

“...CAST AND CREW THAT ENABLED US TO MAXIMISE PRODUCTION VALUES.”

Rob Tapert, *Executive Producer, Hercules : The Legendary Journeys*

It was a recommendation from an American, Eric Gruendemann, that led Hollywood-based Universal Studios to consider New Zealand as the location for *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. Gruendemann, *Hercules*' co-executive producer, convinced executive producer Rob Tapert that New Zealand's landscapes were ideal for a TV movie visually based in an ancient Greek world. "New Zealand met our core criteria," says Mr Tapert. "Its stunning landscapes brought to life the mythological world we imagined for *Hercules* and subsequently for our other shows."

If there were still any reservations among Universal Studios' bosses about filming in a country they didn't know, these were soon allayed. The team was impressed by the demonstrable on-screen value of New Zealand's experienced crew, talented cast, state of the art facilities and amazing variety of location options.

"What initially sold us on New Zealand was the scenery," says Mr Tapert. "But it was the capabilities of the New Zealand cast and crew that enabled us to maximise production values. We aimed to give our series a 'feature film look' and the New Zealanders helped us achieve that."

In the end, not only *Hercules* but five other productions – *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Young Hercules*, *Cleopatra 2525*, *Jack of All Trades* and *Amazon High* – were filmed in New Zealand over a period of eight years. Universal Studios' local production arm Pacific Renaissance Pictures produced more than 300 program hours and spent more than US\$400 million in New Zealand. At its peak it employed 700 locals and had six shooting units servicing three shows simultaneously.

"Initially our director, second unit directors, production designer and physical producer were Americans. However, over the various series, more and more of the total cast and crew were New Zealand-based," he says. "For example, the preparation for the shows was done in New Zealand, the final two years' worth of special effects for *Xena* were done in New Zealand, as was post production for *Cleopatra 2525* and *Jack of All Trades*."

Cost efficiencies from using locals extended well beyond travel, food and accommodation expenses. Time and again New Zealanders found innovative solutions to production problems. The vast array of costumes were also designed and made in New Zealand. These became some of the shows' signature elements. New Zealand's multi-cultural society lent the productions a credible 'look'.

And, importantly, Pacific Renaissance Pictures found central and local government agencies, as well as industry guilds, available and film-friendly.

Says Eric Gruendemann: "There are no cons, only pros about shooting in New Zealand."

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