

Ad campaign celebrates Central American airline's 75th anniversary

When Taca Airlines set out to celebrate its 75th anniversary, management decided to honor the people and the destinations that the company serves throughout North, South and Central America. It was the company's biggest ad campaign ever.

The job was given to cinematographer Jose Luis Ocejo, a native of Mexico, who now lives and works as an independent filmmaker near Miami, Florida. He and a two-person crew visited 13 countries over two months. They documented tourist destinations throughout the Western hemisphere, and filmed Taca employees sharing humorous observations in the Spanish language.

"The campaign showcases the real people that work for the airline," Ocejo says. "The goal was to show that Taca unites the three Americas."

Ocejo and a crew would visit one of Taca's destination cities and film the most iconic tourist destinations in the area. Footage from each destination included an employee in the foreground of one location, talking about how a word or phrase in Spanish in that country might mean something else throughout the rest of the Americas.

Most of the images were recorded in Super 16 format on KODAK VISION2 200T 7217 film. He used an ARRI SR camera mounted with a Zeiss 11-110 zoom lens.

"We carried very little lighting equipment, and I didn't know from one city to the next if I was going to have sun or rain or something in between," he says. "I chose 7217 because I love the colors, the range and flexibility it gives you."

He pulled deep stops, typically between T8 and T11. When possible Ocejo used a polarizing filter to deepen the colors.

"We needed a deep stop in order to get depth of field from the foreground clear to the background," he explains. "Everything had to be sharp. We used flexible reflectors to bounce fill light wherever it was needed in the foreground and background and on the faces of the talent. There was no other artificial light. We just wanted to keep each scene within a reasonable contrast range."

Ocejo also shot time-lapse sequences at each destination. During daylight hours, he used a 35mm ARRI 2-C camera and a Norris intervalometer. In Argentina, they shot the widest boulevard in the world, capturing the flow of traffic driving up and down the street. In other locations, they shot sunsets, a cathedral or an iconic landmark.

"The time-lapse sequences were part of the original plan for the campaign," he says. "The idea was to take a recognizable landmark and make our footage distinctive and more visually interesting."

The 35mm time-lapse shots were recorded on KODAK VISION2 100T 5212 film in order to capture the most pristine images possible. Ocejo chose Super 16 format for night time-lapse sequences, primarily using KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film.

"We never considered shooting on anything but film," Ocejo says. "Video wouldn't have given us the range we needed, and it would have been impossible to do time-lapse shots."

Film also gave the airline the flexibility it needed to finish spots in both 4:3 standard video and 16:9 HD formats. "High-definition isn't really a factor in South America yet," Ocejo explains. While he framed for 16:9, the spots were edited in traditional 4:3 television format. The footage can be re-purposed in the future for HD screens.

The negative was processed at Continental Film Lab in Miami, and scanned on a Spirit DataCine to create the digital master files. Editing was done in El Salvador by Imagen TV, where Taca, as well as the ad agency, Publicidad la Comercial are based. HMC Films, Inc. in Miami, provided the film, as well as handled all the logistics and post-production supervision that went into coordinating the processing and transfer time. HMC also supervised the film transfer and conceptual look of the spots.

Most of the commercials are 60 seconds. The spots have begun airing in Taca destination cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and Miami. All the live-action employee footage was shot with Spanish language audio.

Below: Cinematographer, Jose Luis Ocejo, in Santiago, Chile.





Above left: Cinematographer, Jose Luis Ocejo, filming in Key West, Florida and setting up to shoot in Bogota, Colombia (right).

About the Cinematographer

Ocejo began his career as a still photographer in Mexico. He transitioned to film production as an assistant cameraman, and then stepped up to director of photography and transitioned to directing. Many of his assignments took him to the United States, so he decided to move to the Miami area 15 years ago.

"There are more opportunities to work here and still have connections in South and Central America," he says. He studied at Miami Dade Community College, while continuing to handle professional assignments. Today, about half his work is for U.S. clients, and the other half is for Central and South American clients.

Among working cinematographers, he most admires Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC, another native of Mexico. "He has a very natural approach to lighting that produces very true images," Ocejo says, "and he's been a kind of inspiration in another way. His career illustrates you can do so much, no matter where you come from." ■