

# THE BEST PLACES TO LIVE AND WORK as a **Moviemaker** **2024**

*Here's to a better year for everyone on this list*

**BY TIM MOLLOY, DEIRDRE MCCARRICK & MARGEUX SIPPELL**

**T**his list isn't about obvious choices. It's about helping you make the best decisions — for you — about where to live and work as a moviemaker.

Generally speaking, the best and most obvious places for filmmakers to live and work are Los Angeles and New York City. This is so obvious that years ago, we moved them to our Best Places Hall of Fame. We don't feel like we even need to tell you how terrific they are in terms of their huge film and TV industry presence, endless networking opportunities, and full-hearted embrace of cinematic culture.

We love them both. But can we make a suggestion?

Maybe don't move to New York City or L.A. — at least not at the start of your career. And if you find yourself stagnating in either city, consider moving elsewhere — and not necessarily to the *other* city. We suggest another path.

Find a livable, affordable community with enough film, TV or commercial jobs to pay the bills — and with the lowest possible cost of living, the shortest possible commute, and the least general stress. Not so you can take it easy, but so you can focus your energy on making your own projects.

To that end, make sure your new home has a thriving film scene, in terms of festivals and tax incentives and truly indie, DIY filmmaking. Make friends. Make things. Do favors. Collect favors. Help shoot a friend's

short film one weekend so that they'll help shoot yours next month.

Expand your network as widely as you can. If you move to El Paso, Texas — which is joining our list of Big Cities for the first time — take advantage of all the resources not only in El Paso, but an hour away in Las Cruces, New Mexico — which is returning to our list of Smaller Cities and Towns. If you live in Philadelphia — a constant presence on our list of Big Cities — recruit actors and other collaborators from New York City, or take the 70-minute Amtrak there as often as you can to work on big productions. (The quiet car is a great place for a nap.)

It's easy in New York and L.A. to get trapped in a cycle of doing industry-adjacent jobs that won't lead to your dream projects, or that leave you too exhausted to make your own films as you endure a long commute and testy roommates. In a place like Albuquerque or Cleveland or Pittsburgh or Dallas, a good job will help you earn enough, in a few years, to buy a house for what you would pay for a one-bedroom in New York or Los Angeles. Imagine the benefits of shooting movies in your own backyard, with a team of reliable friends.

When you've made your breakthrough — when agents and managers and studio executives and fellow filmmakers start demanding regular face-to-face meetings — maybe *that's* when it's time to move to New York or Los Angeles. And once you've

conquered the film world completely, you can keep a place in one or both of those Hall of Fame cities and spend the rest of your time wherever you like.

All of which is a long way of welcoming you to our annual list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker.

Last year, like the pandemic years, was a time to reset, as much of the industry shut down so striking writers and actors could get the respect and money they deserve for their work. We suspect 2024 will be a better year for the industry as a whole, and every community on our list, since almost no one working in the film or TV industry had a great 2023.

We compile this list through questionnaires to film commissions, talks with moviemakers, and research into financial incentives, cost of living, and overall happiness — as well as with in-person visits, whenever possible. We hope you'll discover some new places that sound great for living life and making movies. None of the places below offer a perfect mix of flawless weather, short commutes, low costs and endless job opportunities, because no such places exist. But we've tried to give you an overview of each locale, so you can find ones that come closest to your ideal home.

Finally, a region's financial incentives often vary, usually depending on how much money you spend and how you spend it. So while we've tried to give a general overview for the cities below, we urge you to consult an accountant before going somewhere for the tax breaks.

Happy hunting.





# BIG CITIES

## 25. EL PASO, TEXAS (TIE)

El Paso is a perfect example of a welcoming city where you can afford to make your own films with like-minded collaborators. Located along the U.S.-Mexican border, across from Ciudad Juarez, this thriving West Texas metropolis is joining our list for the first time thanks to a fast-growing community with an emphasis on experimentation. “What I see here is common to what happened in Austin back in the late ’80s, early ’90s,” Troublemaker Studios co-founder Elizabeth Avellán, producer of the *Sin City* and *Spy Kids* franchises, said at the El Paso Film Festival in September. “You’re investing in yourselves and you’re investing in each other. This community has that

of productions.” Additionally, El Paso’s cost of living is well below the national average, and so are filmmaking costs. You can choose from a wide range of production facilities like Cheeky Monkey Post and Rio Bravo Post. The quality of life adds up, too: El Paso is safer than the national average, the architecture is striking, the natural beauty all around is inspiring, and the cross-cultural pollination is intoxicating. You will not find better Mexican food in the United States. Local DIY filmmakers include *Old Man* director Lucky McKee, who recently helmed an episode of Rian Johnson’s *Poker Face*, and Charles Horak, who runs a spectacular converted warehouse/soundstage called the Rio Bravo Outpost that also provides working space to talents like Carlos F. Corral, artistic director of the El Paso Film Festival and founder of

### Notable Film Festival:

#### El Paso Film Festival

The festival goes hard for Texas filmmakers, including locals like Ralph Gonzalez, whose low-budget, impressive sci-fi short “Novas” was a standout, and Zach Passero, who spent nearly a decade making his wild ’80s throwback animated horror comedy *The Weird Kidz*, which won him the director’s award. Many events are held at the immaculate and spacious Hotel Paso Del Norte, a 112-year-old building on the National Register of Historic Places. The festival is also where we first saw Katherine Propper’s hip-hop road movie *Lost Soulz*, featuring El Paso rapper-actor Krystall Poppin. You can read Propper’s piece about the making of the film on page 42.



## 25. DALLAS, TEXAS (TIE)

Full of shiny skyscrapers and even shinier stars at night, Dallas is another tremendous place for filmmakers who want to get to work right away. With its affordable cost of living and bustling independent film community, the city greets new filmmakers with open arms. Eager to welcome productions into the city, the Office of Special Events makes it very easy to get film permits. And there’s no shortage of intriguing places to shoot — local nature includes White Rock Lake, Fair Park, and the Trinity River Corridor. If you’re in need of a more urban setting, try Klyde Warren Park or the Dallas Arts District. On top of the previously mentioned Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program rebate of up to 22.5%, Dallas offers an additional incentive: if your crew will be staying in Dallas for more than 15 nights, you could qualify for up to 10% off your stay at participating hotels. Notable productions that often shoot in the region include *The Chosen* drama series and reality shows like *House Hunters* and *Love After Lockup*. Nearby film programs at the University of North Texas and Southern Methodist University infuse the city with bright-eyed young filmmakers — and best of all, the people of Dallas have embraced the

ability, and it’s already doing it, and the people are wonderful.” The financials help — the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program offers a rebate of up to 22.5%. According to the state, it is a “cash grant based on a percentage of a project’s eligible Texas expenditures, including eligible wages paid to Texas residents,” and the amount varies by “budget levels and types

MindWarp Films, a collective of filmmakers that has worked with companies from Apple to Netflix. And as we noted in our introduction, the city shares a close kinship with nearby Las Cruces, New Mexico. If you can’t find any interesting stories to tell in the largest cross-border metro area in the U.S. and Mexico, maybe you shouldn’t be making movies.

COURTESY OF VISIT EL PASO



film industry and imbued the filmmaking community with a sense of camaraderie and excitement.

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Dallas International Film Festival

The Dallas International Film Festival does an admirable job of showcasing must-see films like this year's Best Documentary Feature Grand Jury Prize winner *Bad Press*, directed by Rebecca Landsberry-Baker and Joe Peeler, and Best Narrative Feature winner *Story Ave*, directed by Aristotle Torres. Over the past 17 years of the festival, it's contributed more than \$1 million in prizes, and continues to host education events, screenings, and panels year-round.

## 24. SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Adding to the state rebate of up to 22.5%, the Supplemental San Antonio Film Incentive Program offers a 7.5% rebate, for a total incentive of up to 30%. That adds to the allure of a film-loving city with about 15 movie theaters, at least a dozen festivals, and at least half a dozen film societies. Film groups and unions also have a strong presence. Notable equipment rental houses include Indie Grip & Lighting, Cinemills TX and Bauhaus Media Group, and local production facilities include Alamo City Studios, Quarter Moon Productions and Geomedia, as well as the city of San Antonio's SA-CAN Studios, co-located in the San Antonio Film Commission's office building. Coming soon is Hill Country Studios, a sprawling \$267 million movie studio in San Marcos, 45 minutes from downtown San Antonio. But enough hard numbers, let's talk livability: San Antonio has a lower cost of living than the U.S. average, rolling Hill Country landscapes, dude ranches and farmland just outside of a thriving downtown, and 300 years of architecture, from Spanish colonial missions to dance halls to sleek new buildings to industrial warehouses. There are no film permit fees for more than 250 city-owned properties, including the colorful River Walk, Historic Market Square and La Villita Historic Arts Village. And the city's Apply4 online film permit application simplifies things. The San Antonio Film Commission staff is hands-on and efficient for whatever moviemakers need, and the long list of local productions includes the documentaries *The Quilt* and *The Beat of a Nation: Kerouac's Road*, as well as the PBS series *American Historia* with John Leguizamo, and a slew of reality shows.

#### Notable Film Festivals:

##### CineFestival and San Antonio Film Festival

CineFestival, the long-running Latino film festival, celebrated its 44th edition this past summer at the historic Guadalupe Theater. Presented by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, it emphasized Texas cinema, with bountiful free screenings.

The San Antonio Film Festival, meanwhile, celebrates its 30th edition this year. Its latest edition, based at the majestic Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, gave out awards aplenty with a strong emphasis on encouragement, positivity, and helping people break into the industry.

a Janet Jackson Lifetime documentary and the Burghart Brothers' independent feature *Headcount*. The regional arts council ArtsKC also supports filmmakers with two \$10,000 production grants for short narrative films and a \$1,000 screenwriting award. And there are no permits required to film here. One extremely cool neighborhood that should be on your radar is West Bottoms, characterized by its historic brick buildings, vintage stores, jazz bars, bistros, and cafes. And in the fall, the neighborhood is known for attracting visitors in search of haunted houses. KC also offers a terrific free public transit system.



## 23. KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Kansas City's breathtaking lakes, caves, natural tunnels and funky city culture are obvious draws for filmmakers, and after years of effort by state representatives and the Kansas City Film Office, Missouri recently introduced a state tax incentive for film and TV productions. The "Show Mo Act" offers \$16 million in annual transferable tax credits, split between film and episodic projects. Productions are eligible for a 20-42% tax credit based on how much they spend in the state. And Kansas City offers up to a 10% cash rebate. The film office recently moved under the Office of the Mayor in an effort to streamline and enhance services to visiting film productions and local filmmakers. Recent productions include

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Kansas City FilmFest International

Celebrating its 28th anniversary in 2024, the Kansas City FilmFest International has awarded over \$260,000 in cash and prizes throughout its history. It's a great place to catch daring independent features, like Mike Cheslik's *Hundreds of Beavers*, which won Best Narrative Feature in 2023.

## 22. HONOLULU, HAWAII

Honolulu's distance from the mainland will be enticing to some filmmakers and feel isolating to others. When you move to a state five hours from the rest of the United States, you're putting all your eggs in one basket. But what a basket. Hawaii has a thriving film and TV industry — it brought in nearly \$400 million in 2022 — and is



# Best Places To Live and Work



known for experienced crews accustomed to handling network shows, blockbuster films, and smaller productions at the same time. Recent productions include Apple TV+'s *Chief of War*, CBS's *NCIS: Hawaii*, Disney's live action *Lilo + Stitch*, and Hallmark's *Aloha Heart*. Kualoa Ranch, a mere half hour from Honolulu, is the home of sets used for *Lost*, *Hawaii Five-O*, and multiple *Jurassic Park* films. Oahu has locations as varied as jungles, beaches, hiking trails, and downtown Honolulu, which resembles the more upscale parts of L.A. with its skyscrapers and luxury stores. The Hawaii Production Tax Credit is 22% on Oahu and covers all labor — resident, non-resident, above the line and below the line, as well as goods and services. Of course, Hawaii's separation from the mainland and intoxicating beauty result in a much higher cost of living than in most of the United States. So it may not be an ideal place to make your own indie movies, unless you can also find steady paying gigs. But if you can — welcome to paradise. You'll be surrounded by some of the most awe-inspiring locations on the planet. We're thrilled to welcome Honolulu to this list.

## Notable Film Festival:

### Hawai'i International Film Festival

HIFF recently celebrated its 43rd year of highlighting cinematic accomplishment in the Asia-Pacific region. It is focused on discovering new talent from Hawaii's growing indie scene and internationally, and on encouraging cultural exchange through film. The festival notes that its program is about "more than just watching movies" — it recognizes the value of cinema as a starting point for greater curiosity and understanding.

## 21. MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Memphis is not only home to a rich cultural history, but to a thriving community of independent filmmakers and a robust crew base. The entire third season of the NBC primetime series *Young Rock*, about Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, was shot in Memphis, which also hosts many other series from networks like Food Network, HGTV and MTV. A gloriously diverse city known for the exquisite music of Beale Street — and

musical landmarks that includes Graceland, Sun Records, and Stax Records — it also boasts two very compelling tax incentives: a 25% cash rebate for in-state spending, and a 40% payroll tax credit and state sales tax exemption for out-of-state residents, or 50% for parent companies headquartered in-state. You can even get to work on building your own Graceland, given the affordable housing and low cost of living.

## Notable Film Festival:

### IndieMemphis

IndieMemphis admirably and tirelessly supports local filmmakers with programs like the Black Creators Forum, a three-day symposium filled with speakers and workshops. Artistic director Miriam Bale tells *MovieMaker* the festival has a "no duds"

 **Film & Television**  
COLLEGE OF ARTS & MEDIA  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER

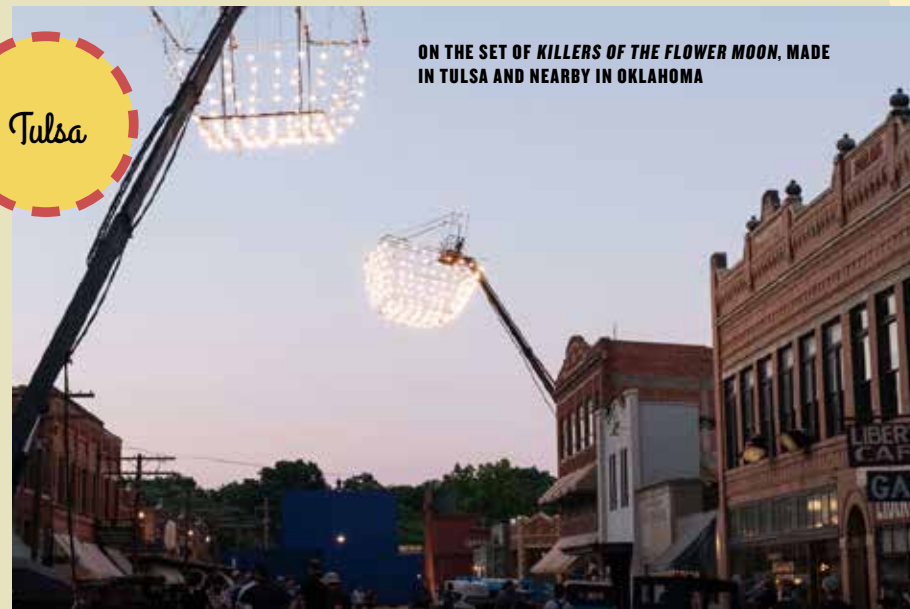
**LET YOUR  
PASSION  
DRIVE YOUR  
PROFESSION**

University of Colorado Denver

**CALL FOR ENTRIES**

Submissions are now open for the  
22nd Annual Tallgrass Film  
Festival taking place October 24-27  
2024 in Wichita, KS!  
Submit on FilmFreeway  
Final deadline is July 15.

  
**TALLGRASS**  
FILM FESTIVAL  
tallgrassfilm.org



ON THE SET OF *KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON*, MADE IN TULSA AND NEARBY IN OKLAHOMA

Tulsa

policy: “I want to have a festival where there are no duds, there’s just absolutely no duds. And that doesn’t mean that you’re going to love everything — some of these films are going to push you a little bit out of your comfort zone... they’re all really solid films that will stay with you.” Recent highlights included last year’s opening night film, Raven Jackson’s *All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt*, and Augusta Palmer’s documentary *The Blues Society*, about the Memphis Country Blues Festival.

## 20. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston is one of America’s most cinematic towns — from its five centuries of architecture to the 80-mile Charles River to the simple delights of fall leaves and immaculate snow. But one of the best things about Boston is its close proximity to so many other gorgeous locations, from dense woods to mountains to the beaches of Cape Cod. It’s known for professional, very experienced crews, a thriving documentary scene anchored by PBS’s *Frontline* and *American Experience*, and great financial incentives — including a 25% production credit, 25% payroll credit and a sales tax-exemption. Recent major local productions include Luca Guadagnini’s *Challengers*, starring Zendaya, and *The Instigators*, a heist thriller from Artists Equity, the production company founded by local boys Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. Boston is also on majestic, snowy display in Alexander Payne’s latest, *The Holdovers*. One of its greatest assets is the Massachusetts Production Coalition, which advocates

passionately for the local film industry and helps filmmakers at every level get their projects made in the Bay State. The state’s film scene is also supported by the Provincetown International Film Festival, held about two hours from Boston. It’s one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Roxbury International Film Festival and Boston Underground Film Festival

The Roxbury International Film Festival just celebrated its 25th anniversary, and is dedicated to celebrating filmmakers of color from around the world. It closed with a special screening of *Eve’s Bayou* featuring its writer-director, Kasi Lemmons, highlighted films from around the world, and featured a packed schedule of events including daily script reads.

The Boston Underground Film Festival, held at the cozy single-screen Brattle Theatre in Harvard Square, highlights the best of genre filmmaking. One highlight of last year’s edition was a screening of director Jeffrey A. Brown’s Cape Cod-set *The Unheard* that included a Q&A with him and screenwriter brothers Michael and Shawn Rasmussen.

## 19. TULSA, OKLAHOMA

The eyes of the film world were cast on Oklahoma with the release of Martin Scorsese’s *Killers of the Flower Moon*, shot largely in Osage County about an hour from Tulsa. Some of the casting of the film took place

in Tulsa, the biggest city near the massive production. Oklahoma’s second-biggest city is getting very used to the spotlight, thanks not only to Scorsese but to films like 2021’s excellent *Minari* and TV productions like the Sylvester Stallone drama *Tulsa King* and the recently wrapped *Reservation Dogs*, from Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi. Tulsa boasts experienced crews, an easy permitting process, and locations that range from a vacant prison to a vacant hospital wing to the longest contiguous section of Route 66 to the auditory wonder known as the Center of the Universe. Just 15 minutes from Tulsa International Airport is the Cherokee Film Studios complex, home to a massive LED volume wall. *Land of Gold* director Nardeep Khurmi recently wrote a piece for *MovieMaker* about how the wall enabled him to stage a cross-country drive, mostly within the studio. The Tulsa area is thriving in part thanks to the Filmed in Oklahoma Act, which offers a rebate of 20-30%, depending on which uplift opportunities a project qualifies for. Additionally, the cost of living in Tulsa is below the U.S. average.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Circle Cinema Film Festival

The festival celebrates the best of Oklahoma filmmaking and cinema from around the globe, featuring free kids films, an emphasis on local projects with Indigenous cast and crew, documentaries and discussions. It’s based at the nonprofit Circle Cinema, which was built in 1928 on the original Route 66 alignment and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. It also includes an art gallery and lobby that’s perfect for neon-lit parties.

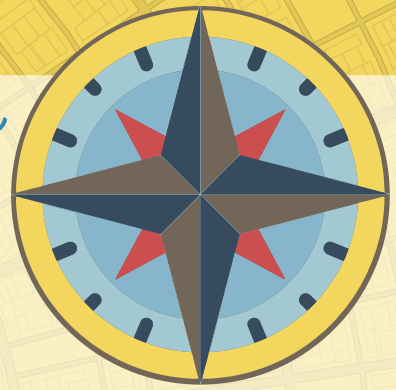
## 18. CLEVELAND, OHIO

Cleveland and the area around it have produced the Russo brothers, Jim Jarmusch, and LeBron James, the rising star of filmmaking behind the SpringHill Company. It has a very experienced, deep crew base that can handle multiple major productions at a time, and entices them with Ohio’s 30% refundable tax credit based on \$300,000 minimum spend. You’ll also find plenty of equipment rental houses, including Cleveland Camera Rental and Midwest Grip & Lighting. Cleveland’s cultural offerings include the Cleveland Institute of Art, Kent State University, and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, on the shores of Lake Erie. The city’s cost of living is well below average — housing costs are remarkably

PHOTO BY MELINDA SUE GORDON/COURTESY OF APPLE



## Best Places To Live and Work



affordable. The city is also a mere two hours away from Pittsburgh, which appears soon on this list. The wide range of projects shot in Cleveland include the feature film *Lost and Found in Cleveland*, Netflix's *Unsolved Mysteries*, and Netflix's *Baby Gorilla Cam*, a livestream from the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo that we just learned about while writing this and need to go watch immediately — be right back.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Cleveland International Film Festival and Chagrin Documentary Film Festival

The Cleveland International Film Festival is one of the handful of film festivals in the world that is one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee and one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals. It's known for bold, energetic, crowd-pleasing programming, for inclusivity — including programs focused on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ filmmakers — and for education. It also offers massive prize packages.

The Chagrin Documentary Film Festival, meanwhile, basks in the small-town charm of Chagrin Falls, known for the scenic falls in the town's center. It recognizes great documentaries in honor of David Ponce, a young filmmaker who died of leukemia in 2006, but whose spirit and legacy live on in his community's annual embrace of storytelling and its capacity for increasing our understanding of the world.

## 17. CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

A new addition to our list, the fast-growing Charlotte film community supports a wide range of productions, but has lately been a hotspot for comedies, including *Please Don't Destroy: The Treasure of Foggy Mountain*, *Mother Couch* with F. Murray Abraham, and *Operation Taco Gary's*, starring Brenda Song, Dustin Milligan and Simon Rex. The benefits of shooting in North Carolina include a 25% return on goods, services, and labor through the NC Film and Entertainment Grant, and there's no charge to shoot on state-owned property. You'll find

very diverse landscapes, from the bustling downtown to foothills and flatlands to a wide array of rivers and lakes including Lake Norman and Lake Wylie, with over 1,595 miles of shoreline. And the U.S. National Whitewater Center is home to the world's largest man-made recirculating whitewater river, the only one of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. The Queen City also counts nearly 900 local crew members, a streamlined permitting process, a healthy mix of independent theaters and large chains, and plenty of rising filmmakers emerging from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Central Piedmont Community College. The cost of living is almost exactly the national average, and you can easily take quick meetings out of town: The Charlotte Douglas International Airport offers six nonstop direct flights to Los Angeles every day, and 40 non-stop daily flights to the New York City area.

**May 22-26, 2024**  
Ten Years of Cutting-Edge Independent Films  
Submit your film today!  
[www.mammothlakesfilmfestival.com](http://www.mammothlakesfilmfestival.com)

**JIFF**  
JULIEN DUBUQUE  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL

**APRIL 24TH - 28TH, 2024**  
DUBUQUE, IOWA

*Five-day film festival featuring the best in independent films along with great panels & workshops.*

**SUBMISSIONS NOW OPEN**  
**FilmFreeway**

**JULIENFILMFEST.COM**



Portland



#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Charlotte Film Festival

CFF offers an inspired, amusing selection of films. For example, at its latest edition, alongside the William Shatner documentary *You Can Call Me Bill*, it also presented the little-seen exploitation film *Impulse*, starring Shatner as a psychosexual gigolo. But it is most essential as a resource for local filmmakers, hosting roundtables on Carolina Crafted Films and teaching filmmaking skills to rising moviemakers. Participants included the Black Girls Film Camp and the Charlotte Unconventional Film School, which offers classes, weekend intensives, workshops and retreats.

## 16. BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Chris Rock drew the eyes of the world to Charm City last year with his live Netflix special *Selective Outrage*, weeks before the strikes shut down production in this usually busy film and TV hub. The hometown of John Waters, Barry Levinson and David Simon frequently plays itself, but also hosts plenty of productions set in nearby Washington, D.C., so the crews are very experienced, and many are second-generation. Baltimore has history on its side, too: Because the old port city was founded nearly 300 years ago, it can offer a range of historic locations from the enchanting Fells Point seaport to impressive Mt. Vernon

brownstones to well-preserved Victorians to blue-collar rowhouses to stately mansions. And as fans of Simon's work can attest, it can offer authentically rough corners as well. Baltimore's cost of living is below the U.S. average, and the incentives are solid: qualified film productions can receive a refundable tax credit of up to 28%, while a series can get up to 30%. The very accommodating Baltimore Film Office is quick to help with permits and locations, and the many local equipment rental houses include Serious Grip and Electric and Red Star Baltimore. Local post facilities include Studio Unknown, Cerebral Lounge and Digital Cave.

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Maryland Film Festival

The Baltimore-based Maryland Film Festival marks its 25th anniversary this year, and its recently appointed director of programming, KJ Mohr, says this edition, to be held at the historic SNF Parkway Theatre, will feature star-studded premieres, unique special events, and "innovative experiences both within and outside the theater spaces."

## 15. PORTLAND, OREGON

The home of Todd Haynes, who you can read more about on page 80, has a rich film and TV history that also includes Gus Van Sant, *Portlandia*, and *Simpsons* creator Matt

Groening. But its best days may be ahead of it: It was here that Guillermo Del Toro began production on his Oscar-winning *Pinocchio*, at the offices of animation house ShadowMachine. It also welcomed the new Dean Israelite drama *Little Wing*, starring Brian Cox, Kelly Reilly and Brooklynn Prince, and draws lots of athletic-apparel commercials, in part because suburban Beaverton is the home of Nike. It offers a vast selection of shooting locales, with both coastline and mountains within 30 miles of downtown Portland, and ample warehouse space that can be converted to sound stages. Portland is making it easier to get film permits in its efforts to grow as a filmmaking destination, and a sizable crew base means it can handle up to four feature films and commercial work at the same time. It's an artistic community where you shouldn't have much trouble finding imaginative collaborators, and it offers a 25% rebate to films above a \$1 million threshold, plus up to 26.5% of labor costs. Its strong film culture should be evident from the more than 20 film festivals in the region, and lovely local movie houses include The Hollywood Theatre, which recently purchased the iconic video store Movie Madness, home to more than 80,000 titles, with help from a successful crowdfunding campaign. That's just another sign of how much Portlanders love their movies.

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Portland Film Festival

Led by the infectiously enthusiastic film producer Joshua Leake, the Portland Film Festival is a nonprofit dedicated to promoting new filmmakers, providing free or low-cost screenings, and filling cultural voids in Portland. Its opening night film last year, the documentary *Jailhouse to Milhouse*, celebrated *The Simpsons* in an appropriately mirthful, only-in-Portland setting: the McMenamins Kennedy School, an entertainment destination that includes a hotel, theater, soaking pool, restaurants, a brewery, and more.

## 14. SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Any filmmaker can see the benefits of living in close proximity to both the Slamdance and Sundance film festivals, but Salt Lake City doesn't just come alive with those events based in nearby Park City — its film scene thrives with a mix of scrappy independent filmmakers and big out-of-state productions. The crew



# Best Places To Live and Work



base is filled with professionals who have decades of experience in projects ranging from features to TV to commercial work. (Utah's dazzling natural beauty makes it a major draw for outdoorsy ad campaigns.) The state also has a competitive incentive program that offers a refundable tax credit or cash rebate of up to 25%, and Salt Lake City and its surrounding areas can stand in for locations from New York to Silicon Valley to Russia or even Mars. You've likely seen the Bonneville Salt Flats, two hours out of town, without even knowing it: The breathtaking natural phenomenon has been used in blockbuster movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* and *Independence Day*. If you're into dive bars, this probably isn't the city for you. But you'll embrace it wholeheartedly if you like hikes, skiing, meadows full of flowers, lakes, and snow-peaked mountains.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Sundance, Slamdance and FilmQuest

As you're well aware, Sundance is one of the most prestigious of all film festivals,

as well as one of the film world's most important incubators of rising talent. It's a star-studded affair that draws the best in indie filmmaking to Park City every January.

Slamdance, held concurrently in Park City, is a for-filmmakers, by-filmmakers festival devoted to discovering the most bold, groundbreaking and experimental new films and creators. Both Sundance and Slamdance are strongly dedicated to uplifting underrepresented filmmakers.

But we'd also draw your attention to FilmQuest, about 45 miles outside of Salt Lake City, in the cheery mountain town of Provo. Every fall, founder Jonathan Martin and his passionate, bighearted team preside over a vibe akin to an '80s slumber party. The crowd consists largely of moviemakers who watch each other's often-brilliant DIY genre films almost around the clock, with occasional breaks for axe throwing and karaoke parties. Because it's all held at one venue, the fun and cozy Velour Live Music Gallery, almost everyone sees everything, and filmmakers quickly bond over their shared love of wild cinema.

## 13. PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Films shot in and around Pittsburgh include classics like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *The Dark Knight*, as well as recent productions like *The Man Called Otto* and *The Pale Blue Eye*, and TV shows like *American Rust* and *The Mayor of Kingstown*. Film and TV spending is steady, regularly coming to about \$150 million per year. The Steel City has a modern sheen it's hard to replicate elsewhere, but with its historic buildings, three rivers, sweeping bridges, and nearby mountains, it can stand in for a wide range of other cities and time periods. Don't visit Pittsburgh without filming — or at least riding — the cars of the Duquesne or Monongahela inclines, the two funiculars up Mount Washington that will make you feel like you're living in the Swiss Alps while

- SFiFF Submissions are Now Open
- Early bird deadline is March 4th, 2024
- Over \$100,000 in cash and prizes for juried award winners

Submit online at [santafe.film](http://santafe.film)

**Discover new talent, stories, and global cinema**

Bringing diverse cinema to the screen every month in Downtown LA

Attend | Submit | Join

[nfmla.org](http://nfmla.org)  NEWFILMMAKERS LA



giving you a spectacular view of the city's skyline. They're among the many charms of this city, more affordable than the U.S. average, that offers easy permitting, many free locations, including several bridges and parks, and four full crews. The number of crew members is growing thanks to a new workforce development program that has graduated about 75 people with paths to union membership. The tax incentives are also impressive: Pennsylvania offers 25% for eligible projects, with an extra 5% if you use qualified production studios or post-production facilities. It also offers many equipment rental houses and post facilities, and is home to excellent universities including Carnegie Mellon, known for one of the best drama schools in the world.

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Three Rivers Film Festival

Now in its 42nd year, the festival locally abbreviated as 3RFF celebrates the best of international independent film. The latest edition featured 22 indie features including dramas, comedies, and documentaries. Its well-curated list of recent films included *The Holdovers* and Sharon "Rocky" Roggio's provocative documentary *1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture*, which argues that Biblical references to homosexuality are mistranslations.

## 12. PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia often has annual film and TV spending in the hundreds of millions, and it's easy to understand why: It's one of the most versatile of all film cities, offering everything from posh highrises to Revolutionary War-era manors to funky rowhouses to cozy farmhouses just outside of town, and a diverse mix of neighborhoods like the Golden Block, Italian Market, and Chinatown. It offers the same generous tax incentives as Pittsburgh — up to a 30% credit — and low or no costs to shoot on most public properties. Seeking out a permit from Philadelphia Parks and Recreation can unlock access to iconic locations like the Schuylkill River Trail and the Rocky Steps leading up to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia benefits from a very savvy, professional film office that helps filmmakers quickly. Its cost of living is close to the national average, and Philly is an excellent home base for East Coast filmmakers given its accessibility to New York City, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The city's more than 4,000 murals



are an obvious sign of how much it values arts and culture for all, and the city has an experienced local crew base with a strong union history, as well as a sizable non-union crew base eager to take on indie projects. Filmmakers can also draw on the thriving local theater scene. The long list of recent projects has included HBO's *The Gilded Age*, ABC's Philly-set *Abbott Elementary*, and M. Night Shyamalan's feature *Knock at the Cabin* and Apple TV+ show *Servant*. Shyamalan, who grew up near Philadelphia, loves filming in the region, and watching his projects will give you a great sense of its astonishing adaptability.

#### Notable Film Festivals:

##### The Philadelphia Film Festival and BlackStar

The Philadelphia Film Festival recently marked its 32nd edition with 10 days of events and screenings, including the opening-night film *American Fiction*, paired with a skyline party, and the closing-night screening of *Saltburn*.

Blackstar is focused on celebrating the work of filmmakers of color beyond the confines of genre, hosting not just the festival but also year-round events including screenings, exhibitions, a filmmaker seminar, a film production lab, and a journal. The 2023 festival included films, panels, DJs, yoga and conversations from the Daily Jawn Stage.

## 11. CINCINNATI, OHIO

Cincinnati has its own special charm, but one of its big draws is that it can pose for many different cities — like Chicago, for example, in Jeff Nichols' epic motorcycle gang drama *The Bikeriders*, which made excellent use of the city's topogra-

phy in scenes with long stretches of road. Barry Levinson's 1950s gangster movie *Alto Knights*, starring Robert DeNiro, also recently shot in Cincinnati. It's a great place to make period films, and it can also easily pose as Europe because of its abundance of Italianate architecture. Its flexibility also owes a bit to geography: With Kentucky just across the Ohio River, it straddles the Midwest and South and reflects the flavors of both. Filmmakers can really stretch out and enjoy multiple types of terrain across both states without spending much time in transit. Plus, Ohio offers a 30% refundable tax credit, and the affordable cost of living, which is below the national average, make it an attractive place for filmmakers to live well. Film Cincinnati notes that the number of local crew members has tripled in the last five years, and that crews can now handle up to three large feature films at once. There are no fees for film permits — but there is a real sense of community that draws fellow filmmakers together.

#### Notable Film Festival:

##### Over-the-Rhine Film Festival

Over-the-Rhine is a fun, well-run diversity festival led by people from the disability community. Taking place in the historic Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, it uses cinema as a way to build empathy, seeking out dynamic storytelling and unique voices.

## 10. MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA

Montreal is the kind of film-mad town where people will line up around the corner to see a South Korean film you've likely never heard of, as they did last August when director Lee Hae-young's outstanding *Phantom* played the always-magnificent



# Best Places To Live and Work



Fantasia Film Festival. Fantasia is just one anchor of Montreal's sublime film scene, which supports local filmmakers and those from around the globe with equal passion. Another key player is Concordia University, one of our 25 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada, which produces innovators like Félix Lajeunesse and Paul Raphaël, founders of the immersive virtual reality company Felix & Paul Studios, which we profile on page 34. Walk the streets of diverse, romantic Montreal and you'll immediately feel creativity brewing — it's a truly global city that feels welcoming, inspiring and urgent. But that incalculable energy is backed up by strong numbers: The tax credit for film production services can be as high as 42.6%, based on federal and provincial tax rates. And the region has a dedicated union presence with thousands of technicians and actors and hundreds of directors and production managers. Thanks to its modern downtown, many green spaces and historic Old Montreal neighborhood, it can easily double for many North American or European locales. Recent local productions include Amazon Prime Video's *The Sticky*, a

maple syrup heist comedy from Blumhouse TV, Jamie Lee Curtis' Comet Pictures, and Montreal's Sphere Media, among others. And the cost of living is remarkably low given the quality of life — as long as you love (or can learn to love) long, dreamy winters.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Fantasia International Film Festival

One of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, the genre-focused Fantasia combines a strong interest in genre films with a love of Asian cinema and some of the most passionate and informed audiences in the world. In partnership with the Cannes Film Festival, it also welcomes Frontières, the international co-production market and networking platform with a focus on genre financing and co-production.

## 9. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

*The Bear*, *The Chi*, and Wolf Entertainment's *Chicago One* franchise have done a lovely job of showcasing the many sky-

scrapers, corners, alleys, open spaces, and sweeping views of rivers, canals and Lake Michigan that make Chicago one of the most beloved cities in the country. The excellent tax incentives include a 30% credit on qualified production spending, the city film office is happy to help with permits and liaising with government agencies, and the Illinois Film Office can provide further assistance in dealing with state government. America's third-largest city has nightlife, restaurants, sports and culture to rival those of New York and L.A., but Chicago is far more affordable — its cost of living is just slightly above the U.S. average. Outside of town you'll find breathtaking natural vistas, picturesque farmland, and small towns that look like they did decades ago. The region is home to thousands of seasoned, world-class union crew members, and an ever-growing concentration of young filmmakers from

**14th ANNUAL  
ART OF BKLYN FILM FESTIVAL**  
June 2024

2024 SPONSORS

UCLA Extension  
Writers' Program

InkTip

STAGE 32  
ROADMAP  
WRITERS

FADE IN

ScriptHop

**CALL FOR ENTRIES**  
*Films & Screenplays*  
Submissions Close 5.1.24

[aobff.org](http://aobff.org)

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Council on the Arts | NYC Cultural Affairs

BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

**DOC SHOP**  
FILMMAKER'S FORUM

FEBRUARY 19-23, 2024 | MISSOULA, MONTANA





genre. The festival, which just celebrated its 20th year, draws an intense following — attendees have even been known to get CUFF tattoos — and describes itself on its website as “a not-for-profit organization dedicated to programming films that defy convention.” It also features indie arcade games in its CUFFcade, which are free to play year-round at Calgary’s Globe Cinema.

## 7. MIAMI, FLORIDA

Miami’s golden beaches and vibrant culture make it a delightful place for anyone — but it’s an especially excellent place for filmmakers who crave a thriving, diverse, and skilled community of creatives. Among its greatest assets is a committed crew base, filled with professionals happy to share deep knowledge of all their eclectic region has to offer. Miami-Dade County also has almost 30 rental houses to choose from, including HD House, and the many notable local post houses include Accord Productions and Alacran Studios. Though the state of Florida doesn’t have film and television incentives, Miami-Dade County has a TV, Film and Entertainment Production Incentive Program geared toward small and mid-sized projects. If a production spends at least \$500,000 in Miami-Dade County, it is eligible to get a maximum of \$50,000 back as a cash rebate. If it spends at least \$1,000,000, it can receive up to \$100,000 back. Additionally, Miami-Dade County is launching a new incentive program geared toward large productions called the High Impact Film Fund. The grant program, designed to recognize projects that will bring the highest return on investment to the county, offers a 20% cash rebate to productions that spend at least \$5 million locally. Miami-Dade County has allocated a total of \$50 million to the program over the next five years. Recent projects filmed in Miami include DC Comics’ *Blue Beetle* and HBO’s *A Missed Connection*.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Miami Jewish Film Festival and American Black Film Festival

The Miami Jewish Film Festival offers good opportunities for networking with distributors, and it’s one of the best showcases for independent films that tell heartfelt Jewish stories. This year’s Critics Prize went to the Israeli drama *America*, directed by Ofir Raul Graizer, and the Audience Award for Narrative Film went to the Israeli romantic comedy *Matchmaking*, by Erez Tadmor.

schools including Columbia College Chicago, DePaul University, Northwestern, and the Harold Ramis Film School. The director and *Ghostbusters* star is among many comic icons who had formative experiences in the Chicago improv scene, including Bob Odenkirk, Conan O’Brien, Chris Farley, and Bill Murray, and you can still mine the city’s many improv hubs, including The Second City and iO, for fast-rising talents.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Chicago International Film Festival

The Chicago International Film Festival celebrates its 60th year in 2024, making it one of the longest-running festivals on earth. The festival programs films it hopes will get a big reaction from audiences, and likes them engaged, involved and opinionated: Last year’s theme was “Critics Welcome.” The city has produced many great ones, including longtime TV partners — and occasionally feisty sparring partners — Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. The latter inspired Ebertfest, held annually two hours from Chicago in Champaign.

## 8. CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

Calgary is ranked the second-most livable city in North America by the the Economist Intelligence Unit, and is tied with Geneva, Switzerland for seventh-most livable city in the world. It’s easy to see why: An affordable, thriving and growing film hub, Calgary is a global city that has managed to retain its unpretentious charm. If you’ve seen *The Last of Us* or the latest season of *Fargo*, you’ve seen lots of Calgary, which boasts a glimmering modern downtown with easy access to prairies, badlands, and the Rock-

ies. It was recognized at the 2023 Location Managers Guild International Awards in the categories of Outstanding Film Commission and Outstanding Locations in a Contemporary TV Series for *The Last of Us*. Additionally, three Calgary-area ranches — the John Scott Ranch, the CL Ranch and Albertina Farms — won the Location of the Year Award at the Global Production Awards in Cannes, France, during the Cannes Film Festival. Calgary also entices productions with a 22% tax credit for foreign projects, and it can go up to 30% when Alberta-based owners or producers are involved. Recent shoots in the region have included the latest season of *Fraggle Rock: Back to the Rock*, and the long-running Canadian series *Heartland*. Much of the credit for the region’s success goes to Calgary film commissioner Luke Azevedo and his team. He’s an extremely detail-oriented advocate for film in Alberta who welcomes newcomers from around the world with open arms — and hopes they’ll love Calgary so much they make it their full-time home.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Calgary International Film Festival and Calgary Underground Film Festival

Calgary is one of the very few cities with two different film festivals on our list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, and it’s a testament to the strength of the city’s film scene that they’re very different. CIFF is the bigger one, an Oscar-qualifying festival known for a major industry presence. On its website, it espouses “passion for film... across virtually every culture and demographic.”

CUFF also offers a wide range of films of all kinds, but is especially celebrated for



# Best Places To Live and Work



Just a short drive from the city of Miami is beautiful Miami Beach, home of the celebrated American Black Film Festival. Lena Waithe was honored as an ambassador in 2023, and she shared the wisdom she's gathered through her work with her production company, Hillman Grad, and her many successful projects like *Master of None*, *Queen & Slim* and *The Chi*.

Both festivals are alums of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee list.

## 6. ATLANTA, GEORGIA

The anchor of Georgia's multibillion-dollar film and TV industry, Atlanta is a huge homebase for a wide range film and TV productions, thanks to its vast industry infrastructure, string of hit productions, and welcoming weather almost year-round. Anyone working on blockbusters is almost certain to spend some time here, and it's telling that the great Francis Ford Coppola selected it for shooting his next epic, *Megalopolis*. Georgia also wins fans with its 20% tax credit, which can be boosted another 10% for productions that use the

famous Peach logo. Prime production hubs include the 330-acre Tyler Perry Studios, on the former grounds of the historic Fort McPherson army base, which hosted recent projects including *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*; the *Hawkeye* series on Disney+, and 2021's *Coming 2 America*. Other recent large Atlanta productions have included *Blue Beetle* (which also filmed in Miami) and Netflix's *They Cloned Tyrone*. Given the many projects it attracts, Atlanta is known for very experienced crews, and takes pride in its hospitality, noting that both above and below the line collaborators can live very well in the area. Its reasonable cost of living makes it another good choice for people who want to earn money working on big productions, and to spend that money on their own indie projects. That model has been applied many times by graduates of the Savannah College of Art and Design's Atlanta campus, which provides a top-tier, real-world education. Its attractions include an LED volume wall that students enlist to add a sense of awe to their productions. The city's many popular shooting locations include Piedmont Park, and we also recom-

mend The Clothing Warehouse in Little Five Points —as both a location and a fun shopping destination. Another notable production hotspot is Briarcliff Mansion, which has been featured in *Stranger Things*, *Doom Patrol*, *The Vampire Diaries* and *First Man*.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Atlanta Film Festival

The Atlanta Film Festival hosts an annual Creative Conference full of helpful educational programming, as well as a highly regarded screenplay competition. The very diverse lineup of films that screened at the 2023 edition included Petter Ringbom and Marquise Stillwell's documentary *This World Is Not My Own*; Paul Schrader's *Master Gardener*; and Bomani J. Story's *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster*.

**MAKE YOUR CREATIVITY YOUR CAREER!**

**FAST TRACK AN EXCITING CAREER WITH OUR ACCELERATED DIPLOMA PROGRAMS IN:**

- Film Production
- Acting for Film, TV and the Theatre
- Writing for Film & TV
- Video Game Design & Animation
- Video Game Design & Development
- Graphic Design & Interactive Media

**OR LEARN 100% ONLINE:**

- Video Production
- Writing for Film & TV
- Graphic Design & Interactive Media

**• Bachelor of Creative Arts Pathway**

**Toronto Film School YOUR IN**

**EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES AT TORONTOFILMSCHOOL.CA**

**25 COOLEST FILM FESTIVALS IN THE WORLD 2023**  
MovieMaker

**HELL'S HALF MILE** FILM & MUSIC FESTIVAL

MOVIES.  
MUSIC.  
MORE.

**OPEN FOR SUBMISSIONS**  
FALL 2024 FESTIVAL  
HELLSHALFMILE.COM



## 5. VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Vancouver's long list of high-profile recent film and TV projects — from HBO's *The Last of Us* to A24's *Heretic* to Netflix's *Virgin River* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* — speaks for itself. Vancouver is ranked as the most livable city in North America by the Economist Intelligence Unit,

Austin



and the fifth-most livable city in the world. We promise you can find whatever location you need in this affordable British Columbia film kingdom, from the friendly, modern city streets to the timeless cobblestones of Gastown to the rain forest of Stanley Park to the shores of Kitsilano, a lovely beach that also offers mountain views from its sandy beaches. (You might also want to film — or unwind — in the huge saltwater Kitsilano Pool.) Local film incentives have lured many films and TV shows from Los Angeles, three hours away by plane. In addition to a basic tax credit of 28% for international projects and 35% for Canadian projects, filmmakers can add several additional potential incentives including a DAVE (Digital, Animation, Visual Effects & Post Production) credit of up to 16%. If you're thinking of going to film school — or recruiting film students to help with your project — Vancouver is one of the best places you could possibly be. It's the home of education institutions including Simon Fraser University, Capilano University, and the Vancouver Film School, which made our recent list of the 25 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Vancouver International Film Festival

The Vancouver International Film Festival is one of the largest festivals in North America, sharing films from more than 70 countries on nine screens, with an emphasis on documentary, Canadian films, and East Asian cinema. It's led by the Greater Vancouver International Film Festival Society, a not-for-profit founded in 1982 that offers stellar programming year-round at the VIFF Centre.

## 4. AUSTIN, TEXAS

Early in this list we included a quote from Troublemaker Studios co-founder Elizabeth Avellán, a crucial figure on the Austin film scene, because Austin is in many ways the model for a thriving film scene outside of New York City or Los Angeles: Thanks to local icons like Richard Linklater and Robert Rodriguez, it blazed a trail for other towns that want to do it themselves, way back in the '80s and '90s when the coasts had a virtual lock on film production. Austin is a powerhouse today, with a long list of productions including Rodriguez and Avellán's *Spy Kids: Armageddon* for Netflix, Max's *Love & Death*, CW's *Walker*, Apple's *The Last Thing He Told Me*, and much more. Its 50 years of intense indie film production mean the city has more than 1,000 crew members, about 25 boutique production houses, and 18 production facilities — including two LED volume stages. It's also free to film on city streets and sidewalks and in parks, and a wide range of terrain, from lakes to the Hill Country, are easily accessible. The new Hill Country Studios, the \$267 million production hub we also mentioned in our San Antonio entry, will be located between San Antonio and Austin, but a little closer to Austin — about a half-hour's drive away. It plans to offer 800,000 square feet of soundstages. Austin's local film scene is anchored by the Austin Film Society, which Linklater founded in 1985, and also includes the original Alamo Drafthouse, which has five local locations and its headquarters in the city. If you've visited the Austin Film Festival or SXSW, we probably don't need to tell you that Austin is just plain fun, with delicious food and lovely trails along Lady Bird Lake and some of the best nightlife in America. You've already read in our previous entries about Texas' state rebate of up to 22.5%, and Austin offers an additional 0.75% incentive for qualifying projects.

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### SXSW and the Austin Film Festival

SXSW is such an industry happening that it's one of the key places where indie filmmakers find distributors. It's known for smart, bold programming, and a big showing here can jumpstart your career.

The Austin Film Festival is also well-curated and is especially targeted toward writers, who pack panels and networking events and spend weeks leading up to the festival eagerly checking their emails to see how their scripts performed in AFF's very popular competition. As often happens at these things, though, some of the best connections happen while you're waiting in line for screenings or breakfast tacos.

## 3. NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

You could use New Orleans as a stand-in for other locations, but why would you? America's most eclectic city has history, stately architecture and some of the best food and music on earth. In addition to a 25% base tax credit and an additional 15% for local labor, you can receive another 15% if you're shooting a Louisiana screenplay. And New Orleans has 17 union crews who are among the most experienced in the country. The film office has seen everything, and can turn around permits quickly, as well as direct you to city-owned shooting locations including Gallier Hall (the former City Hall), Armstrong International Airport (which has permanently closed terminals available) and a shuttered prison. Recent projects include the big-budget Netflix action thriller *Carry-On*, starring Taron Egerton and Jason Bateman. And if you're making an indie short, please note: shooting in New Orleans — or anywhere in Louisiana — qualifies you to enter the Shreveport-based Louisiana Film Prize, which every fall hands out up to \$50,000 for the best short made in the Pelican State. New Orleans' cost of living is almost exactly the U.S. average, and whether you live for nature or nightlife, you can do more living here than almost anywhere else — it's immersed in the history, romance and legends of all the varied cultures that come together in the Big Easy.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### New Orleans Film Festival

A regular on our list of the 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, NOFF works tirelessly to find new talent and promote underrepresented filmmakers, and is one of the few festivals that is Oscar-qualifying in all three short-form Academy-accredited categories — narrative, documentary and



# Best Places To Live and Work



animated. It draws top industry representatives, offers generous prizes, and is known for transparency and thoughtful programming.

## 2. ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque returns to a place it has held many times before on this list: It's our top big U.S. city for moviemakers. One of the most culturally rich cities in the country, it anchors a growing New Mexico film scene that also includes nearby Santa Fe and Las Cruces, both of which you'll soon read about in our list of Smaller Cities and Towns. All in all, the film industry supports about 8,000 well-paying jobs statewide. Albuquerque's experienced crew base, sunny weather, and affordability have helped draw big hitters like Netflix and NBCUniversal, which have made use of Local Economic Development money for ambitious studio builds. In turn, the presence of huge entities provides stable jobs that give local filmmakers the security to make their own indie projects. The maximum credit is 40%, under optimal conditions, and film commissioner Cyndy McCrossen, who has astonishing knowledge of area locations, runs a very professional operation that is quick to handle permit requests and anything else filmmakers need. Recent productions in the area include Netflix's

The city owns roughly 30,000 acres of stunning wide-open spaces including rocky foothills, pine forests and deserts, and filmmakers are also attracted to its trails, parks, railyards, and the ABQ BioPark, which includes a zoo, botanical garden, aquarium, and Tingley Beach, which features fishing ponds, paddle boats, and more. The cost of living in Albuquerque is below the U.S. average and the quality of life is high: It has little traffic, lots of open space, and nature all around. And it's just a two-hour flight to Los Angeles.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Albuquerque Film & Music Experience

Giving equal weight to music and film, AFMX is an annual interactive event held every September with an emphasis on domestic and international films. It offers panels and workshops, intimate networking, and, of course, live musical performances. One of its key objectives year-round is to encourage young people to find careers in film and music.

## 1. TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

Each fall, the eyes of the film world turn to the Toronto International Film Festival for an early look at some of the year's likely Oscar contenders. But the eyes of the world are also on Toronto almost all the time,

*Reacher* to Paramount's *Star Trek* franchise to Hulu's *What We Do In the Shadows* to Netflix's *Umbrella Academy*, Toronto hosts just about every entertainment giant, thanks in large part to its more than 2 million square feet of studio space and ability to double for countless other locations around the world. But it also plays itself quite adeptly, as evidenced by the upcoming Canadian series *Law & Order Toronto: Criminal Intent*.

Canada's largest city, with a population of nearly 3 million, is a booming, no-nonsense film and TV capital that consistently draws billions in industry spending — which helped it climb three places since last year to claim the No. 1 spot among the big cities on this list. The hometown of filmmakers like David Cronenberg and Sarah Polley employs 35,000 workers in the film and TV sector. It has a strong union presence, and the city partners with unions and community organizations on job training to make the industry more diverse and inclusive. Its film office also promises the fastest turnaround time in North America for permits. And Toronto offers reliably fantastic financial incentives: Several tax credits can be combined for savings of up to 45% on qualified labor costs and up to 32.5% on total production costs. Excellent available rental facilities include William F. White International, and the impressive local film programs include the Toronto Film School — one of our 25 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada — as well as Toronto Metropolitan University and York University. It's also reasonably affordable compared to similarly metropolitan U.S. cities. We could go on and on, but really: Just turn on your TV.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Toronto International Film Festival

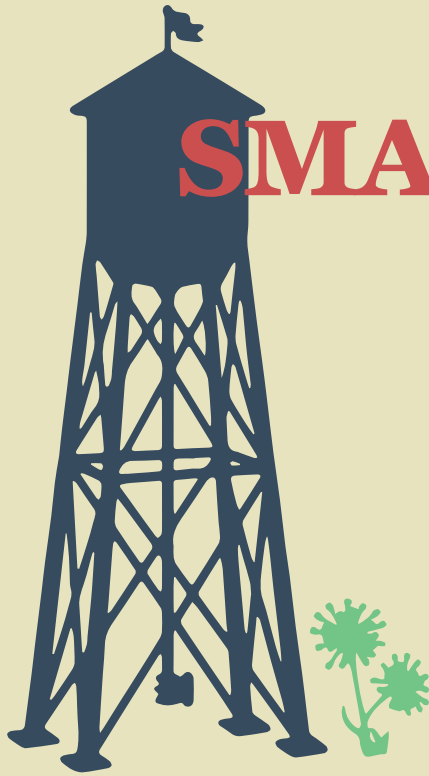
One of the most prestigious and influential film festivals in the world, the non-profit TIFF is a renowned cultural force and launching pad for awards-season films that draws on the best of cinema from Canada and around the globe. It always hosts an impressive cavalcade of A-list filmmakers and stars, and also does an enviable job of discovering and promoting daring new filmmakers, especially in its Discovery and Midnight Madness Programs.



*Obliterated*, A24's *Love Lies Bleeding*, Paramount's *A Really Haunted Loud House*, and the Warner Bros shows *The Cleaning Lady* and *Duster*.

because we see it every time we flip through our TV channels or subscription services: With productions from Amazon Prime Video's *The Boys* and *Cruel Intentions* to





# SMALLER CITIES & TOWNS

## 10. RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

If you're interested in making a period project involving early American history, Richmond is uniquely set up to accommodate your needs. Among its many free filming locations is the gorgeous, state-owned, 3,000-acre scenic backlot at State Farm just 30 minutes outside of the city. It offers access to period sets that can cover a 300-year span and were built by past productions including *John Adams*, *Lincoln*, *Harriet* and *The Good Lord Bird*. The backlot includes rolling hills, forests, farmlands, battlefields, a sailing ship set, and vacant prison facilities. Richmond also boasts many museums, a bustling restaurant and bar scene, and all kinds of recreational activities, like kayaking on the James River, which runs through downtown. It's less than a two-hour drive to Washington D.C., but there's not much you'll need that Richmond doesn't already have. Virginia offers a 20% tax credit for film, TV and commercials that can go up to 40% if the production uses local workers, first-time workers, or locations in disadvantaged districts, among other qualifiers. There are also opportunities for sales, use, and hotel tax exemptions. Plus, Virginia has lots of small grant opportunities for microbudget projects, especially by local filmmakers. And the Virginia Film Office goes above and

beyond to help productions with whatever they need, bringing a red-tape eliminating, make-it-happen attitude. Recent projects filmed here include the Apple TV+ drama *Swagger* and the Nicholas Colia-directed indie movie *Griffin in Summer*, starring Melanie Lynskey.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Virginia Film Festival

The University of Virginia's Virginia Film Festival prides itself on enlightening talks with dynamic filmmakers: In 2023, Ava DuVernay attended to accept the VAFF Visionary Award and talk about her eye-opening film *Origin*, which explores the worldwide caste system.

## 9. ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

Close to Tampa, Clearwater, Bradenton and Sarasota, St. Petersburg is the production hub of Florida's thriving western central coast, a sunny stretch of powder-white beaches and almost any other kind of location you could desire — from marinas to warehouses to charming downtowns to ultramodern towers to thick tropical canopies. The St. Pete-Clearwater Film Commission draws a wide range of projects through a business development program that offers a cash rebate incentive of 10 to 30% on qualified expenditures in Pinellas County's 24 municipalities. (The amount of the rebate depends on factors including the impact on local tourism.) The area regularly attracts productions from the History Channel and HGTV, and is a top choice for print ads and commercials thanks not just to the blue skies but also to the magnificent architecture, including showstopping Mediterranean Revival homes. The Ringling College of Art and Design, in nearby Sarasota — a gorgeous location in its own right — is one of our

Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada. Perhaps surprisingly, the cost of living is almost exactly the U.S. average.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Sarasota Film Festival

Held about 50 minutes away from St. Petersburg, Sarasota is a fun-filled, smartly curated festival that last year celebrated its 25th anniversary with guests including Roma Downey, documentarian Barbara Kopple, and the Indigo Girls, who attended a packed, emotional screening of Alexandria Bombach's terrific documentary about the duo, *It's Only Life After All*. Its enticing location is known for serene beaches, pleasant shopping and tours through tunnels of mangrove trees, and executive director Mark Famiglio makes sure everyone has a fun and memorable time, especially with a closing-night dinner that turns into an impromptu talent show.

## 8. LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

Las Cruces has a large, close-knit, largely Latino indie film community, and it is making smart, strategic moves toward even greater growth. Eminently film-worthy thanks to its old adobe architecture, lavish mansions and ample palm trees, Las Cruces is a solid stand-in for Los Angeles, many other American cities, and several Mexican locales. It's also a perfect homebase for shoots at Spaceport America, the U.S./Mexico border, and White Sands National Park. The healthy film scene is fueled by magnificent tax incentives: Thanks in part to a new statewide benefit for productions shooting outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, projects in Las Cruces can receive up to a 40% refundable tax credit. Notable recent projects have included *In the Summers*, starring *Flash* star Sasha Calle. Film Las Cruces handles film permitting with joyful hospitality and an emphasis on speed — it offers two full-time employees available 24/7 to meet filmmakers' needs. The region also has a large crew base for both union and non-union projects. And its passionate



# Best Places To Live and Work



film culture is augmented by New Mexico State University's Creative Media Institute, multiple offerings at Doña Ana Community College, and the state's new film training facility. As we've mentioned, the Las Cruces and El Paso film communities are closely aligned, and residents of each locale benefit from their proximity to the other. And Las Cruces has a cost of living below the U.S. average.

## Notable Film Festival:

### Las Cruces International Film Festival

You didn't really think we'd lavish all this praise on New Mexico's film and TV industry without once mentioning *Better Call Saul* or *Breaking Bad*, right? The great Giancarlo Esposito, who starred in both, was honored with the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Entertainment at the latest edition of the Las Cruces International Film Festival, which offered a stacked slate of films — especially New Mexico stories — including entries in the 48 Hour Film Challenge Las Cruces. *Better Call Saul* star Patrick Fabian was also a welcome part of the lineup.

## 7. BOULDER, COLORADO

Those who appreciate a nice work/life balance will gravitate to the bustling town of Boulder, nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. With its adorably charming downtown, Boulder is as pleasant in real-life as it looks on screen. It offers an abundance of choices for filming locations, from city stops like the Pearl Street Mall to the enthralling natural beauty of Rocky Mountain National Park and Boulder Falls. For the active, there's biking, hiking, and rock climbing, and for those interested in kicking back and enjoying that work-life balance, there are many microbreweries and streetside cafes. Colorado offers a rebate of up to 20% off expenses if the productions hire at least 50% Colorado-based cast and crew. In-state projects need to spend at least \$100,000 to qualify, while out-of-staters need to spend at least \$1 million. The Boulder County Film Commission makes it easy and inexpensive to get film permits, and it's hard to argue with 300 days a year of sunshine. Recent projects that have filmed in Boulder include *Elevation* with Anthony Mackie and Amazon Prime Video's *Coach Prime*, a docuseries following University of Colorado Boulder's head football coach, Deion Sanders.

## Notable Film Festival:

### Boulder International Film Festival

Celebrating its 20-year anniversary in 2024, the Boulder International Film Festival is a four-day celebration that combines local, national and international films with tastings, happy hours, and more. Its cool and innovative ideas include a Best Adventure Film category.

## 6. KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

Knoxville has lured an impressive number of recent TV projects, from true crime like TV One's *Fatal Attraction* and Oxygen's *Snapped* to adorable and educational *Sesame Street* fare for Max like *Cookie Monster's Bake Sale*, *Oscar's Handmade Halloween* and *Elmo & Tango's Holiday Helpers*. Films that have taken advantage of the region's astonishing natural beauty include

only financial incentive. All who invest \$200,000 or more in qualified spending are eligible for a cash rebate in the form of a 25% grant from the state, which also offers an additional qualified production credit that can offset up to 50% of franchise and excise tax liability. And productions that qualify for the state grant rebate are also eligible for another 5% grant for shooting in Knox County, where Knoxville is located. One more reason to love Knoxville is the close proximity to Dollywood, the homey theme park established by local hero and national treasure Dolly Parton.



the Hallmark Channel's *Love in the Great Smoky Mountains: A National Park Romance*. And recent documentary standouts include Curren Sheldon's *Country Brawlers*, a look at rural boxing in Central Appalachia that won the Best Tennessee Feature last year at the highly respected Nashville Film Festival. Filmmakers are drawn by very professional, experienced crews, and by the many gorgeous locations: It's free to film in city-owned locations, including parks, downtown Market Square and Gay Street, as well as in the very photogenic Augusta Quarry. Free locations aren't the

## Notable Film Festival:

### Film Fest Knox

With its first edition this past November, this festival — started by the Visit Knoxville Film Office, Public Cinema, and the locally based Regal Theaters — introduced the American Regional Film Competition, to showcase great work from outside New York City and Hollywood that is too often overlooked. The winner of the competition receives an Oscar-qualifying theatrical run through Regal.

PHOTO BY WARREN LEMAY



## 5. KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

We consider Kamloops, returning to our list after its debut last year, to be a true discovery — and a fast-rising film hub where you can still make a name for yourself before everyone's talking about it. It's the hub of the gorgeous, gloriously unspoiled Thompson-Nicola region about 200 miles inland from Vancouver, with 3,300 film-friendly locations from badlands to desert to grasslands to snowy mountains to waterfalls to forests and ski resorts. In other words, it's a fantastic place to shoot a movie — or to enjoy being alive. Adding to

### Notable Film Festivals:

#### Kamloops Film Festival and Stseptékwles re Sk'elép Indigenous Film Festival

The Kamloops Film Festival returns for its 28th annual edition this year, after a 27th go-round that included a slew of Oscar-nominated films as well as the Kamloops-filmed action thriller/reality TV satire *Outrunners*.

It is led by the Kamloops Film Society, which also presents the Stseptékwles re Sk'elép (Coyote Stories) Indigenous Film Festival in association with Tk'emlúps te

including unit production managers and first and second assistant directors. Filmmakers are lured not only by its livability and charm, but by a 25% North Carolina rebate on qualifying expenses and purchases. Recent projects include an Ava DuVernay Starz series starring Joshua Jackson and Lauren Ridloff.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Cucalorus Film Festival

One of our favorite festivals — Cucalorus is both one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee and one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals — offers a safe harbor from ego by eschewing prizes and awards in favor of an artist-driven environment known for joyful screenings and meaningful late-night talks. In lieu of trophies, chief instigator Dan Brawley makes sure everyone goes home with a great story.

## 3. SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

With its many lush green squares and endless ghost stories, Savannah has long been a magnet for Hollywood productions. It's known as the location for the famous bus stop in *Forrest Gump*, but its most recent projects include Todd Haynes' Netflix drama *May December*, Ava DuVernay's aforementioned *Origin*, and *Fear the Walking Dead*. It has a particularly energized creative atmosphere thanks to the presence of the Savannah College of Art and Design. The university will gladly allow Hollywood productions to film on its state-of-the-art new backlot as long as they hire SCAD students to work on the project. You can also shoot for free at the Savannah Hilton Head International Airport. Other amazing locations include Tybee Island, the beaches of the Golden Isles, and historic downtown Savannah, which has architecture that can serve different periods from Colonial to Victorian to mid-century modern and contemporary industrial design. In addition to Georgia's tax credit, Savannah productions can also take advantage of the city offering up to a 10% cash rebate and an additional \$25,000 bonus incentive if they hire 50% local crew.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### SCAD Savannah Film Festival

If the balmy weather and spooky fall vibes in October aren't enough to draw you to the SCAD Savannah Film Festival, then



Savannah

the joy are massive tax incentives: British Columbia offers a basic domestic tax refund of 35%, or basic international tax refund of 28%, and that's before you start adding more possible benefits, such as a 16% DAVE (Digital, Animation, Visual Effects & Post Production) credit. Recent projects include Apple TV+'s monster series *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters*, and past projects have included *Jurassic World Dominion*. Expect to see many more projects, from small to monster-sized, in the near future. And what Thompson-Nicola Regional District film commissioner Terri Hadwin told us about the area last year remains true in 2024: "No film fatigue — people are excited to work with the film industry." The area is also exploring the possibility of opening a new film studio in Kamloops.

Secwépemc. Guided by an all-Indigenous committee, the festival offers storytelling, art, and free family films.

## 4. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

Wilmington has played a charming all-American town — with secrets! — in movies from *Blue Velvet* to *The Black Phone* to *Halloween Kills*. It really is a delightful place, but the secret has long been out about its position as a thriving film hub. It boasts plenty of top-tier crews, some of who go back two or three generations — productions in the region often hire about 90% local crew, including all department heads. The community also boasts over 30 members of the Directors Guild of America,



# Best Places To Live and Work



come for our favorite part — the genuine awe and happy abandon with which SCAD students watch movies. They ooh, they aww, and they squeal with delight at all the right parts. Just don't try to compete with them for a selfie with stars like Eddie Redmayne on the red carpet, because you will certainly lose.

## 2. FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

The air is warm but the business is brisk in this diverse, celebrity-studded city of about 180,000 people that is just 15 miles from downtown Miami, but is very much its own community — and a cinematographer's dream. The region is known for 22 miles of beaches, waterfront mansions, a buzzing boardwalk, four fishing piers and endless parks — many of which are available for filming with no fees. And it refuses to be typecast: Greater Fort Lauderdale film commissioner and Film Florida president Sandy Lighterman notes that it also has areas that look like Colorado and Connecticut. She runs a very friendly operation offering concierge-like assistance, and the local crews are also known for skill and experience. Fort Lauderdale makes up for Florida's lack of big statewide film incentives by offering several of its own, including a film and TV incentive of a 15% rebate, capped at \$175,000, for projects that spend at least \$400,000 in Broward County. It also offers a Special Projects Incentive of a 10% rebate, capped at \$2 million, for productions that spend at least \$5 million in the county. There's also a pilot program for Broward County-based emerging filmmakers that gives out up to \$10,000 per project. (These are just a few of the impressive incentives offered.) All of these advantages make it a hotbed of film and TV production. Lionel Messi recently bought a home in Fort Lauderdale, but non-superstars can afford to live here, too — it isn't too high above the national cost of living, and the quality of life is well above average, especially if you like beaches and sunshine.

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival

With screenings of some 200 films at locations across South Florida and the Bahamas, FLIFF is especially committed to raising up first-time filmmakers, and doesn't forget its roots: Its audience awards include four different "Filmed in Broward" categories.

ries. Its latest edition, its 38th, included films from 40 countries and eight world premieres.

## 1. SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

This majestic wonder returns for the second consecutive year to the top of our list of Smaller Cities and Towns, and after a year of upheaval in the film world, one thing remains steady: We haven't found another place with so many film opportunities per capita. As an added bonus, Santa Fe is one of the loveliest places on the planet, a chosen hideaway for people like George R.R. Martin, Gene Hackman and Robert Redford who could live anywhere, and prefer to spend much of their time in this town at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The area was well-represented in *Oppenheimer*, which shot in Santa Fe and in locations close to it, including Los

Bonanza Creek Ranch, which has hosted beloved Westerns from *Lonesome Dove* to *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* to *3:10 to Yuma*. A recent but very impressive addition is Camel Rock Studios, which is owned by the Native American Tesuque Pueblo and is the home of AMC's *Dark Winds*. Hanging your hat in paradisiacal Santa Fe means you can fly to Los Angeles for morning meetings and still be home in time for the countless evening art shows. And yes, it's another fine place to earn a good living, while living less expensively than you would in L.A. or New York, so you have time and money to make your own films. You'll find plenty of inspiration in Santa Fe.



Alamos and Ghost Ranch. Santa Fe's film scene thrives under the tireless watch of film commissioner Jennifer LaBar-Tapia, whose peerless people skills help productions at all levels get what they need. And she gets plenty of business thanks in part to New Mexico tax incentives that can quickly add up to a 40% credit. A UNESCO-designated City of Craft and Folk Art, with 300 days a year of sunlight, Santa Fe offers many excellent places to point your cameras, indoors and out. The inside options include Santa Fe Studios, with two 20,000 square-foot soundstages, and the indoor/outdoor offerings include the sprawling

### Notable Film Festival:

#### Santa Fe International Film Festival

Another of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, SFIFF caters to a sophisticated audience that knows great art and great film, and treats filmmakers well: Besides offering generous assistance with travel costs, it gives out prize packages from Panavision and Light Iron for the winners in the Best Narrative Feature and Best Narrative Short categories. Perhaps most importantly, SFIFF supports the young New Mexico movie talent by holding a student day when they meet with visiting filmmakers.

COURTESY OF CAMEL ROCK STUDIOS