

Myanmar takes the lead role in German TV show

By Myo Theingi Cho



Wrapping up the final scene of the show, which ends with a donation ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.

OLIVER Clemens, a popular German TV actor in his 30s, releases the top button of his high-collared Myanmar traditional shirt and blows lightly on his chest in an attempt to cool down. It has little effect as the sweat keeps rolling down his brow, glistening in the harsh October sun.

Mr Clemens, seven other German actors and a 40-plus production crew have been in Myanmar for the past month filming a 90-minute TV show that will premiere on German television screens on January 1 next year.

“Die schonste Reise des Lebens – Myanmar” (The Most Beautiful Holiday in Life: Myanmar) tells the story of a young German couple who elope. After marrying on the cruise ship Love Boat stationed in Shanghai, they head to Myanmar for their honeymoon.

“Die schonste Reise des Lebens – Myanmar” (The Most Beautiful Holiday in Life: Myanmar) tells the story



The show will premiere in Europe on January 1.

The show, filmed almost entirely in Myanmar, follows the couple on their travels through Yangon, Bagan, Ngapali and various stops along the Ayeyarwady River.

“This is a very good opportunity to promote Myanmar to the European tourist market,” says the general manager of The Bagan Hotel, Oliver E Soe Thet, who has been assisting the film crew throughout the shoot.

The TV channel ZDF, which commissioned the show is the second largest in Germany and attracts 12 million viewers, including German-speaking audiences in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Greece and Turkey.

The fictional couple in the show runs out of money during their honeymoon and has to rely on the renowned hospitality of Myanmar people, which the actors say they also experienced while they were here.

Sitting on the steps of Shwedagon Pagoda where the final scene of the series is being shot, Mr Clemens, who plays the bridegroom, says, “I had never been to Myanmar before but I like the country very much. The people here are very friendly and open-minded, so I feel wonderful here.”

His feelings are shared by his costar Luise Baehr, a well-known German TV actress and former ballerina who plays the role of the runaway bride.

“I was really excited when I came here. I was overwhelmed by the culture and the people, who have been so friendly toward us. I felt very welcome,” Ms Baehr says, clasping her hands to her chest in a gesture of gratitude.

The only difficulty they encountered, Mr Clemens says, was the oppressive heat, since many of the scenes were shot outdoors.

Wiping more sweat off his brow, he adds, “I think a lot of people will want to come to Myanmar after they see the beautiful places in the show. They are going to fall in love with these places and want to see them for themselves.”

Light-reflecting screens, camera stands and electrical chords are rearranged and the break is over. There’s no more time for chit-chat; final touches need to be made on the last scene of the show, which ends with a donation ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda.

The frantic activity surrounding the shoot is in stark contrast to the peacefulness of the pagoda, but none of the worshippers seem to mind much — some stop to watch the activity, but the majority just go on with their business.

Ms Baehr and Mr Clemens get into position with the other actors, including some locals who play the monks in the donation ceremony, and the camera rolls.

After he yells “cut”, bringing the filming of the scene to an end, director H.J. Togel, a German TV veteran, comments what a pleasure it has been to work in Myanmar.

“We didn’t have any real problems throughout the whole shoot because the people here are so gentle and helpful,” he says, his forehead, like that of Mr Clemens, pouring sweat.

“Please don’t forget that tourism is a really big contributor to a country’s growth,” he adds.

Mr Soe Thet is also very optimistic about the effect the show will have on tourism when it screens in Europe next year.

“To me this is a very effective way of promoting the country, as well as facilitating cultural exchange,” he says.

“I think it will be a very big boost.”

Mr Clemens says that along with wonderful memories, he will also be taking a couple of Myanmar longyi with him when he goes back to Germany because he enjoyed wearing them so much while he was here.

Ms Baehr says the sight of the sun setting over Bagan will forever be burned into her memory. “Watching the sun set was the most beautiful moment for me,” she says.

Having been a dancer for 15 years before she became an actress, Ms Baehr also says she would like to come back one day to learn traditional Myanmar dances.

“It is a really interesting style,” she says, moving her hands through the air in imitation.

She also says that she was amazed to find out how many of her friends had already been to Myanmar once she told them that she was going to be filming there.

“They told me that this was one of the most beautiful countries that they had been to,” she says, adding that she now agrees.

But would she consider holding her own wedding here? She contemplates it for a moment and says, “I am a Christian, so it would be more difficult, but I would definitely like to do it.”

With all the equipment packed up, it is time to leave. The cast and crew take a final look up at the glittering dome of Shwedagon and hit the road.

<http://www.myanmar.com/myanmartimes/MyanmarTimes18-341/t001.htm>