

Press Release
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THE VIKINGS HAVE LANDED IN CANNES

Shetland Vikings conquered new territory last night (Monday 21st May) as they took one of the most glamorous nights at the 60th Cannes Film Festival by storm.

200 key figures from the movie industry enjoyed a party entitled 'Viking Saga in Cannes' at a villa in the famous French town.

The theme of the reception, the fourth such event organised by the Scottish Highlands and Islands Film Commission (SHIFC), was Orkney and Shetland and five members of Shetland's famous Lerwick Jarl Squad, including Shetland MSP Tavish Scott, had a starring role.

Shetland Islands Council (SIC) and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) helped organise the event, which featured performances by Shetland musicians Gemma Donald and Owen Muir. Guests dined in style on the finest Shetland and Orkney produce including oysters, fresh salmon, smoked salmon, organic farmed cod, Shetland beer and gin, Orkney whisky, Orkney and Shetland fudge and oatcakes and Shetland beef and lamb.

Trish Shorthouse of SHIFC, which globally promotes film making in the Highlands and Islands and whose representatives have been busy making contacts throughout the festival, said: "We have had fantastic backing for the event from various agencies such as HIE and SIC, so as a publically-funded organisation we have had to spend very little money.

"The party not only promoted the Highlands and Islands as a region to visit and to come and film, it showcased the high quality food and drink from the Highlands and Islands, this year from Shetland and Orkney. Our party simply offered the movers and shakers of Cannes something quite unique."

Karen Smyth of Glasgow-based film production company La Belle Allee, said: "The party is a great way of forging connections with international film producers and it will bring a lot more film work to Scotland. It was an amazing showcase for us to show what Scotland has to offer for every type of film maker; you don't just have to come here to make period films."

Dan Vogel, a Chicago-based producer with Scottish roots, is doing all he can to encourage film making in Scotland. His Digital Media Group is the main sponsor of the villa shared by SHIFC during the festival.

He said: "The party enabled Scottish companies to meet a Who's Who of contacts in the international film industry and build up lists of names and information. It also promotes Scotland as a place to come and film.

"I love the scenery of Scotland and know what it has to offer. I am hoping to shoot a film in Scotland in the next year or so. Hopefully five years from now there will be a nice core of film production going on in Scotland."

Geoff Wilcock, director of Forres-based Open Brolly (MovieSite), had seen his firm take on more and more orders since the start of its association with SHIFC.

He said: "For small companies like us, Cannes is extremely important. It has helped us to become the biggest provider in the UK and Ireland for back office systems for regional film commissions. We provide web-based services for locations and local crews so prospective film makers can log in and find out about what is available to them.

“This year there has been a lot of interest in film tourism and we believe this can be exploited in the Highlands and Islands for years to come. For example, the TV series *Monarch of the Glen* is only into the showing of its third series out of seven in some countries. We have been holding meetings and workshops in Cannes to show how tourism operators can exploit interest in TV and film locations.”

Neil Henderson of Shetland Islands Council said: “We are keen to attract any positive film-related business to the area, not only for the obvious immediate direct economic impact through use of accommodation, transport and other local services, but also for the longer term valuable exposure the media of film and TV can realise.

“Shetland’s natural and cultural environment makes it a particularly attractive location for documentary filming, and recently we have measured significant interest in Shetland from exposure through BBC’s *Springwatch* and *Viking Fire* documentaries. This year we are set to feature on the prime time TV on BBCs *Coast* and *Nature of Britain*.”

Amanda Millen, who is leading a team of eight from HIE’s Creative Industries Department”, said: “We are in Cannes to show we take the screen and broadcast industries seriously, and that we want to be taken seriously. The SHIFC party is regarded as the best non-official party in Cannes and has been highly successful in terms of the economic returns.”

Among the team were fashion designers Sandra Murray, who designed the dress worn by Ivanka Trump at the Tartan Week in New York earlier this year, and Gemma Carver a graduate from Fort William.

Amanda said: "Sandra and Gemma were not only able to show people from outside the Highlands and Islands what talent we have, but were also able to make contacts and hopefully secure orders from around the globe."

Dunoon-based Argyll Catering received a grant from HIE to organise the food at the first reception held by SHIFC four years ago. However, the firm, which has catered for the stars of the *Harry Potter* films, *The Last King of Scotland* and *Seachd* got so much business that it has paid to come over to do the catering duties out of its own pocket.

Ian Murray, a partner in the firm with his wife Estralita, said: "Going to Cannes helps us to secure work because anybody who is anybody in the industry is there. We and the other firms from the Highlands and Islands out here can not only tell the film makers about the beautiful scenery but show them that the infrastructure for making films is there too. We are not only promoting Argyll Catering at Cannes, but also the whole of the Highlands and Islands."

Mr Murray revealed that turnips to go with the haggis and tatties served at the party had been flown over from Inverness as it had been impossible to buy them in France.

He explained: "The French love things like frogs legs and snails, but they don't eat turnips – they feed them to their cattle!"

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