

ARTS & LIFESTYLE

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Inside: Festival with a wild side



Filming a scene in Jerusalem for the short film *Secular Oasis*.

Filmmaking dreams in Jerusalem

Budding filmmakers from around the world come to Jerusalem to attend an annual movie-making workshop. This year's group included an Australian student for the first time. **Danny Gocs** reports.

EVERY year budding filmmakers from around the world spend more than a month in Jerusalem working with Israeli film industry mentors to produce short documentary films.

The program, known as the Jerusalem Film Workshop, has been running since 2014, and for the first time an Australian was one of the participants – former Bialik College student Gideon Aroni, 19, who is studying film and television at Swinburne University.

Aroni and the 23 other participants had the thrill of seeing their work pre-

miere at the Jerusalem Film Festival, which ran from July 25 to August 4.

“We had special passes to the festival and on the day all the short films were screened, it was a fantastic atmosphere,” said Aroni.

Aroni was the youngest of this year's Jerusalem Film Workshop participants, aged 19-27, who came from as far afield as the United States, Europe and Asia.

Many had already finished their tertiary studies, but all were interested in making films.

The participants were housed in Jerusalem's Katamonim neighbourhood for five weeks in shared apartments. They were divided into six teams of four with a director, producer, cinematographer and editor under the guidance of Israeli mentors.

“As I had some editing experience, I took charge of the film editing on the documentary, which had to be under 10 minutes,” said Aroni.

Filming by all the teams was concentrated in Ein Karen, a suburb of Jerusalem.

“Our film was set in a secular yeshiva for Israelis living in Jerusalem. At the start we spent a lot of time in workshops discussing the direction of the film,” he said.

“It was all down to us – they gave us the subject but we had to create the film.



Gideon Aroni (third from right) with some of the participants of this year's Jerusalem Film Workshop.



Melbourne student Gideon Aroni.

We also worked with mentors from the Israeli film industry to get everything ready before filming.

“We shot the whole film in three days. Filming required a lot of planning and was done under the hot sun. Then we had editing computers brought into our apartments and ended up working round the clock for a couple of days.

“The process was quite arduous, but it was a great experience and we were working with professional equipment and people. We were proud of our film, *Secular Oasis*, which ran for eight minutes and 30 seconds.

“We learned a lot about working as a team.”

One of the mentors for *Secular Oasis* was Israeli director Tamir Elterman, whose 2017 film *Mubi* won best directorial debut at the DocAviv documentary film festival held annually in Tel Aviv.

Each weekend the participants had free time to explore Jerusalem and other parts of Israel.

Aroni is in his first year of a three-year course at Swinburne University with an optional honours year.

“I have done acting and filmmaking



Jerusalem Film Workshop founder Gal Greenspan.

in the past, but now I am more passionate about working behind the camera,” he said.

“With some film courses you have to pick your speciality, but at Swinburne it starts as a holistic course and lets you focus on particular areas later on.”

Four years ago, while Aroni was a student at Bialik College, he was a regular reviewer of video games for Jewish radio station J-Air.

“Now I’m more into film, but am still passionate about video games.”

The Jerusalem Film Workshop was the brainchild of Israeli producer Gal Greenspan, who divides his time between Melbourne and Tel Aviv making documentaries and co-productions through his company, Green Productions.

“Participants come from all over the world to live in Jerusalem and tell their stories through film, while meeting other filmmakers and working with them, with help from their Israeli mentors,” he explained.

“This collaboration can make amazing relationships for them as well as great films.

“I was at this year’s Cannes Film Festival and met some former participants who were presenting their latest projects.”

Greenspan said the Jerusalem Film Workshop collaborated with Jewish film festivals around the world to get the work of the students screened.

“The Jerusalem Film Festival is a great festival and a wonderful platform for the students to meet industry professionals from around the world as well as giving their films a premiere screening.”

He said the Israeli film industry remains vibrant.

“There are great films being made in Israel and many of them attract international attention.”