as much as it does the culture. Considering the exposure it's getting through two mammoth movies out this month alone, it's clearly succeeding. If you're heading into the city this month, then keep an eye out for the cameras... you might just end up being part of a Hollywood blockbuster.