

# Game of Thrones world tour

*Experience Ireland, Croatia and Spain through the eyes of the producers and crews on the sets of GoT Season 7. By Eugene Yiga*

**S**ince its premiere in April 2011, fantasy-drama *Game of Thrones* has become one of the world's most popular television shows. And while millions of fans enjoy each season's episodes, the show's creators spend an entire year bringing it all to life.

'Although this is TV, it's TV on an unprecedented scale,' says Duncan Muggoch, a line producer for Croatia and Spain, the 'southern locations'

for *Game of Thrones*. 'And, even though last year was big, this one's even bigger.'

Of course, working with thousands of people – cast, extras and crew – across dozens of sets in various countries presents its challenges. 'Dubrovnik [Croatia] is understandably a big tourist attraction, so you're fighting your way through thronging crowds on the best of days,' Muggoch says. 'That's been a difficulty on the sets.'

#### THE CHALLENGES

Shooting in different locations requires constant communication between each country's crews. 'I think we're the only ones in the world that shoot with two units at the same time all season long,'

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says production manager Bernie Caulfield. '[But] if one of those spokes in the wheel is missing, it's going to collapse.'

Ensuring continuity presents its own set of challenges. For example, items like wigs and costumes must be a perfect match when filming in two locations, countries apart.

Then there's the 'delicate' locations. For season five, for example, one of the Spanish filming locations was the Alcázar of Seville. Registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, this palace is one of the most visited monuments in Spain. (The royal family still uses the upper levels as their official Seville residence.) More than 50 years after it was used as a set for the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, the palace was used as the set for the Water Gardens of Dorne, one of the nine constituent regions of *Game of Thrones*' seven kingdoms.

'It's understandably difficult

to shoot in a place like that because it was obviously not built as a set,' Spanish line producer Peter Welter Soler says. 'At places like the palace's famous balcony, for instance, where the staircase is too narrow to be able to carry up most of the gear, we had to get a crane in to haul that material up. This made it much trickier than a back-lot studio shoot.'

The palace receives an average of about 8 000 tourists a day, so Soler considers it a privilege that they got exclusive use of it. 'In delicate locations such as these, we always ensure that our crew are very careful and obliging.'

#### A SENSE OF THE ANCIENT

Ireland is much more film-friendly than Croatia and Spain, and Belfast remains the heart of the show. Being a major city, it has everything a big film crew needs. And a mere 20-minute drive out of the city brings you to the heart of the countryside.

'It helps with the ancient feel of the show that the Irish landscape looks and feels old,' says producer Chris Newman. 'It's worn down and eroded. And everything has that ancient feel to it, everywhere you go. The woods feel old, as do the cliff tops, and the moorlands certainly look ancient. I look forward to going to the set every day, because it's so breathtaking.'

After more than 40 years in the film business, Newman has learned to take the ups and downs in his stride. He's also learned to play whatever hand he's dealt because the show can't stop.

'*Game of Thrones* is a big event, but you can't let the scale of it intimidate you,' he explains. 'The thing to do is to come in and say, "All I have to worry about is what's in that frame." It should be like skydiving. Don't worry about the height you're jumping; just make sure that your parachute works.' ▶



#### OPPOSITE PAGE

**TOP:** Inch Abbey is a large, ruined monastic site in Northern Ireland.

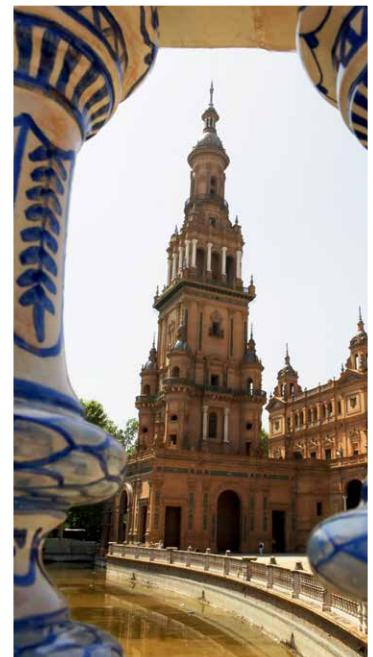
**BOTTOM:** Another view of the 12th-century Inch Abbey where Stark's bannermen in *Game of Thrones* pledged allegiance to the 'King in the North'.

#### THIS PAGE

**LEFT:** Tollymore Forest Park was Northern Ireland's first state forest park.

**BOTTOM:** The famous rope bridge at Carrick-a-Rede near Ballintoy in Northern Ireland.





*'Those who seek paradise on Earth should come to Dubrovnik'*

#### DUBROVNIK IN A DAY

Enchanted by this beautiful city on the Adriatic Sea, George Bernard Shaw once said that 'those who seek paradise on Earth should come to Dubrovnik'. And Shaw's vision of Dubrovnik is preserved in the city's Old Town, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979.

Old Town and its many sights, including the venerable city walls, is one of the top attractions here. If you're visiting in the summer, don't miss the world-renowned Dubrovnik Summer Festival with its music, theatre and dance.

One of the greatest pleasures for many visitors to Old Town Dubrovnik is to enjoy a drink at one of the cafés along Placa Street (also called Stradun), the main thoroughfare, and just observe as the world goes by under the watchful gaze of the city's patron, St Blaise, or Sveti Vlaho as the locals call him. Getting around Dubrovnik's

Old Town is just a pleasure; its size means that you can get from one gate to another, or from one of the entrances to the 'edge' of the walls, in no time at all. That said, actually exploring the fascinating Old Town area will keep you more than occupied for a number of days.

But don't miss the day trips from Dubrovnik, though. There are countless tours to nearby islands and coastal towns that simply beg to be explored.

#### THE SIGHTS OF SEVILLE

Situated on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, Seville has a rich Moorish heritage, and used to be a prosperous port that carried out trade with the Americas. The streets and squares in the historic quarter of the capital of Andalusia are lively and busy, treasuring many World Heritage Sites and several extremely traditional and culture-rich districts, like Triana and La Macarena.

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Seville is a prominent business centre in the south of Spain and has many hotels distributed all over the city, enabling visitors to discover its endless attractions at leisure. Museums and art centres, theme parks, cinemas, theatres and clubs are some of the many leisure options that this thriving city holds. Without forgetting, of course, the numerous terraces, inns, and bars where visitors can practise one of the city's (if not the world's) most deeply-rooted and tastiest traditions: 'going out for tapas'.

Visitors will also discover the immense natural wealth of this region, which sits halfway between two continents, in natural treasures such as the Doñana Nature Reserve, declared a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, and the Sierra Norte Nature Reserve. These are the ideal settings for practising outdoor sports, and include hiking, horse-riding and cycling routes. If, on the other hand,

golf is more your swing, then you will be glad to know that Seville has four excellent golf courses in its vicinity.

#### BEAUTIFUL BELFAST

Belfast started out as a small hamlet with fertile land along the mouth of the Lagan River. Soon, marauders and pirates realised the shores were safe from the North Atlantic storms, making it the perfect haven for repairing sea-ravaged ships. From these early stages the industrious locals developed a boat-building trade.

Belfast today is packed with history, culture, exciting events, great food, and more. It's also home to Titanic Studios where *Game of Thrones* is shot and only a stone's throw away from other filming locations across Northern Ireland, including The King's Road, Winterfell, The Wall and Dragonstone.

The area offers several guided tours, visiting sites including Robb's Camp in the Riverlands, one of Walder Frey's Twins, and the ruined 12<sup>th</sup>-century abbey where Stark's bannermen pledged allegiance to the 'King in the North'. **C**

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