

HOME > FILM > SPOTLIGHT

AUGUST 23, 2019 9:00AM PT

# How Italy Entices Big-Budget Film and TV Projects to Shoot on the Peninsula

By NICK VIVARELLI



CREDIT: COURTESY OF PETER MOUNTAIN/NETFLIX

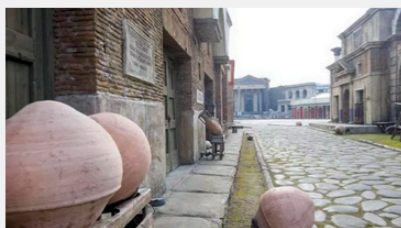
This summer there is lots of action on the Italian peninsula.

“No Time to Die,” the latest James Bond film, is shooting amid cave dwellings in the ancient southern town of Matera, while Christopher Nolan’s latest, “Tenet,” is encamped in Ravello, a jewel overlooking the Amalfi coast. Terrence Malick is in Anzio, a central seaport, where cameras are rolling on his drama “The Last Planet,” which will reportedly depict passages in the life of Christ.

A little further north, on the grounds of Rome's Cinecittà World theme park, Sky's high-end Rome-origins skein "Romulus," filming in archaic Latin, is in the midst of a 28-week shoot, while Luca Guadagnino's HBO/Sky show "We Are Who We Are," set on a U.S. Army base, is about to go into production in Padua.

"There is a production surge under way," says "Romulus" producer Riccardo Tozzi, chief of ITV-owned Cattleya. "The whole sector is fully employed. So much so, that it's gotten tough to assemble a crew."

## RELATED



**Revamped Cinecittà Set for More U.S. Shoots, Including Netflix's 'Luna Nera'**

**Rome's Cinecittà Makes Major Upgrades to Soundstages, Backlot**

Giancarlo Leone, head of Italy's TV producers' association APA, estimates a 150% growth in international TV productions coming to Italy over the course of 2019-20, compared with 2017-18. By the end of next year, more than 25 high-end international shows will have shot in Italian locations, he says, while there were 10 series lensed in the country over the past two years.

Leone also estimates that this year, TV production spend in the Italian territory will total \$423 million, a sum generated by independent producers, broadcasters, streaming platforms and the country's tax credit.

The surge in international film and TV shoots is driven by tax credits and regional incentives and also by the ability of Italian directors including Guadagnino and Paolo Sorrentino, whose series "The New Pope" will launch at the Venice Film Festival, to speak to international audiences.

"Bond 25" line producer Enzo Sisti calls the 30% Italian tax credit with a €20 million (roughly \$22.6 million) cap "the best in the world." It's not the money in itself that makes it so, he says, but the fact that it's a cash-back structure. "You can use 80% of the incentive while you shoot," Sisti notes. And the small gap that is left is paid back by local production service companies within six weeks. "This is what makes it so attractive," he says.

Cinecittà chief Roberto Cicutto notes the edge that the system gives Italy: "Depending on your spend, you know that you will get a [specific] percentage of that back," he says. And, unlike Germany, there is no spend minimum to tap into the funds, "which is crucial," he points out.

Sisti serviced the latest "Bond" in Matera and in the Apulia region. Before that, he handled a five-week Cinecittà shoot of Netflix's feature "The Two Popes," directed by Fernando Meirelles. He also worked on Hulu's "Catch-22," shot mainly in Sardinia.

“There’s an ongoing process under way of regained trust between Hollywood and Italy,” says Cicutto. “This stems from the obvious fact that the U.S. studios and platforms are now greenlighting more narratives set in Europe and Italy.”

Meanwhile, state broadcaster [RAI](#), which produces 70% of the country’s TV drama output, has been broadening its horizons. [RAI](#) has been focusing on some big international co-productions by investing roughly one-third of its roughly \$224 million annual budget on high-end, globally minded shows such the “Medici” series, “My Brilliant Friend,” “The Name of the Rose” and the upcoming “Leonardo” which, like “Medici,” has Frank Spotnitz as showrunner.

“RAI Fiction’s basic storytelling philosophy is centered around the idea of narrating Italy and the diversity of the country’s territory. Not just as backdrops, but as the pervading spirit from which these stories spring forth,” says its chief executive Eleonora Andreatta.

The second season of “Friend,” titled “The Story of a New Name,” is shooting near Naples.

Cicutto, who is a former producer, points out that Italian narratives are becoming a source of inspiration for international TV dramas and films — and even contemporary tales that aren’t costume pieces.

“When we went to Hollywood recently everyone told us they were in contact with producers who had Italian intellectual properties,” he says.

And they were interested in finding more.

Cinecittà, which coordinates the internationalization of Italy’s industry in tandem with motion picture association ANICA and the country’s film commissions and regional funds, will soon launch an initiative focused on U.S. publishers who publish Italian novels and people who do scouting of Italian narratives for U.S. platforms and studios.

The Rome studios are the nexus of a multi-pronged effort to make Italy a major global industry player again.

Another key plank of this effort is Rome’s MIA market for TV series, feature films and documentaries that launched five years ago.

“It puts together the country’s creative forces and Italy’s resources as a territory,” says MIA chief Lucia Milazzotto. “It’s a platform where the international industry can find all the Italian elements it needs.”

Projects that have germinated from MIA include “Eternal City,” a high-end series from Belgian writer Carl Joos (“Cordon”). RAI and France Televisions have teamed on that project.

Other promotional initiatives to help the Italian industry gain more international traction include former Taormina Film Festival G.M. Tiziana Rocca’s Filming in Italy/Los Angeles event that promotes Italian cinema, TV, locations and talent. Last year Rocca introduced the Rome Lazio Film Commission and its fund to Hollywood.

“The idea is to introduce the assets of a different region each year to entice U.S. producers,” Rocca says.

There is also a new festival dedicated to Italian TV product being launched in Los Angeles by Italian journalists Valentina Martelli and Francesca Scorucchi and prominent advertising executive Marco Testa, who are all based in L.A., and also Rome-based publicist Cristina Scognamillo. They will present this showcase, called ITTV the Italian TV Festival, on Sept. 19 at Soho House in West Hollywood with a one-day event and a panel titled Opening Boundaries featuring a chat with U.S. director and producer Peter Landesman (“Mark Felt: The Man Who Brought Down the White House”).

Of course, Italy’s push to gain more international traction isn’t limited to Hollywood.

Roberto Stabile, head of international relations for Italian motion picture association ANICA, points out Italy is part of Ibermedia, the multimillion-dollar pan-regional film fund for co-productions with Spain, Portugal and Latin America, though this has yet to yield a major joint project. More importantly, Stabile says sales of Italian movies to China has grown from three titles over three years to 67 pics so far this year (including to platforms).

The Chinese remake of Italian concept movie “Perfect Strangers” hit the No. 5 spot at the Chinese box office this year, and at the Venice film festival, he has high hopes of announcing two high-profile Italy/China co-productions to be shot in Italy.