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# A FIRST-CLASS SERVICE

How Vietnam's The CREATV Company is using its extensive local expertise and know-how to attract international productions to shoot in Southeast Asia

**A**s Southeast Asia throws open its doors to international film and TV producers, The CREATV Company (CTV), the longest-established private production company in Vietnam, has forged an alliance with Mandala (MDL), the Philippines-based producer and production services powerhouse.

The CTV-MDL partnership covers nine territories in which the two are already established producers and production service giants: CTV brings know-how and expertise in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, while MDL is the hands-on expert for incoming productions looking to shoot in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea.

"We offer our expertise and specificity in our respective territories and the pact also allows us to mobilise and pool our resources," says CTV creative producer Stirling Silliphant. "To have everything under one umbrella to help foster and realise any project, especially a cross-border co-production, is a big plus for anyone thinking of filming in Southeast Asia."

## Fit for purpose

The CTV-MDL alliance is about more than expanding the market and reach, notes Mandala founder and executive producer Johanna Kirsten Lagman. "It is about making us relevant to the times we are operating in and fulfilling the need for more content in various platforms."

The aim is to "cut the fat from the basics so resources can be better utilised for production needs and servicing," notes Lagman. "We all know that demand now, especially from streaming platforms and pay per view is increasing, but budgets are decreasing.

"We are uniting to streamline creative, finance, logistics — not just for one country, but many," she says.

CTV was at the centre of the return of international production to Vietnam at the tail end of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022. It



Mandala's Johanna Kirsten Lagman on the set of *Special Forces* on Discovery; below, CTV founder and managing director Othello Khanh



provided production services to the Netflix-backed romantic comedy *A Tourist's Guide To Love*, starring Rachael Leigh Cook, Scott Ly and Ben Feldman, which filmed throughout the country.

Having shot at locations such as Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hoi An, Ha Giang (doubling for central Vietnam) and Hanoi, among others, *A Tourist's Guide To Love* involved more than 200 local crew members and vendors, including those in the production, local travel and retail industries.

Silliphant says the scene-stealing locales and being able to facilitate the production across the whole of Vietnam has given CTV a boost. "Our local teams in Vietnam are now both fully booked until the end of 2023, and our alliance with Mandala allows us to table more business

by sharing our shared resources and expertise," he says.

In 2023-24, CTV aims to double its resources and production service offerings, thanks to the alliance.

Like CTV, Mandala has also managed to facilitate recent international productions in the Philippines and worked as the local arm in producing international projects for the streaming media and pay per view, amid the country's Covid-19 restrictions. The company was active in working to set the regulations and create the safety protocols for filming. When the borders gradually opened in the Philippines, Mandala was on hand to welcome back international productions from documentary, reality and scripted formats.

Projects include facilitating *The Amazing Race*, *Survivor* as well as

"To have everything under one umbrella is a big plus if you're thinking of filming in Southeast Asia"

Stirling Silliphant, CTV

adventure/expedition productions such as *Lost Gold*, and investigative docs such as *Current Affairs*, National Geographic's *Trafficked* and more. Mandala is currently working on Netflix lifestyle shows *Street Food Asia* and *Home Game*, and a co-production on the festival trail with French/Belgian company Matapang.

CTV founder and managing director Othello Khanh has been operating in Vietnam and the region since 1995, when he set up shop after working in Paris, Mexico and Los Angeles.

"I find sister-in-expertise Johanna [Kirsten Lagman] a solid associate for regional development," Khanh says.

Khanh and Silliphant enjoy navigating the unique and sometimes challenging local quirks of shooting in the region. "While many people are excited and eager to break into Southeast Asia, shooting here is quite daunting," notes Silliphant. "If there's anyone who can take you through it, minimise confusion and anticipate the things that can't be anticipated, The CREATV Company can."



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