

ON LOCATION:

During a visit to the West Pomerania area of Poland, Rob Clymo discovers that all manner of options are open to the roving filmmaker

POLAND



Poland proves to be a place that's full of surprises, particularly if you're in the market for making films. On a recent trip there, where we were shooting footage for a travel video, the area of West Pomerania, which covers the top left-hand chunk of the country right next to the German border, proved to be a real revelation.

The trip started off, naturally, in the rain-sodden surroundings of Stansted airport. Arriving there late at night on the too-expensive Stansted Express and making eye-contact with row upon row of zombie-like folks waiting for the first flight next morning, I was relieved to know I'd be enjoying a few hours in the relative splendour of the Premier Inn down the road. Granted, I had to spend the night with a picture of a grimacing

Lenny Henry staring back at the bed but you can't have everything and, aside from that, it was perfect. Good location, fair prices and chirpy service - a place I'd therefore recommend for any impoverished filmmakers who don't fancy spending the night sleeping next to their valuable kit back at the inhospitable terminal building.

On the way

Next morning, it's still raining and I'm anticipating more of it at the other end. However, as we descend through the wispy clouds and touchdown at Goleniów airport, the weather is sunny and decidedly, well, summery. Yeah, remember that? Travelling out of the airport and down the highway reveals a part of Poland that is incredibly green and very wooded. It's certainly a

far cry from the more frequently visited likes of Krakov or Warsaw, although the former location is still seen as a superb place to visit if you're after a thick slice of history. Mind you, the only problem is that you'll also be dodging the stag and hen parties that have been heading that way ever since the budget airlines put it on their route maps. Here though, it's much quieter.

After a swift check-in at the Szczecin Radisson Blu and a hearty hotel lunch, we kick things off with a city tour. On the face of it this seems like it might not take that long, but as our guide begins to explain, it's scheduled to include a tour of a former wartime underground shelter. We'll also be able to see segments of a recently completed film, called *The Great Escape*, which you can read more about in our dedicated boxout in this very feature over on page 83. After that, the tour is going to on around the city on the trail of *The Great Escape* itself, highlighting the various locations that were used to complete the film.

Szczecin is actually closer to Berlin than it is to Warsaw or Krakov and it's easy enough to get around on foot, which is a relief when you're carrying cameras and equipment. Also known as Stettin, this is a location that has all manner of influences from Swedish, Prussian, German and Soviet influence. That in itself makes it an ideal

place for filming, due to the varied architecture and diverse collection of people found there. A couple of notable routes will take you around the main points of interest, one being the City Tourist Route while the other, the Golden Route, is aimed at walkers and cyclists. Trams and buses are also plentiful if you need to get around a little quicker too. The city is also dubbed Poland's 'green lung' and it's easy to see why with multiple green spaces and a waterfront that is being rapidly redeveloped to allow visitors to enjoy the best that the Oder River has to offer.

Of course, the main purpose of the visit is to get some decent footage, so we have a shortlist of locations to film over the space of

Germany and the Baltic Sea for centuries. Unfortunately, much of Szczecin was destroyed during fierce fighting in World War II, but the replica castle is impressive. If you climb to the top of the bell tower you can take in views right across the city. Another bonus with this location is that you're not battling with thousands of tourists the whole time, unlike some locations that are victims of their own success. After that stop, the rest of the afternoon is taken up trundling around the city shooting more footage before heading back to the Radisson Blu and making the most of the rather excellent spa facilities that are on offer.

Joining the team

By now everyone has met everyone else, and other travellers in our party include a couple of full-time travel filmmakers, who spend their time jetting around the world making promotional videos that cover every corner of the globe. Business appears to be good, even though the recession has meant that budgets have been cut by many of their regular clients. However, as is the case with many people discovering the lure of filmmaking on the move, you can get great results with some decent kit and without the need for large amounts of money. Often, if you get it right, the end results can rival footage produce by some of the top digital production houses.

Ex-BBC man Leslie Graham (pictured left) is the perfect example of this. He's never far from his trusty Canon and a robust-looking tripod and spends the whole time ducking and diving in an attempt to capture as much of a snapshot of the area as is possible. When we visit the bunker where part of *The Great Escape* was filmed, he seems a little bemused that I'm shooting such long clips. But, as I explain later, this is more to do with capturing what our guide is talking about as we trudge through the fascinating maze of subterranean tunnels so I can transcribe it into an interview later on. Leslie, meanwhile, has got his shooting-on-the-go routine honed down to a fine art. He keeps his clips short and sweet, then transfers his new footage over to a MacBook Pro when he gets back to the hotel each evening. He then edits and fine-tunes it all using Final Cut Pro. That said, when I see him checking out of the hotel the next day he's got a fairly hefty suitcase, along with that beefy tripod of his plus a stack of other kit, which obviously means a whole lot more fun and games at airports.

The Saturday shoot

Next morning, we leave the hotel and head for Wolin, which is home to a Slavs and Viking Centre, which appears to be the perfect place to capture some footage

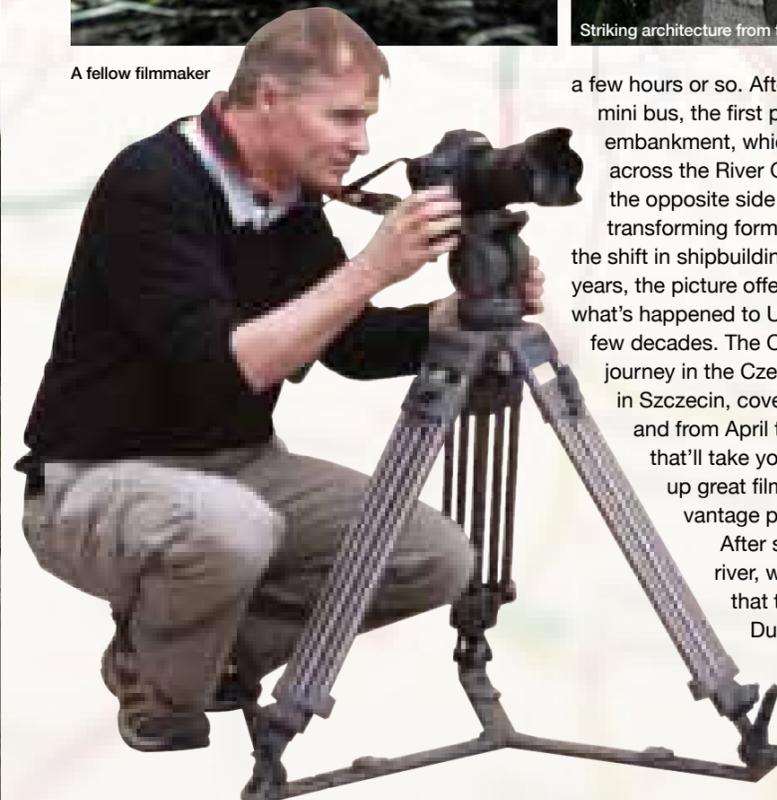


Striking architecture from the past



Pic: Marcin Bielecki

A fellow filmmaker



a few hours or so. After loading the kit into our mini bus, the first point of call is the Chobry embankment, which offers up excellent views across the River Oder. Meanwhile, over on the opposite side of the estuary lies the fast transforming former dockyard area. Due to the shift in shipbuilding to Asia in more recent years, the picture offers up a similar vision to what's happened to UK shipyards in the past few decades. The Oder River itself begins its journey in the Czech Republic and ends here in Szczecin, covering a distance of 854Km and from April to October there are boats that'll take you on a tour of river, offering up great filming options from the water vantage point.

After some filming around the river, we head up to the area that takes in the Pomeranian Dukes Castle. Pomerania was a region stretching right across Poland,

to beef up the more traditional tourist fare we've been getting so far. It turns out not to be a disappointment either because, as we pull up the muddy lane towards the centre, we're surrounded by a group of individuals all dressed in authentic costumes. Heading through the imposing wooden gates, we're taken back in time and it almost feels like we're in a movie ourselves. Wolin was once the largest and richest port in Europe, being a central hub and crossing point for the many different trade routes that spanned the globe.

Due to its geographical proximity to Scandinavia, the region is also steeped in Viking history and, today, attracts thousands of visitor's eager to sample a part of the

distant past. If you're looking for a ready-to-go location for filming this part of history then this place is ideal, as its got the lot from traditional buildings, which have been put together using ancient techniques, through to enthusiastic volunteers who spend their days toggled up in traditional clothes. The attraction is run by the Slavs and Viking Centre Association and every year is also host to a giant Slavs and Vikings Festival. This features battle re-enactments, which from the footage we saw, has a real no-holds-barred air of authenticity. When we ask if anyone gets hurt, the guide nods and simply says 'Sometimes...'

Needless to say, we find that there are plenty of filming opportunities thanks to the variety of individuals kitted out in traditional garb, carrying out their everyday duties from maintaining the armour through to producing clothes of the period. There are also people cooking different foods, from traditional breads over an open fire through to a rather large man who's roasting similarly sizeable chickens in a clay oven. Later on we huddle inside one of the darkened huts, gather round

a table, then tuck into a bit of the bird. It turns out to be cooked perfectly although it gets washed down with a rather more modern coffee instead of a goblet of something rather stronger. Maybe next time...

Next stop

Our next port of call is Świnoujście, a short drive from the Viking centre out to the coast. Although the weather isn't so great, it's still a great place to do some filming. First up, we jump off the bus at the base of the huge lighthouse there, which is sandwiched between a vast and decidedly unglamorous tarmac plant, the Baltic itself and an impressive old military location known as Gerhard Fort. We start with the lighthouse and it isn't exactly a bundle of laughs lugging cameras and a large tripod to the top of the said structure, counting 300 steps along the way. Nevertheless, the view from the top is superb, even on a less than perfect day and we shoot some footage while waving bon voyage to one of the passing ferries en route to Denmark.

Close by, it's hard to avoid the fact that

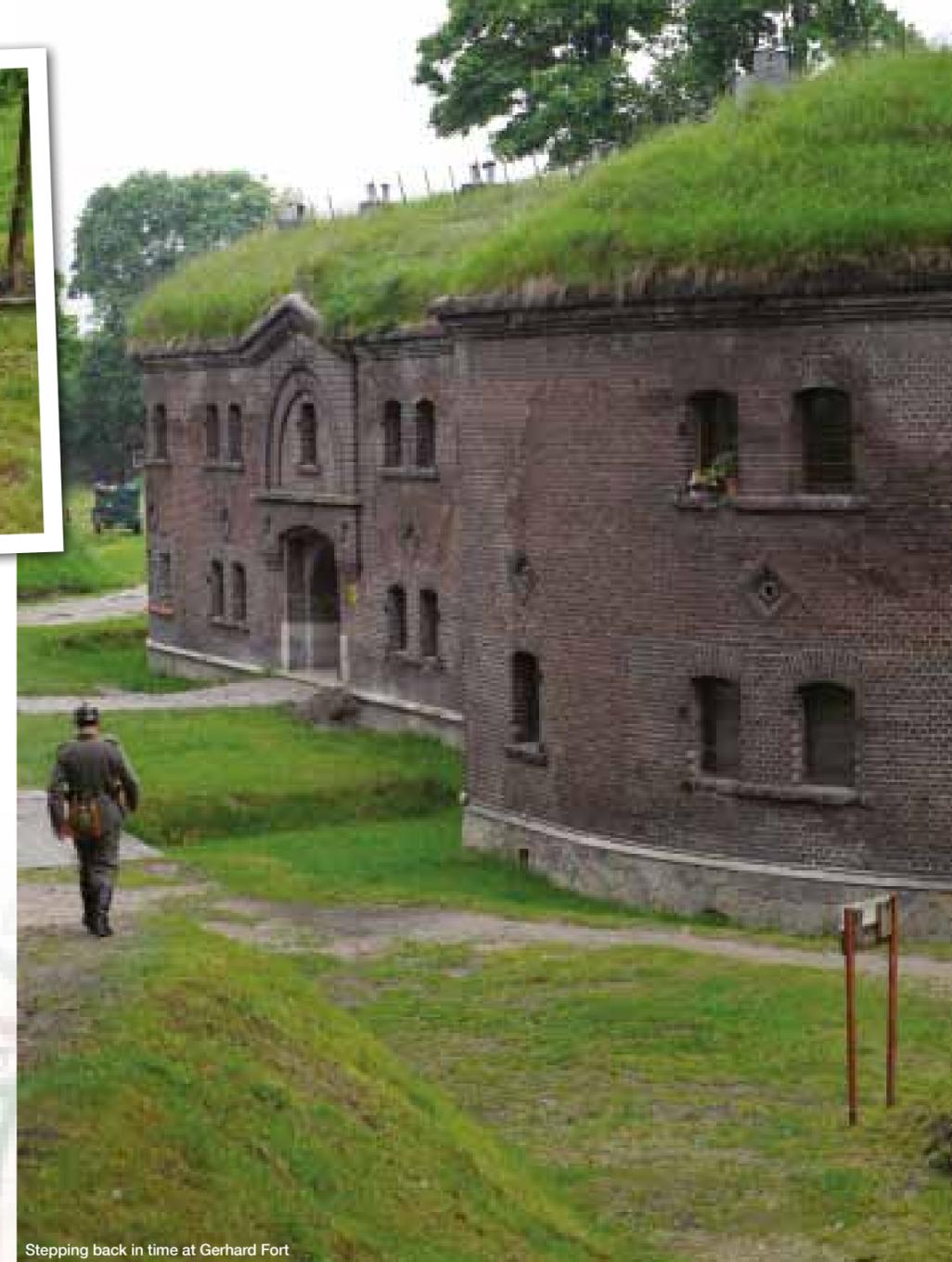


there's a massive development going on which, the guide explains, is the base for a new pipeline that will transport gas supplies from the Middle East in the near future. I'd noticed the part finished pipework for the last few kilometres and the scale of the concrete and steel engineering work that was going on was impressive to say the least. Anyone after an industrial backdrop for a short feature would find it, and that rather bleak tarmac plant, a great place to film.

Gerhard Fort, meanwhile, situated across the road in amongst the trees, is an altogether different kettle of fish, one that comes complete with tank traps, trenches and a sentry box at the entrance. We walk in through the entrance only to be met by a guide who clearly loves his job. Saying that, his authentic costume is spoiled a little by the fact that he's wearing designer glasses and sports braces. Nevertheless, it's a ten out of ten for his delivery as he takes charge of the tour by, well, shouting a lot. Of course, if you're trying to do any kind of filming then having someone like this tagging along the whole time can turn out to be intrusive. But, he proves useful in terms of information and rolls off the history of the place. Anyone into second world war stuff will find this part of Poland fascinating, although the many conflicts that have raged here down the years will take you much farther back in history than the last seventy years or so.

Going on water

According to our schedule, the next part of the itinerary takes us on a boat trip. After walking to the edge of a pretty choppy estuary, it seems the boat trip is more of a brief lift across to the other side. However, getting into a wildly bobbing rigid inflatable with a stack of valuable camera equipment is always nerve-wracking and this is no exception. Leslie advises me to cover up my camera, but I decide to stick with it and cling to the back of the drivers seat as



Stepping back in time at Gerhard Fort

we speed across the waves. It's blowing a gale, but as we get across into more sheltered water it turns to be quite enjoyable and also offers up some great views of the local scenery.

After a late lunch at a cosy little waterside



restaurant in Świnoujście, we head by mini bus to the more touristy coast and beach area, which is bustling with weekenders trying to make the most of the blustery conditions. Later on we begin our journey to the next location of Kolobrzeg, via an interesting car ferry across the water and then via road. It's a bit of a trek, but our arrival at the five star Aquarius Spa hotel more than makes up for being cooped up in a van for a while. This nearly new location is superb, with a really funky multi-coloured glass exterior and rooms that are huge compared to many similarly starred hotels in other parts of Europe. There's even a nightclub in the basement, one that Leslie attempts to film in later that evening before being bundled to one side by burly bouncers. Prior to that, we chow down



Filming in the trenches at Gerhard Fort



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE GREAT ESCAPE IN SZCZECIN

The Great Escape was one of the most important episodes of the World War Two. It was almost too daring and too ingenious to be true. But, it did happen. The Polish city of Szczecin, in those days the German town of Stettin, was of crucial importance in this context, because it was from here that two of the three who got away made their escape to Sweden. The Great Escape to the North, by Szczecin's director Andrew Fader, is a full Polish production. His aim has been to show the 'missing links' of the famous moment in history. The documentary is based on real



Pic: Marcin Bielecki

Żagań and on a boat, as seen here. The Great Escape to the North film is not just an exciting, emotional war drama; it is a fictionalised documentary. The main producer of the work was Magnolia Management Group and the co-producer was the West Pomeranian Film Fund and city of Żagań, where the legendary escape tunnel was dug. The premiere of the work is timed for release on the 70th anniversary of the Great Escape, in March 2014.



Pic: Marcin Bielecki

historical events. It's the story of two Norwegian RAF pilots who escaped through Szczecin to neutral Sweden. The subplot presents the fate of a Pole and British prisoner, two additional escapees who reached Szczecin. The film is set mostly in the city itself, but some of the scenes were shot on location - at the Museum of Allied Prisoners of War Martyrdom in



Pic: Marcin Bielecki



Pic: Marcin Bielecki

on some incredible food. So far then it's a resounding thumbs-up to Kołobrzeg.

The Sunday shoot

When daylight arrives, the spa town reveals that it sits right on the edge of the Baltic Sea and boasts mind-blowing wide sandy beaches with a tree-lined backdrop, although we had no idea we were so close to the sea on arrival the night before. To be honest it turns out to be something of a surprise and not the sort of place you'd expect to visit while in Poland. In fact, had the weather been sunnier, you could have easily been fooled into thinking you were in a beach location just about anywhere. Apparently the sandy beaches have been given a helping hand due to the constantly shifting coastline, and the addition of new groynes means that the pristine sands are now another feature that brings countless tourists into the area each year. Leslie even ambles down the beach with his camera and tripod to check the water - needless to say it's not warm...

There's been a lot of investment further back from the sea too, with the local streets that run parallel to the beach being very modern and boasting impressive new hotels. Each one appears to have its own spa features and associated supporting staff. In fact, it turns out to be an ideal place to investigate by Leslie the cameraman as he and his filming partner have been producing a documentary on medical tourism. Poland is now the place to go for many tourists, keen to get everything from dental to open-heart surgery work done, while sensibly enjoying a holiday at the same time. You can even spend your time there drinking Jantar, a bottled mineral water that's hard to find anywhere else.

I'm initially a little sceptical until we take a tour of the place and get to see first-hand what sort of treatments are undertaken here.

We head down into the basement of one hotel and see a variety of different rooms, all created specifically for different kinds of treatment. It's an excellent place to film, and the locals are very obliging with people sitting in baths of mud and being wrapped up in peat in order for us to get the footage that we're after. There's even the chance to taste some of the fruit shakes that the staff have prepared in order to show off what they offer, although you get the feeling that they'll have a suitable cleansing effect if you have too many. Nevertheless, one of the other journalists on the trip polishes off five, before heading off for what could only have been one very messy massage.

But that's why most people come to this area it seems, for treatments of one kind or another and a bit of rest and relaxation. For the people on our trip, including us, who've come to get a varied snapshot of the Polish travel and tourism industry, we've certainly seen it all. There are some incredible locations to be found in the West Pomerania area, from history and ancient cultural hotspots through to state-of-the-art modern buildings and facilities. What's more, you can get your work done here both cheaply



and efficiently. And, after you've finished filming for the day, it's also possible to sit back and relax, knowing that you're enjoying some high-end facilities for a fraction of the cost of doing it elsewhere in Europe. Even factoring in a low-cost airline flight to the area, Poland still comes in as great value for money, plus if you look in the right places, some of the food is sublime too.

Back to Blighty

Monday morning sees an early start and us retracing our steps back along the leafy highways to Goleniów airport. All in all, the trip was a great success and it was also the perfect chance to try out a fab Panasonic GH3 along the way.

Useful addresses

- The Polish National Tourist Office www.poland.travel
- Polish Spa Centre in Kołobrzeg www.spacitykolobrzeg.pl/
- Marshall's Office of West Pomerania <http://folder-en.wzp.pl/>
- Premier Inn www.premierinn.com ■

DOCUMENTARY SYNOPSIS:

On the night of the 24th of March 1944, one of the most daring prison breaks of WWII took place. Despite major problems, 76 out of 200 prisoners of war who had been supposed to escape, managed to leave one of the most secure camps in the Third Reich. The entrance to the main tunnel called 'Harry', which lead to the North, was hidden under a stove in hut number 104. The fugitives spread out over the whole German territory using forged documents and carried clothes, maps and followed prepared escape routes. One of these routes lead to the North, through Szczecin and the Baltic Sea to neutral Sweden. It was selected by two Norwegians - Lieutenant Jens Muller and Sergeant Per Bergsland. They spent two dramatic and very hectic days in Szczecin, trying to contact Swedish sailors who might help them. One of the safest places in the whole city, where ordinary Germans had no right to enter, was the French brothel.



The Szczecin route was also chosen by British serviceman Harry Day and the Pole Paul Tobolski. Their story is intriguing since, during their escape, they played the roles of a captured escapee and his German guard. In order to arrest the escapees, Nazi Germany called upon all available forces, including the army, auxiliary forces and even members of the Hitler Youth. The Great Escape to the North is the story of the two Norwegian RAF pilots who reached Szczecin. It was a desperate race against time, motivated only by their hunger for freedom.

According to British historians, the breakout from Stalag Luft III was of great importance in terms of propaganda. Although the loss was huge - 50 of the captured escapees were condemned to death - the Great Escape lifted many people's spirits; not only of fellow soldiers and civilians, but those who were fighting and imprisoned themselves.