

SANTA FE § STUDIOS

MovieMaker

The Best Places to Live and Work as a Moviemaker 2017

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18 January 2017

Small Cities and Towns:

2. Santa Fe, New Mexico

Moving up from last year's fourth place to a strong second, the city of Santa Fe placed a concerted emphasis on moviemaking in 2016. While Savannah expanded its preexisting local commission, the New Mexico town established a brand new one: the Santa Fe Film Office, a joint city/county office with a full-time staff and additional contract employees which opened in March, 2016.

The move is a ringing endorsement of Santa Fe's big-screen potential, and coincided with a wave of big productions. Scott Cooper's *Hostiles*, with Christian Bale, Rosamund Pike and Wes Studi, was shot among the red rocks of the nearby 21,000-acre Ghost Ranch. Jessica Chastain plays the real-life woman who met with Native American leader Sitting Bull in the 19th century in *Woman Walks Ahead*. Other buzzy titles rounding out the pack were *Granite Mountain*, *Villa Capri*, *Ideal Home*, *Cliffs of Freedom*, *Titan* and *Justice*—a veritable star-studded bonanza.

Why is half of Hollywood decamping to the second smallest town in these pages (population 70,000)? Beyond an uptick in neo-Westerns, perhaps, it's likely for that excellent New Mexico refundable tax credit of up to 30 percent (and the lack of a minimum spend to qualify for the incentive is pretty indie-friendly). The production and post resources befit a much bigger city, from MBS Equipment at **Santa Fe Studios** to Garson Studios at Santa Fe University of Art and Design (SFUAD), housing the largest permanent green screen in the state.

Make good friends within the industry in order to have the very best crew members possible," suggests *Smoke Signals* and *Edge of America* director Chris Eyre, who's also on the Santa Fe Independent Film Festival advisory board, "because everyone wants them in New Mexico!" He believes that moviemakers can have a "very good lifestyle here, by networking and participating as a crew member for other television and film happening all around the state. The New Mexico community is not massive, so relationships mean more."

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A *Song of Ice and Fire* author George R. R. Martin owns the local Jean Cocteau Cinema, which he says he wants to make "important a part of Santa Fe's future: the most eclectic and unpredictable venue in town, with its mix of films old and new, large and small, author readings, book signings, live music, comedy, burlesque, magic shows and karaoke." Indeed, beyond cinema, Santa Fe is famously arts-focused. The UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts teems with museums, galleries and jewelry shops, plus the world-class Santa Fe Opera and acclaimed Aspen Santa Fe Ballet.

Acclaimed Hawaii-born underground moviemaker Jon Moritsugu now calls New Mexico home. He loves the fact that there are "mainstream as well as total scuzzball productions always going off." But more than that, he says, "there is something sublime about the space out here. I've done my best writing and filmmaking in Santa Fe and I know it's because of what 'isn't here.'"

Eyre concurs: The place is just plain inspiring. "It is really still an untapped place for storytellers in America to discover." Just don't forget to figure out how you like your chiles: red, green or Christmas.