

THE BEST PLACES TO LIVE AND WORK



AS A
MOVIEMAKER
IN
2025

*A list for
anyone looking
for a change — or
justification to
stay put*

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YEARS AGO, WE TOOK NEW YORK CITY AND LOS ANGELES out of the running for our annual list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker and put them in our Best Places Hall of Fame. Our logic was that NYC and L.A. were so obviously the best places for industry professionals that there was no need to list them.

But the last few years have chipped away at that notion – especially for Los Angeles. Both L.A. and New York remain in our Hall of Fame, but as the industry has struggled, they are far from the bets they once were. Nothing in the film and TV industry has *ever* been a sure bet, but the recent gloom among Angelenos is undeniable.

So this year, we say what we say every year, but we mean it more than ever: Don't rush to move to NYC or L.A., and don't stay in either city if doing so is crushing your soul. The best place to live and work as a moviemaker is a place where you will actually *make movies*.

L.A. is filled with people who move to the city, get in over their heads on rent or mortgage payments, and take jobs they don't really like that are *kind* of connected to the industry but leave them

BEST BIG CITIES

25. OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA

A new addition to our list, Canada's capital city has a picturesque beauty that may photograph best under a blanket of snow: It is often used in Hallmark Christmas movies, and romances and holiday films are especially in love with the sight of the fairytale-castle-like Fairmont Chateau Laurier. But Ottawa has locations for any kind of film — the Diefenbunker, a Cold War museum just outside the city, offers steel doors and tunnels perfect for sci-fi. The financial are also very favorable: The provincial tax credits include 35% of the eligible Ontario labor expenditures for qualifying productions, plus an additional 10% for locations, like Ottawa, outside of the Greater Toronto Area. Other incentives include a refundable tax credit of 21.5% on eligible production costs, which can be combined with the federal Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit of 16% of eligible Canadian labor costs.

Ottawa is also affordable, with a active crew base, and the many post houses include Affinity Production Group, Phantom Productions, Aspen Films, Nyce Image Productions, and Cloud in the Sky Studios.

24. CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Sunny and pretty Charlotte has a fun downtown, natural beauty and convenient locations that have doubled for everywhere from New York City to far-off jungles and deserts. Its own one-of-a-kind locations include the Charlotte Motor Speedway and the U.S. National Whitewater Center. Recent productions have included the Starz series *The Hunting Wives* and the feature *Roofman*, starring Channing Tatum and Kirsten Dunst. There's no fee to shoot on state-owned property in North Carolina, and the tax incentives include the NC Film and Entertainment Grant, which provides a 25% return on goods, services, and labor. The region also offers a large crew base, and notable cinemas include the Independent Picture House,

too tired to work on their scripts at night.

You would be better off somewhere affordable, with a large enough industry presence to help you make a living in your day job while you make movies with your friends in your spare time. And we want you to *have* spare time, not give it all to some industry-adjacent job that saps your creative energy.

The best place to live and work as a moviemaker is one where you have lots of friends who will help you make movies — in return for you helping them make *their* movies. Maybe that's New York and L.A., which are full of driven and talented people with the confidence to try to make it in New York or L.A. But if your work is good enough, especially in an age when you can promote yourself from anywhere, Hollywood will find you — and let you know when your physical presence is required.

You can't control macro-level decisions by studios or their investors. But you can control what you make with people you love. So don't worry so much about where you live — focus on what you can make.

We hope this list will help. It takes into account everything from tax incentives to industry presence to cost of living to proximity to other film scenes, as well as to nearby schools and festivals. Maybe you won't want to move to certain places because of their politics or laws. Or maybe you *do* want to move to certain places to help change their politics or laws. That's up to you.

Finally, we aren't saying you should just up and move to any of these places. But maybe shoot a film in one and see if you can see yourself living there. No location on this list will be right for everyone, but we bet at least one place will be right for you.

So with that, here's our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker in 2025.

a great place for indies and foreign films. With an average cost of living, Charlotte is known for convenience and comfort.

23. KANSAS, CITY, MISSOURI

Kansas City is reaping the benefits of a recent state film incentive, welcoming projects that range from a new HGTV home renovation series to Hallmark's highly anticipated NFL tale *Holiday Touchdown: A Chiefs Love Story*. It has also hosted indie features like the recent *Rise & Shine*, *The Possession of Gladstone Manor*, *Break the Cycle*, *25 Miles to Normal*, and *Don't Move*, plus a slew of commercials. Missouri now offers a 20%-42% transferable tax credit on all qualified spend, from an annual fund of \$16 million, split evenly between TV and film. Additionally, KC offers



its own 10% cash rebate on all qualified spending in town. No permits are required to film, and the Kansas City Film Office work hard to make road closures and traffic control easy, should you require them. The many locations that call out to be filmed range from jazz bars to caves. And the city's beloved festivals include Panic Fest, recently named one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World. KC's cost of living is below average, and between experienced crews and lots of return business, it is making a name for itself as a Midwestern film hub on the rise.

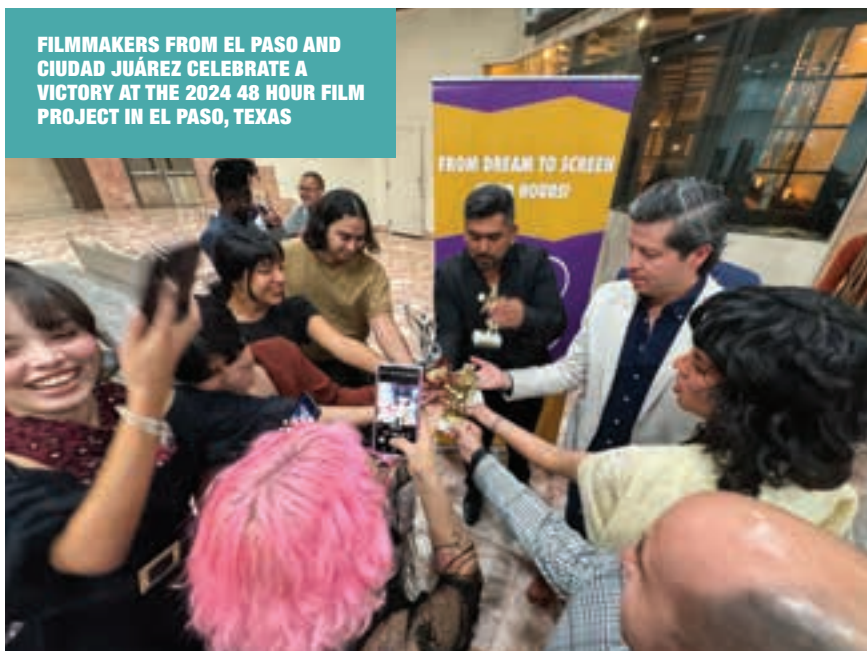
22. SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Production in Salt Lake City is going strong, thanks in part to a tight-knit, supportive DIY film community, lots of commercial work, and big-ticket projects including the religious drama *The Chosen* and Amazon Prime's *Fallout*. Filmmakers of the world come each year to Salt Lake City and nearby Park City for Sundance, and if they're lucky, they also spend time afterward exploring Utah's stunning national parks, and locales from mountains to deserts. It's one of our most gorgeous states, and adding to its appeal is Utah's Motion Picture Incentive Program, which offers up to a 25% post-performance incentive, including a cash rebate or refundable tax credit. There's also the Community Film Incentive Program, a 20% post-performance cash rebate specifically for projects that originate in Utah with budgets between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

21. EL PASO, TEXAS

When we think about affordable, livable cities where you can find a niche among like-minded filmmakers, helping each other get things made, El Paso is one of the first cities that comes to mind. Besides gorgeous mountain views and terrific museums, it emanates cool, and culture. Sharing a border with Ciudad Juárez

FILMMAKERS FROM EL PASO AND CIUDAD JUÁREZ CELEBRATE A VICTORY AT THE 2024 48 HOUR FILM PROJECT IN EL PASO, TEXAS



ensures that this West Texas city is filled with stories (as well as some of the best Mexican food in America). It also shares much culturally with Las Cruces, New Mexico, which appears soon on our list of our top Smaller Cities and Towns. Recent productions to shoot in El Paso include Paul Thomas Anderson's upcoming film, *The Battle of Baktan Cross*, which is, for our money, as good as it gets. Other local shoots have included the features *Mechanics of Borders* and *Look in My Eyes*. The thriving, passionate film scene is anchored by the El Paso Film Festival, one of *MovieMaker's* 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, as well as one of our 25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World. And local filmmakers include the festival's artistic director, Carlos F. Corral, whose MindWarp Films has worked with companies from Apple to Netflix. And the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program offers a state production incentive of up to 22.5%.

20. SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The home of the Alamo has had a bonanza of recent productions, from commercials to documentaries to reality shows to the ever-reliable Taylor Sheridan's *1923*. The Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program, mentioned above, recently received \$200 million in funding, and on top

of that 22.5% cash rebate, San Antonio offers an additional rebate of up to 7.5%. Known as the largest U.S. city with a majority Latino population, 306-year-old San Antonio benefits from hardworking, efficient crews that are quickly growing in numbers. Less expensive than the average U.S. city, it's packed with character and culture, as well as a very wide range of locations: rolling Hill Country, Spanish Colonial missions from the 1700s, dude ranches, dance halls, rivers and lakes, flat farmland, dense urban streets, and just about anything else you might need, with no film permit fees for more than 250 city-owned properties — including iconic locales like the River Walk, Historic Market Square and La Villita Historic Arts Village. The city is also a mere 80 miles from Austin, Texas' biggest film hub.

19. FORT WORTH, TEXAS

The aforementioned Taylor Sheridan is keeping a lot of industry people busy in the Fort Worth area with an empire of shows that includes the Paramount+ dramas *Yellowstone*, *Lioness*, and his new *Landman*, starring Billy Bob Thornton, Jon Hamm and Demi Moore. Fort Worth, like the previous two cities on this list, benefits from the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program's 22.5% cash rebate for qualifying productions. And the

PHOTO COURTESY OF DESTINATION EL PASO

city offers the *you Stay We Pay* Hotel Rebate, which gives \$5 back for each hotel room night if you book 500 total nights. With very little red tape around the filmmaking process, there's a strong crew base in Fort Worth, and no permits are necessary for filming exterior B-roll as long as you don't block the right-of-way. In fact, the only time you need a permit in Fort Worth is when you're closing down a street or sidewalk — otherwise, you can just deal directly with the property owner. Fort Worth also offers a 127 by 4 foot Volume stage at Trilogy Studios — everything's bigger in Texas. The local festivals include the Lone Star Film Festival.

18. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

It's not hard for us to find great things to say about Boston — *Moviemaker's* editor and publisher both live just outside the city, and can attest that its thriving film scene extends far across the state, from the campuses of nearby Cambridge to the shores of tranquil Cape Cod. We love it here, and so do filmmakers: Recent productions include the TV series *The Walking Dead: Dead City* and the feature *At The Sea*, starring Amy Adams. In addition to one-of-a-kind architecture in one of America's oldest cities, Boston offers four vivid seasons — fall is when it most thrives — and incentives that include a 25% payroll credit and 25% production credit, as well as a sales tax exemption. The Boston area has a deep, experienced crew base and is known for a no-fuss approach, and local filmmakers are close-knit and happy to pitch in on each other's films. We're also pretty confident that local guys Matt Damon and Ben Affleck will continue to champion the Boston scene by setting a movie here every

year or so through their company Artists Equity — as they did with the recent Apple TV+ film *The Instigators*, starring Damon and Casey Affleck. We also love many Massachusetts film festivals, including the genre-focused Boston Underground Film Festival and the inspiring Provincetown International Film Festival, and you'll find bountiful repertory screenings alongside new releases at movie palaces like the Coolidge Corner Theater and the Somerville Theatre. And Boston is just 50 miles to another city you'll read about in our Smaller Cities and Towns section — charming Providence, Rhode Island.



MATT DAMON, LEFT, AND CASEY AFFLECK WHILE MAKING *THE INSTIGATORS* IN BOSTON

17. PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

The Steel City can easily stand in for other places and even other time periods with its historic buildings, three rivers, beautiful bridges, and the nearby Allegheny mountains. Perhaps most famously, it served as parts of Christopher Nolan's *Gotham*, and more recently it has been the backdrop for Paramount+'s *Mayor of Kingstown*, starring Jeremy Renner. But Pittsburgh also has a character and storied history all its own. The city has a steady film and TV business thanks to hardworking, professional crews and incentives that include a

25% tax credit, with an additional 5% credit available for qualifying national productions filmed in certain local locations. The Pittsburgh Film Office has also backed a workforce development program called Create PA dedicated to diversifying behind-the-camera crew members and mentoring members of underrepresented communities. Permitting and location scouting are relatively simple, and fee-free locations include dramatic government buildings, scenic bridges, historic mansions, blast furnaces, and the Mount Washington overlook, which provides a sweeping view of the city's impressive skyline. Pittsburgh and its surroundings also offer tranquil natural beauty.

And aspiring filmmakers can learn their craft at many top-notch schools, including Carnegie Mellon University, which offers one of the best acting programs in the United States.

16. CLEVELAND, OHIO

The Man of Steel himself recently touched down in Cleveland, where James Gunn partially filmed his upcoming *Superman* movie from DC Studios. Ohio is going strong, too, offering \$75 million in tax incentives

per year, including a 30% rebate with no minimum number of shoot days to qualify. Cleveland's crew base is large, hardworking and experienced, and Cleveland's unique natural and historical filming locations include Lake Erie, the Victorian-era landmark the Cleveland Arcade, Cedar Point amusement park, and Squire's Castle, an 1890s gatehouse inspired by English and German baronial castles. The city's crowd-pleasing Cleveland International Film Festival turns up regularly on our list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, and Ohio's second-largest city is also home to distribution company Gravitas Ventures,



which recently acquired locally made production *Escaping Ohio*, directed by Jessica Michael Davis, who is from nearby Akron. We're very proud to support the film through MovieMaker Production Services.

15. TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Known for its Route 66 attractions, status as the birthplace of Leon Russell and JJ Cale's "Tulsa sound," and influence as a center of native American arts and culture, Tulsa is also having a big moment as a film and TV hub: Besides serving as the homebase for Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon*, it recently hosted Amazon's *Sarah's Oil* and the Paramount+'s Sylvester Stallone series *Tulsa King*.



TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Tulsa also provided many locations for Taika Waititi and Oklahoma local Sterlin Harjo's FX series *Reservation Dogs*. Getting film permits is simple, and films approved for the Filmed in Oklahoma Act can receive a rebate of 20-30%. And near Tulsa, the Cherokee National Film Incentive provides \$1 million annually for productions filmed within the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Film Institute, meanwhile, offers courses on best practices for filming on tribal lands. The local crews include both industry veterans

and rising talents drawn to the flurry of recent filmmaking in the region. Local theaters include the Circle Cinema, host of the Circle Cinema Film Festival.

14. PORTLAND, OREGON

Portland offers a blend of beauty and flexibility — both the ocean and mountains are close drives away, and parts of the city can easily double as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and a host of other cities. Residents' emphasis on good food and good living also make it

a pleasant place to decompress from industry stress, though it has its share of key players, including David Cress, producer of Nathan Fielder's *The Rehearsal*, *Portlandia* actress and Sleater-Kinney band member Carrie Brownstein, and *Good Will Hunting* director Gus Van Sant. Recent local productions have included Amazon Studios' *Criminal* and Netflix's *The Night Always Comes*, and tax incentives include a potential 25% rebate with a \$20 million cap per year. The city also has plentiful warehouse space that can be used as sound stages and a sizable, experienced crew base accustomed to film, TV and commercial work. Though it's very modern, it also has a strong respect for analog culture, from the revered Powell's Books to many record and comic-book stores to local movie houses like The Hollywood Theatre to the well-stocked video store Movie Madness. Prominent local film festivals include the constantly innovating Portland Festival of Cinema, Animation & Technology.



FILMING A SIMPLE MACHINE IN PORTLAND, OREGON

13. OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Having recently served as the location for the summer 2024 blockbuster *Twisters*, Oklahoma City — like Tulsa 100 miles to the northeast — is riding high. From the beautiful Scissortail Park in the heart of downtown to historic Film Row — home to major Hollywood film studios in the 1940s — to the Oklahoma River and Skydance Bridge, there are a wealth of cityscapes and landscapes to go around. The area also includes attractive state tax incentives like Oklahoma's 20-30% cash rebate and an additional local incentive of 5-10% that can be stacked on top. The local Oklahoma City Film and Creative Industries Office work with the city to turn around permits in a matter of days, making it easy to do business here. The city is also home to 600 crew members, making up 30% of the state's crew base as a whole. Additionally, Oklahoma City Community College has a very affordable program that is on our latest list of the 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada in 2024. The city's post facilities include the excellent Apex Post, which you can read much more about on page 62.

12. HOUSTON, TEXAS

The fourth-largest city in America — and biggest in Texas — has welcomed a large influx of film and TV professionals from Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, strengthening its crew

LEFT, PHOTO BY TYLER LANE PHOTOGRAPHY. COURTESY OF TULSA OFFICE OF FILM, MUSIC, ARTS & CULTURE; ABOVE, PHOTO BY ZACH LEWIS. COURTESY OF PORTLAND FILM OFFICE

base and industry presence all around. Houstonians old and new benefit from its affordability — it has the lowest cost of living of the four biggest cities — and from its diversity in every sense. The region offers striking locations in every direction, from piney woods to green farmland where cattle graze to the nearby Gulf of Mexico. The aforementioned Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program offers a 22.5% rebate, and recent local productions include movies like *40 Dates* and *Charliebird* and shows like Netflix's *Mo*. The city known for innovation keeps growing, and the Houston Film Commission emphasizes that all are welcome — it vows that when you film in Houston, you'll arrive a visitor and leave a local.

11. CINCINNATI, OHIO

Cincinnati got a boost in its cinematic reputation last year when Sundance named it as one of three finalists to be the prestigious festival's new home. (The other options are moving to Boulder, Colorado or staying put in Park City, Utah.) But people in the know have recognized Cincinnati as a film hub in good standing for many years. Film Cincinnati notes that the number of crews has nearly tripled in the last five years, and that members of the local film and TV industry have pulled together through trying

times for the industry at large to share opportunities. The city can crew two major features simultaneously, and even has a deep nonunion crew for commercial and TV work. Recent productions have included the new David Gordon Green holiday comedy *The Nutcrackers*, starring Ben Stiller, as well as Barry Levinson's upcoming gangster movie, *Alto Knights*, starring Robert DeNiro. It's also just across the river from Kentucky, where film production is very much on the rise. Filmmakers can straddle Ohio and Kentucky to capture both Midwestern and Southern flavors. Ohio has the added benefit of a 30% refundable tax credit, for above or below the line, and the city's cost of living is lower than the U.S. average. Local festivals include the Over the Rhine Film Festival, led by people from the local disabled community. And soon Sundance may join the local festival list.

10. PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia is many a cinephile's sentimental favorite thanks to the *Rocky* — and now *Creed* — franchise. It offers a state tax credit of up to 30% and there's little or no cost to shoot on most public properties. It offers a wide range of locations, from Revolutionary War-era homes right in the middle of the city to enclaves like the Golden

Block, Italian Market, and Chinatown, and some of the greatest museums in the country, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Its cost of living is close to the national average. But its secret weapon is its location: It's close enough to New York City that you can take occasional jobs there, and also a fairly short Amtrak away to Baltimore

and Washington, D.C. Recent projects shot locally include Ridley Scott's Apple TV+ series *Sinking Spring*. Local film festivals include Blackstar, a regular on our annual list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee.

9. VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Long the go-to West Coast alternative for film and TV projects that were priced out of Los Angeles, Vancouver has come into its own as a film hub that is many filmmakers' first choice. Recent film and TV projects include HBO's *The Last of Us*, Netflix's *Black Mirror*, and Showtime's *Yellowjackets*. It's gorgeous and very livable — Vancouver was ranked the seventh most liveable city in the world by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2024 — and it offers an efficient and convenient public transit system, fun nightlife, and a downtown you'll love exploring. You can also revel in locations ranging from the cobblestones of Gastown to the rain forest of Stanley Park to the Coliseum-inspired Vancouver Public Library. Local film incentives include a basic tax credit of 28% for international projects and 35% for Canadian projects. Filmmakers can also apply for other boosts including the DAVE (Digital, Animation, Visual Effects & Post Production) credit, which can be as high as 16%. Vancouver is also a great place to start out in the industry: The many film programs include the Vancouver Film School, which is on our latest list of the 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada, and the Centre for Digital Media.

8. AUSTIN, TEXAS

One of the most important places on earth for indie cinema, the home of SXSW and the Austin Film Festival isn't resting on its laurels: Recent productions that have filmed locally include *1923*, *Walker*, and local hero Richard Linklater's epic 20-year-long shoot *Merrily We Roll Along*. Besides excellent food, especially if you like

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOUSTON FILM COMMISSION





barbecue, it offers scenery that ranges from cityscapes to Lady Bird Lake to rolling hills to Austin's iconically weird-in-the-good way atmosphere. The nightlife scene is second to none, but it's also a lovely place to get up early and just go exploring. The same 22.5% rebate that applies in the rest of the Lone Star state is also of course available in the capital. And there's a sales tax exemption for items rented or purchased for use in productions, a tax refund on hotel rooms used for more than 30 consecutive days, and refunds for taxes on generator fuel. The region has more than 1,000 crew members and boasts many schools with great film programs, including most notably the University of Texas at Austin, one of our 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada.

7. MIAMI, FLORIDA

Miami will always have a commanding industry presence thanks to gorgeous beaches and abundant sunshine, but the region isn't coasting on its looks: Miami-Dade County has locked in business with the High Impact Film Fund Program, which offers a cash rebate of up to 20% for projects with a minimum spend of \$5 million. The Miami-Dade County TV, Film and Entertainment Production Incentive Program, meanwhile, offers a 10% cash rebate to projects for budgets above \$500,000. Both compensate for the lack of state film incentives. The local crew base is highly trained, and the permitting system is as breezy as a day

at the beach. The region has recently served as the location for *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*, Netflix's *Pulse*, and *The Real Housewives of Miami*, as well as music videos for Camila Cabello, Pitbull, and Bad Bunny. And it regularly hosts commercial shoots for a wide



AUSTIN, TEXAS

range of aspirational brands. Local film festivals include the American Black Film Festival, one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, and the beloved Miami Jewish Film Festival.

6. NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Shooting your project in New Orleans inevitably adds depth and character to your story: It's one of America's most compelling, captivating and historic cities, with a uniquely complex mix of cultures and boundless character. If you like music, food or architecture — at all — you may want to stay forever. The many incentives include a 25% base credit and a 10% increase for Louisiana screenplay productions. (There's also a 5% increase for shooting *outside* of the New Orleans Metro Statistical Area, but let's focus on New Orleans for the moment.) Recent local projects

include the *Mayfair Witches* and the upcoming sequels to *Spinal Tap* and *Five Nights at Freddy's*. The rich film scene includes the New Orleans Film Festival, one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, as well as the highly respected genre-focused Over-

look Film Festival. The crews are among the most experienced in the country, the film offices permitting as easy as possible, and the post facilities include the aforementioned Apex Post, which, again, you can read more about on page 62.

5. CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

We're thrilled to welcome Calgary to the top five on our list of the

best cities for moviemakers — though it's used to ranking high on lists. Last year's Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Livability Index ranked it the No. 5 city overall, in the entire world, and the top city in the Americas. Calgary is rising fast as a production hub, hosting high-profile projects like *The Last of Us* and *Fargo*. It was recognized for the latter at the 2024 Location Managers Guild Awards, in the Outstanding Locations in a Contemporary TV Series category. Calgary is very welcoming toward filmmakers — even those looking to move there permanently. And its many attractions include a lovely and modern downtown that gives way to stunning natural beauty nearby, from prairies to badlands to the Rockies. The local 22% tax credit can go up to 30% when Alberta-based owners or producers are involved. As of 2024, the eligibility criteria for some of Calgary's tax

PHOTO BY GINO BARASA. COURTESY OF AUSTIN FILM COMMISSION



CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

incentives were expanded to include some reality TV and game shows. The city is home to hearty crews who know how to perform in snowy conditions, and the great film festivals include the Calgary International Film Festival and the Calgary Underground Film Festival.

4. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Remember when Albuquerque hosted *Breaking Bad* — a show that seemingly everyone in the industry was watching — and a lot of productions made the decision to move to New Mexico? The same thing seems to be happening now with Chicago and industry darling *The Bear*. But Chicago was thriving even before the arrival of FX's awards magnet, thanks to productions including *The Chi* and Wolf Entertainment's *Chicago One* franchise. Long one of America's most vibrant and beloved cities, with a comedy and especially *improv* comedy history that is second to none, the city is going as strong as ever. It benefits from incentives that include a 30% credit on qualified production spending. And local schools with outstanding film programs include Columbia College Chicago and Northwestern University, both of which are on our list of the 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada. The cost of living is just slightly above the U.S. average, and outside the city limits are picture-

esque farmland, charming small towns, and cozily pretty suburbs that John Hughes made famous.

3. ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Long a home-base of superhero epics from both Marvel and DC, as well as the home of Tyler Perry Studios,

Atlanta has plenty of built-in business, buttressed by a 20% Georgia tax credit, which can be boosted another 10% for productions that use the state's famous peach logo. Recent productions that have shot in the area include *Cobra Kai* (about which you can read more on page 26), *P-Valley*, Marvel's *Thunderbolts* and Akiva Schaffe's upcoming update of *The Naked Gun*, starring Liam Neeson. The local crews are among the most professional and diverse in the business, with a shared commitment to excellence. Permitting is easy and conducted via Apply 4's Filmapp, and you'll have a wide range of gorgeous locations to film — and time to film them — thanks to Atlanta's sumptuous green spaces and near-year-round sunshine. The outlook is sunny, too — there's an optimism and energy to Atlanta that's impossible to miss. The local film festivals include the Atlanta Film Festival, one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee, and local schools include the magnificently curated Atlanta campus of the Savannah College of Art and Design, which combines inspiring architecture with artwork by students and alumni.

2. TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

Canada's largest city can feel in many ways like a film and TV industry utopia: In addition to hosting many of

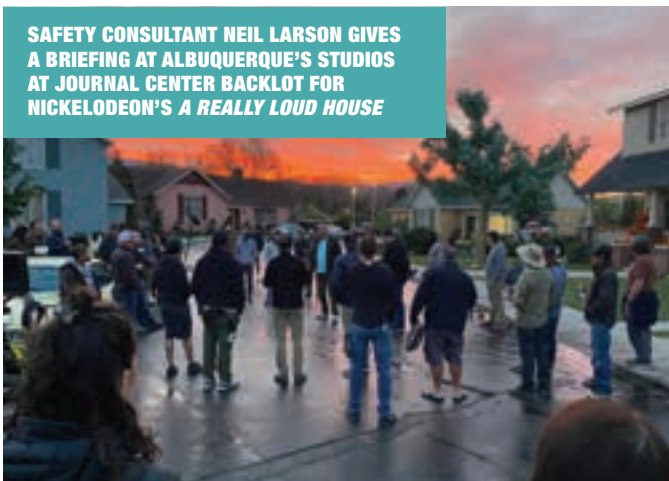
television's most popular shows, from *The Boys* to the *Star Trek* franchise, it raises the curtain on many of the best films of the year with the annual Toronto International Film Festival, which invites film icons from around the world to explore its clean, bustling streets. But Toronto isn't satisfied to merely produce great movies and television: The city works constantly to make the industry more innovative, green and inclusive. It offers power drops that allow productions to access clean energy from the city's electrical grid — a move expected to cut roughly 400 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year. It also provides training programs with a focus on welcoming underrepresented communities into the business. The city is the headquarters of the Black Screen Office, the Indigenous Screen Office, Disability Screen Office, the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television and the Canadian Film Centre, as well as Amazon Studios Canada and Netflix Canada. Sound stages and post-production facilities abound, and the VFX, animation and virtual production sectors are thriving. The diverse city of 3 million employs 35,000 industry professionals who are among the best in the world, and Toronto can convincingly stand in for many other locations. (It is especially good at substituting for New York City, which it has done countless times.) Toronto's many tax benefits include a 35% credit for all labor costs by eligible production companies and an enhanced credit rate of 40% on the first \$240,000 for qualifying labor expenditures for first-time producers. Excellent equipment rental facilities include Sunbelt Rentals Film & TV (formerly known as William F. White International), and the impressive film programs include the Toronto Film School — one of our 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada. Toronto has also produced some of our favorite filmmakers, including the fiercely original David Cronenberg. You can read our interview with him on page 83.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALGARY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque makes its triumphant return as the top big city on our list of the Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker, a position it also held for four consecutive years from 2019 through 2022. But it was never far from the top of the list, thanks to its bustling production schedule, deep crew base, excellent tax credits, affordability, light traffic, abundant natural beauty, and — most of all — commitment to growing its film industry. It's no wonder so many of the greatest filmmakers on earth are working in the Land of Enchantment: Recent local productions include Ari Aster's *Eddington*, Ethan Coen and Tricia Cooke's *Honey Don't*, and a new Jordan Peele film. There's also plenty of mystery and anticipation around *Wycaro 339*, the working title of a new project from Vince Gilligan, whose *Breaking Bad* helped spark the resurgence of New Mexico's film and TV industry by showing all that the state has to offer. Truly diverse and culturally rich — especially if you love Native American art — Albuquerque leads a thriving New Mexico film industry that also includes Santa Fe and Las Cruces, both of which are coming up on our list of the Best Smaller Cities and Towns. Netflix and NBC Universal are among major players that have made use of Albuquerque's Local Economic Development Act money for ambitious studio builds that should keep the local industry presence strong for years to come. The maximum local tax credit is 35%, and there's a 10% uplift for filming outside the major hubs of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, which — in a state with little traffic — mea-

you could live in one of those hubs and work in a community outside of them. (You can easily commute between Santa Fe and Albuquerque.) But you can also find almost anything you need in the city: Albuquerque owns roughly 30,000 acres of open space for filming — including rocky foothills, pine forests and deserts — and film commissioner Cyndy McCrossen is masterful at helping filmmakers find their perfect location. The skilled crews can handle up to 12 productions at once, and are growing thanks in part to state-backed production assistant boot camps and IATSE Training Center workshops about everything from accounting to firearms to handling heavy equipment. As for quality of life, prepare for excellent Mexican food and a shot at home ownership: The median price of a home in New Mexico is about \$370,000, which will buy you about one-third of a house in Los Angeles. And if you still miss L.A., it's a two-hour flight from the pleasant and convenient Albuquerque International Sunport, one of the only airports we'd describe as "pleasant and convenient." Welcome back, ABQ, to the top spot on our Big Cities list.



SAFETY CONSULTANT NEIL LARSON GIVES A BRIEFING AT ALBUQUERQUE'S STUDIOS AT JOURNAL CENTER BACKLOT FOR NICKELODEON'S *A REALLY LOUD HOUSE*

BEST SMALLER CITIES AND TOWNS

10. (TIE) MISSOULA, MONTANA

Yellowstone is the one-word answer for why Missoula is thriving as an industry draw: It's one of several Montana towns that have benefited from the Paramount+ hit's move from Utah. Besides shooting office scenes aplenty in Helena, and the Dutton ranch in Darby, the show has also shot crucial scenes on the streets of Missoula and its now-famous Ruby's Cafe. The *Yellowstone* offshoot *1923* also shoots locally, and regional crews have handled productions for everyone from Nat Geo to A24. The state makes itself even prettier with a 20% base incentive on expenditures, plus a 25% incentive for in-state crew and 15% incentive for out-of-state crew. As an added bonus, there's no sales tax statewide. Missoula is home to the beloved Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, which holds the rare distinction of being one of our 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee and 25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World. In her testimonial for the latter list, filmmaker Hadley Austin noted, "you can go on a proper hike in Missoula by simply picking a direction and walking until the sidewalk leads to trails."



MISSOULA, MONTANA

ABOVE: PHOTO BY MATT TOPLIKAR, COURTESY OF ONE ALBUQUERQUE FILM OFFICE; BELOW: PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTANA OFFICE OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

10. (TIE) KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Returning to our list for the third year, Kamloops gets its name from an English translation of the Shuswap word for “where the rivers meet.” It’s increasingly also where filmmakers meet. Located 200 miles inland from Vancouver, Kamloops is in the gorgeous



KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Thompson-Nicola region of British Columbia, home to an assortment of natural wonders, from waterfalls to grasslands to forests to deserts to snowy mountaintops, as well as ranches and ski resorts. The region has capitalized on its wide diversity of locations by also offering some of the most attractive tax incentives in the world — they can climb as high as 53.5%. Recent projects to take advantage of the many advantages include Nick Butler’s upcoming *Lunar Sway* and *Jurassic World: Dominion*. The local crew base is small but mighty, including many with decades of experience. The Kamloops Film Society holds five film festivals annually — the Main Kam Film Fest, Indigenous Film Fest, Cineloops French Film Fest, Black Film Fest and Queer Film Fest — and the Kamloops film offices are friendly and eager to support both local and visiting productions.

9. KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

Affordable and beautiful, Knoxville has served as the backdrop for shows

like TV One’s *Fatal Attraction* and Tubi’s upcoming *Famously Haunted: Hollywood*. The state of Tennessee has a cash rebate of 25% and a qualified production credit that can offset up to 50% of franchise and excise tax liability. Additionally, the Visit Knoxville Film Office offers an incentive of up to 5% of a production’s total budget on certain projects. Filming is free at many very photogenic locations, including World’s Fair Park, Market Square, the Old City, Gay Street and Augusta Quarry. Knoxville is also home to the Regal Theaters chain, as well as Film Fest Knoxville.

8. LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

Las Cruces is growing fast as a film scene, thanks in part to its affordability and some of the best film incentives in the country: Its 40% refundable tax credit includes a 5% uplift incentive for New Mexico productions shot outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Its commitment to growth is also clear from the state’s recently announced \$15 million studio and soundstage facility, the New Mexico Media Arts Collective, to be located at New Mexico State University’s Arrowhead Park. It will not only service incoming film productions, but also offer training in emerging technology. Recent produc-

tions shot in the region include *Joe’s College Road Trip*, starring and directed by Tyler Perry, and “Summer Machine,” from Santa Fe resident George R. R. Martin. In addition to unique locations that include stately mansions, inimitable adobe homes, and nearby White Sands National Park, Las Cruces can also stand in successfully for palm-tree-studded Los Angeles and many other cities. The region prides itself on quick turnarounds for film permitting, and Film Las Cruces offers guidance through the entire process — Las Cruces film liaison Andrew Jara is an accomplished indie filmmaker himself, and understands filmmakers’ needs. And as we mentioned in our El Paso entry, Las Cruces and El Paso are closely connected, so there’s a two-for-the-price-of-one benefit to living in either city.

7. ASHLAND, OREGON

Stories ring out through the oak trees of Ashland, famous for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. This lushly gorgeous, very charming town of about 21,000 has recently welcomed independent films including *Ernie and Emma*, *Pelican* and *Backseat Driver*, shorts like “In a Pickle,” and the HBO feature documentary *Thoughts and Prayers*. The state tax incentives include a 25% cash rebate on goods and



“IN A PICKLE” CO-DIRECTOR COURTNEY WILLIAMS, CINEMATOGRAPHER MAX MASCOLO, PRODUCER GARY KOUT, A.D. LEVI ANDERSON, AND CO-DIRECTOR AND ACTOR MONICA CORTEZ SHOOTING IN ASHLAND, OREGON

LEFT, PHOTO COURTESY OF THOMPSON-NICOLA FILM COMMISSION; BELOW, PHOTO BY PRATEEK SHARMA



services and a 20% cash rebate on labor, and the rebates go up slightly for productions filmed outside of the Portland metropolitan area, including in Ashland. There's no fee to film in Oregon on state parks or any sales tax in the state. The local crew base is passionate, and local film schools include Southern Oregon University's Digital Cinema program, one of our 30 Best Film Schools in the U.S. and Canada. Local festivals include the Ashland Independent Film Festival.

6. ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

Sunny St. Petersburg is famed for its flawless beaches and inclusive art scene, which extends to an embrace of film and TV projects: free film permits, lively locations and almost year-round good weather are a magnet for productions from films to reality shows to commercials. The St. Pete-Clearwater Film Commission has also launched a strong solution to Florida's lack of statewide film incentives. The local Screen Industry Incentive Program offers a 15% cash rebate on qualified expenditures in Pinellas County, which includes both St. Pete and nearby Clearwater. A project can also qualify for up to an additional 15% in uplift incentives. Local crews are professional and eager to work, and the commission offers a keyword-searchable online production guide to help filmmakers find crew and support services. Inspiration

(L-R) DANIELLE DEADWYLER, JOHN DAVID WASHINGTON, SKYLAR ALEECE SMITH, MALCOLM WASHINGTON, KATIA WASHINGTON, AND MICHAEL POTTS BEFORE THE SCAD SAVANNAH FILM FESTIVAL SCREENING OF *THE PIANO LESSON* AT THE TRUSTEES THEATER



is all around, including at the Salvador Dalí Museum and four-acre Sunken Gardens botanical gardens.

5. SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

History drapes Savannah like Spanish moss from the trees, and filmmakers luxuriate in options thanks to locations that include beautiful squares, stately homes and the romantic sweep of nearby Tybee Island. It is not just part of American history, but film history, having hosted productions including *Forrest Gump* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, as well as the more recent *May December*. Every year its charms are on display at the SCAD Savannah Film Festival, which attracts A-list talent who share advice with SCAD's talented student filmmakers. Many of those students find that they can stay in town after graduation thanks to the thriving

film scene, boosted by SCAD's impressive Hollywood-style backlog. Georgia tax incentives include a 20% base transferable credit and an extra 10% for productions that use the Georgia peach logo. Local Savannah incentives include a 10% cash rebate, and there's also a \$25,000 bonus incentive for hiring 50% of the crew locally.

4. PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Known for its scrappy and vibrant arts scene, Providence is full of life — and the steady stream of students to the Rhode Island School of Design, Brown University, and Providence College nearby keep the scene fresh. So does a 30% transferable tax credit that includes above the line talent, and a low threshold of just \$100,000 that allows small-budget productions to take advantage of the program. The Farrelly brothers have showcased their home state with many films shot around Providence, including *Me, Myself & Irene* and *Dumb & Dumber*, and recent productions include James L. Brooks' *Ella McCay*. For bustling and artsy city streets, check out Thayer and Wickenden, and for an authentic Italian neighborhood — and some of the most delicious Italian restaurants around — head to Federal Hill. Rhode Island may be the smallest state in the nation, but it has a hardworking crew base and the community is extremely film friendly. And they don't call it the Ocean State for nothing — not far from Providence are some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. You're also just a short drive from Boston, which appears, of course, on our list of the best Big Cities for moviemakers. You can easily travel to shoots there.

ON THE SET OF *ELLA MCCAY* AT RHODE ISLAND STATE HOUSE



ABOVE, PHOTO BY DIA DIPASUPLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR SCAD; BELOW, PHOTO COURTESY OF RHODE ISLAND FILM & TV OFFICE

3. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

Wilmington just celebrated 40 years since producer Dino DeLaurentiis brought his 1984 horror thriller *Firestarter* to town and ignited the town's reputation as a Southern film powerhouse. Since then, in film from *Blue Velvet* to *I Know What You Did Last Summer* to *The Black Phone* to *Halloween Kills*, Wilmington has played up its wholesome Anytown U.S.A. charm — to be juxtaposed

ing Cucalorus Film Festival, a regular on our list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee.

2. FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Fort Lauderdale is a mere 30 miles from downtown Miami but has its own busy, star-studded film and TV scene: The long list of local productions includes the films *How to Frame a Family*, *Hot Girl Winter*, and *Wish You Were Here* (Julia Stiles' directorial debut), as

million, for productions spending at least \$5 million in Broward County. It also offers a \$10,000 grant for Broward County-based emerging filmmakers.

1. SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Yes: Albuquerque is our top big city, and nearby Santa Fe leads our list of the top Smaller Cities and Towns. Santa Fe is a bit more expensive than Albuquerque — and the average U.S. city — but that's pretty much its only drawback. It's far more affordable than Los Angeles or New York City, and you'll be hard-pressed to find another location with a better ratio of population — it has just 90,000 residents — to film and TV industry spend. The home of *Oppenheimer* has also recently hosted projects including *The Lost Bus*, *Opus*, *Ransom Canyon*, *Eddington*, *Trap House*, and *Killing Faith*. And the AMC series *Dark Winds* shoots in the Tesuque Pueblo's Camel Rock Studios, a former casino converted into an Indigenous-owned film powerhouse. Other top-notch facilities in the region include Santa Fe Studios, with two 20,000 square-foot soundstages, and the indoor/outdoor offerings include the sprawling Bonanza Creek Ranch. Then there's the tax credit of up to 35%. We recently attended the Santa Fe International Film Festival and were very impressed by the energy and optimism of local New Mexico filmmakers, as well as the low-key influence of the town's many high-profile residents: *Game of Thrones* creator George R.R. Martin, for example, co-owns, with Magnolia Pictures founder Bill Banowsky, the Sky Railway train line, used in *Oppenheimer*, and owns the repertory-focused Jean Cocteau Cinema. The quality of life is also quite high: you're surrounded by art and natural beauty, from mountains to deserts, and Santa Fe is a foodie paradise. As we mentioned in our Albuquerque entry, you can easily fly to Los Angeles for meetings. But you could also just do Angelenos the favor of inviting them to Santa Fe. It's our top Smaller City for the third consecutive year.



SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

against spooky stories. But it's not just about horror movies. Coming-of-age stories and romances like *The Summer I Turned Pretty* may be an even better fit for its many beloved beaches and historic Riverwalk. The city has built up a phenomenal crew base, some members of which go back two or three generations. It's not at all uncommon for Hollywood productions to hire an almost all-local crew. Expertise abounds: Roughly 30 members of the Directors Guild of America call Wilmington home, including unit production managers and first and second assistant directors. The state keeps TV and film productions coming with a 25% rebate on qualifying expenses and purchases. Improbably, given its charm and beauty, Wilmington has a cost of living a bit below average. It's also home of the collaborative and welcom-

well as the telenovelas *Vuelve a Mi* and *Sed de Veganza*, and a slew of reality shows. Commercial work also abounds: Everyone wants to take advantage of the beaches and almost year-round sunshine. The region just announced a new state-of-the-art complex that is expected to include up to 200,000 square feet of sound stage space and add 1,000 jobs. The entertainment company Infinite Reality will be the primary tenant. Greater Fort Lauderdale film commissioner and Film Florida president Sandy Lighterman will be your guide to all things film and television in the region, offering detail-oriented support in every area of production. And Fort Lauderdale offsets Florida's lack of statewide incentives by offering many of its own, including the High Impact Film & TV rebate of 20%, capped at \$2

PHOTO COURTESY OF SANTA FE FILM OFFICE