

For actor, filming in Korea like family trip

By Jac-Ha Kim
Tribune Content Agency

When “Cobra Kai” actor Alicia Hannah-Kim was asked to help secure a team of western actors to appear in the K-drama “Tempest,” she went to work to assemble a cast that includes well-known stars like John Cho, Spencer Garrett, Michael Gaston, Brooke Smith, Christopher Gorham and Jacob Bertrand.

“I think a lot of people think that K-dramas are all romantic love stories, but there are a lot of different genres,” Kim said in a recent interview from Los Angeles. “‘Tempest’ is an international spy thriller. It’s a very sexy show with a lot of different elements.”

Originally joining as a producer, Kim also has a role in the series that streams on Hulu in the U.S.

This interview with Kim has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What was it like when you returned to Korea as a producer?

A: When I arrived at Incheon International Airport, I was feeling like, “OK, this is not the U.S. This is not England.” Korea is very distinct. For me, it’s fascinating to see that I blend in.

Q: You were in the majority instead of the minority.

A: It’s very healing to me to go to Korea and feel like everyone is my family member. Because obviously, in Australia, I grew up predominantly with white people there. I don’t think I thought about it that deeply as a child. I felt othered, but at the same time, my parents were so



Alicia Hannah-Kim said working in Korea on the “Tempest” was a dream come true. **TIMOTHY FERNANDEZ**

fluent in English that I felt like I fit in.

Q: What was it like working in Korea with the western actors that you had a big part in getting cast in this K-drama?

A: It felt like a family trip. We all stayed in the same hotel, the Lotte Hotel. This was in August one year ago.

Q: Was everything filmed on location then?

A: We were sort of all around Seoul. We also filmed in Hannam-dong and on location in the Lotte Hotel. We filmed in a studio in Paju. The studios there are so modern and clean. Paju is great. It’s not that far from Seoul, and it has this wonderful sort of countryside. So it was great that the cast got to experience going out of Seoul to see a little bit more of Korea.

Q: When you weren’t working, what were some of the things that you did?

A: Brooke Smith and Romy Rosemont wanted to go to a jjimjilbang (traditional Korean spa). Jacob Bertrand wanted to meet his favorite Korean actor, Hwang Jung-min, so we were able to facilitate that. He went and watched a performance of “Macbeth,” (which starred Hwang at the National Theater of Korea) in Korean. I really have to applaud him for doing that.

Q: Did you find it gratifying that you helped the

“Tempest” cast and crew communicate?

A: Yes, but it wasn’t just me. Translation and interpreting is a huge issue for international productions. For us, we had a team of translators that were available to us and many members of local staff. Oddly, we had a lot of people who were trilingual and spoke French, English and Korean, which was interesting.

Q: Some of the series is set in the U.S. Was any of it shot here?

A: The U.S. parts are interior, so it was all filmed on set. That’s the wild thing. Our cast traveled all the way to Seoul and we all got into these minivans and then went to sets that were like “The West Wing.” (Laughs) The production value is chef’s kiss. Kudos to the production. They worked really hard.

Q: In real life, you don’t look like the character you portrayed in “Cobra Kai.” When’s the last time someone recognized you as Sensei Kim Da-eun?

A: I went to see V (from the pop group BTS) throw out the first pitch at Dodger Stadium (in August). I was standing there and I heard some people yell out, “Sensei!” I turned around and said, “Yes, is there anything you need?” (Laughs) They were so nice and we had fun.

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