

# Big Bollywood comedy Welcome Back to be filmed in Dubai

John Abraham, Anil Kapoor, Shruti Hassan, Paresh Rawal and more will be in Dubai this December to film Welcome Back



Image Credit: Courtesy Base Industries Group.

The Welcome Back team: Anil Kapoor, Shruti Haasan, director Anees Bazmee, producer Firoz A Nadiadwala, John Abraham, Nana Patekar and Paresh Rawal.

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By Manjusha Radhakrishnan, Senior Reporter

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tabloid! can reveal that the star-packed Welcome Back, the sequel to director Anees Bazmee's 2007 blockbuster, will be filmed in Dubai this December.

It gets better. Stars including Bollywood hunk John Abraham, newly crowned TV king Anil Kapoor, Nana Patekar, Paresh Rawal, Naseeruddin Shah, Dimple Kapadia and Shruti Haasan will spend at least 45 days in the UAE filming major portions of Welcome Back.

"We will begin our shoot on December 8 or 9. It's a great feeling to be back in Dubai with a huge crew of 100-plus people," producer Firoz A Nadiadwala said.

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Nadiadwala is no stranger to big-budget Bollywood productions, having been in the film business since 1955. His company, Base Industries Group, is known for comedies filled with big stars such as Akshay Kumar's Hera Pheri and Awara Paagal Deewana. The Mumbai-based producer has been filming in the UAE since the early 1990s.

"I have filmed around 18 or 19 films in Dubai, so many that I haven't counted. And each year, I have seen this city grow from strength to strength," he added.

In 1997, Nadiadwala production Lahu Ke Do Rang, starring Karisma Kapoor and Akshay Kumar, filmed the song Mujhe Paisa Mila in the city. It showed the two lovers shaking a leg at Deira City Centre, Jumeirah beach and behind the Crowne Plaza on Shaikh Zayed Road. Other Nadiadwala films featuring Dubai include comedy Welcome — about a mobster's sister falling in love with a guy from a crime-free family — and rom-com Deewane Huye Paagal.

But why Dubai, again?

"I consider Dubai my first home," Nadiadwala said over the phone from India, ahead of his arrival in Dubai. In my work experience spanning many years and having been to different parts of the world, there's no place such as Dubai. It's the way that it has positioned in all its aspects — be it governance, culture, infrastructure. We get the feel of Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York and Hong Kong, all in Dubai. If you want experience all the good things in the world, then just head to Dubai," he said.

Nearly 80 per cent of the film will be shot on location in the UAE. The rest is currently being shot in Mumbai.

"In the movie, we are telling the viewers that the place that you are watching is Dubai and it is woven into the screenplay. There's a lot of peace in this city. In my experience, the actors are at their best when they are happy. And since Dubai has some of the best hotels and amenities, the actors are so relaxed, which helps in the creative process," said Nadiadwala.

Bollywood filmmakers have often made the most of Dubai's easy filming but few have actually used the city as a film location. For instance, several portions of Salman Khan's Main Aur Mrs Khanna were filmed in this city, but the movie claimed it was Australia.

But in Welcome Back, the film is set in Dubai, and plans are being made to showcase the city in all its glory. Iconic locations such as the Burj Khalifa and plush hotels including the Burj Al Arab, Meydan and Jumeirah Zabeel Saray will be featured in Welcome Back, says the producer, marking Kapoor's second time filming at the Zabeel Saray. In 2011, he filmed a party scene for the Hollywood spy series Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol at the opulent Palm hotel.

"We will be showing Dubai in a way it has never been shown before. We are getting a special technical team to shoot these scenes in a particular manner. These locations have got so much to offer and we are attempting to do something different, keeping in mind their special features."

"Dubai has always had a very close relationship with the Indian film industry, and it is continuing to grow stronger," said Jamal Al Sharif, chairman of the Dubai Film and TV Commission. "In the past, Indian filmmakers would travel to Dubai to shoot just a scene or dance-number, but recently we have seen an increase in the number of films that are actually set in Dubai."

Welcome Back has retained much of its original cast, including Anil Kapoor and Nana Patekar, but the main lead has changed from Akshay Kumar to hunk John Abraham.

"There is no script similarity between Welcome and its sequel. Director Anees Bazmee has written the screenplay and my brief to him was simple: make it a bigger and a better family entertainer. John is playing a different character altogether, it's not a continuation of the old story," said Nadiadwala.

The music for the sequel is by Bollywood veteran Anu Malik.

"The music will complement the screenplay and I know that his songs will be the big hits of 2014," said Nadiadwala.

No expense will be spared, either, with Dh1,767,675 spent on one song alone — Abraham's introductory song, said to be the most expensive Bollywood song ever, filmed in Mumbai in October.

Like all Nadiadwala productions, the budget is massive.

"The budget is in the vicinity of \$22-\$25 million [Dh80-91 million]. The scale is big but what we worry about is the product. The product will dictate the revenue and its overall success. We are producers who work from the root to the fruit."

Reports also claim that talks are being held with legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan to play the role of don in Welcome Back. The original had the late actor Feroz Khan play dreaded gangster Ranvir Dhanraj, aka RDX.

"It's not easy to make films that have multiple stars. But when you have the support of actors, then anything is possible. For instance, when we sent an email to Anil about Welcome Back, he was so helpful."

The actors aren't the only ones to extend their co-operation. Nadiadwala credits Dubai Film & TV Commission, the local body which authorises production permits for TV, film and commercials, for facilitating their smooth shoot.

"Jamal Al Sharif and his team have been extremely helpful. All that makes it so easy for us filmmakers to shoot in Dubai."

"We're very happy to be hosting the Welcome team in Dubai once again," Al Sharif.

"It confirms the Emirate's position as a desirable filmmaking destination and its escalating popularity amongst international filmmakers."

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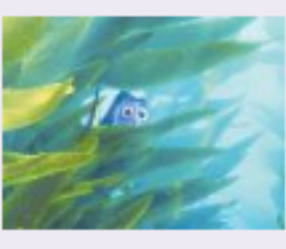
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