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52 Camera-Ready Locations

New Jersey's diverse range of landscapes continues to attract productions of all sizes.

54 Purpose-Built for Film, TV

The state's investment in infrastructure has led to an influx of soundstages and local businesses.

56 Talented Community

A first-rate workforce has helped Jersey to become a major hub for East Coast productions.

57 Makes Economic Sense

Strategic financial incentives make the Garden State stand out as a go-to filming destination.



Production Surge Brings Hollywood to New Jersey Locales

The state is one of the top three destinations for film and TV in the country **BY ADDIE MORFOOT**

When the New Jersey Film and Digital Media Tax Credit Program, one of the most competitive film tax incentives in the country, was enacted at the end of 2018, Hollywood took notice. Productions initially began to rely on the state as a substitute for New York City's five boroughs, as Hoboken and Jersey City's brownstones made for ideal stand-ins for Manhattan and Brooklyn. But today, the state's diverse range of landscapes and locations continues to attract productions of all sizes. In the six years since Gov. Phil Murphy inaugurated the program, the Garden State has doubled for a wide range of locales, including New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, New England, Los Angeles and Florida, as well as



From Jersey City and Cape May to the mountains, Hollywood has relied on the Garden State's diverse locations for productions.

Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

"You can go from a big-city Manhattan look-alike in Newark, Patterson, Hoboken or Jersey City, and then to Trenton for your Washington, D.C., lookalike," says Jon Crowley, executive director of the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission. "And if you need a small-town Main Street, it's probably only 30 minutes away from wherever you are — and between all of that, there are mountains with snow, lakes and horse farms."

The state's geographically diverse landscape, which comes with a diverse pool of talent, ample parking and film-friendly local communities, has proven to be an asset to an increasing number

of productions every year.

"In August and September of 2024, we had more production than Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico," says Crowley.

Almost 99% of the 2024 musical biopic "A Complete Unknown" was filmed in New Jersey over the course of a 60-day shoot. In the movie, 20 cities and towns across 10 counties substitute for New York, California, Texas, Georgia and Rhode Island. Scenes set in Greenwich Village were shot in Hoboken, while Bleecker and MacDougal streets were re-created in Jersey City.

In total, the cast and crew spent a single day filming in New York City. "If we had to do this movie in New York, I don't know if it could have been

PHOTOS: CHOOSE NEW JERSEY



done, because there has been so much change and so much turnover in Manhattan,” says Chris Coyne, a location scout on “A Complete Unknown.”

Anthony Pisani, who served as the film’s location manager, enjoyed the novelty of bringing a production across the Hudson River. “What makes it great in Jersey is the lack of filming fatigue,” says Pisani. “I know that Jersey has had plenty of filming, and it’s getting much more popular with all the stages coming up. But there is still that Christmas

“In August and September of 2024, we had more production than Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico.”

— JON CROWLEY
Executive director of the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission

morning excitement about it where people come and spectate a set.”

In addition to local hospitality, Pisani was impressed with the state’s Motion Picture and Television Commission. “The accessibility is what separates Jersey from the neighboring states, in that you can get on the phone with anyone at any time,” he says. “If there was ever a problem, [the commission] immediately called right back, and it ended right away.”

The commission acts as negotiators between productions and local



municipalities, working to find collaborative solutions, Crowley explains: “If a town or city was going to do intermittent traffic control on a Monday, and talent gets sick and production is like, ‘Can we move to Friday?’ and the police chief says, ‘No, we can’t do that on a Friday,’ we’ll step in and help find a collaborative solution.”

The film’s production also traveled to Cape May, the southernmost tip of the state. The summertime destination on the Jersey Shore, known for its pristine beaches, preserved Victorian buildings and quaint promenade, was transformed into Newport, Rhode Island, over a six-day period. A local motel was transformed into the iconic Viking Motel, locals were cast as extras dressed in 1960s attire and vintage cars lined the streets.

“I did several meetings with the town, and they were great to deal with,” says Pisani. “All of the businesses were supported by us. The coffee shops I’m sure boomed.”

In addition to supporting businesses in the area, production assistants were hired from Cape May County. All told, “A Complete Unknown” spent \$80 million to film in the state, according to a tax incentive application.

“It can only help that people continually see New Jersey in different ways and different lights,” says Coyne. “I’m very proud of ‘A Complete Unknown’ and what it has showcased and shown off, in terms of the state.”



Business Is Booming: Jersey's Network of Soundstages, Services Attracting Big Names

Significant investments in infrastructure have interested more studios and producers **BY ADDIE MORFOOT**

When the New Jersey Film and Digital Media Tax Credit Program launched in late 2018, construction on soundstages across the state immediately commenced. Film and television productions that couldn't find space in New York began pouring into the neighboring state, leading to an influx of developers.

Scott Levy was one of them. In 2021, over the course of a year, he built and outfitted 10 Basin Studios in Kearny. The result is a 46,840-square-foot facility that includes a 36,000-square-foot stage. The remaining 10,840 square feet are used as office space, flex space and on-premise parking.

"We sound-attenuated all the openings in the stage space with real sound-attenuated doors and walls," says Levy. "We added 150 tons of

"We moved Eastern Effects to New Jersey to capitalize on the much better cost of operating in New Jersey as a business."

— **SCOTT LEVY**
Owner of Eastern Effects
and 10 Basin Studios

HVAC to the building, which is completely soundproof."

The building's roof was reinforced with structural steel, and the entire facility was insulated. "We did everything needed to really make this professional and functional for film and television productions," says Levy.

The effort paid off. In the past two years, several productions have utilized 10 Basin Studios — one of 70 stages in New Jersey. Most recently, "Kiss of the Spider Woman," a feature adaptation of the award-winning Broadway musical, and the upcoming crime thriller "RIP" spent four months at the studio.

"For 'RIP,' the state supported production with coordination of location support needs, additional space needs, and of course, the expansive tax incentives benefitted the overall production budget," Levy shares.

With another three major production facilities under construction, the state has the potential to become the country's biggest backlot by 2027. "These facilities will definitely put us on even footing with any of our domestic counterparts," says Jon Crowley, the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission's executive director.

Michael Uslan, chairman of the New Jersey Film Commission and executive producer of the "Batman" franchise of motion pictures, adds: "We are nipping at Atlanta's heels, and once the stage walls are up at various studio builds, I'm confident

PHOTOS: VISIT ATLANTIC CITY, CINELEASE



we'll slide into the No. 3 spot for domestic production, right after New York and L.A."

Netflix will transform a 292-acre parcel in Monmouth County into 12 soundstages totaling nearly 500,000 square feet of new development, with the remainder of the property slated for redevelopment with supporting film uses and community amenities. The campus is projected to be an economic engine, creating more than 1,500 permanent production jobs and more than 3,500 construction-related jobs.

Situated on 58 acres of land in the Bergen Point neighborhood of Bayonne, 1888 Studio will feature



With several major production facilities under construction, Jersey has the potential to become the country's biggest backlot by 2027.

350,000 square feet of production support space, outdoor backlot space, office spaces, lighting and grip facilities and a parking garage.

Additionally, the 12-acre Great Point Studios will construct a full-service 300,000-square-foot complex that includes production stages ranging from 20,000 to 30,000 square feet, as well as offices, support space and parking.

"The cherry on the cake is what the studios are doing to the neighborhood — it's going to be transformative," says Gov. Phil Murphy.

New Jersey's significant investment in infrastructure doesn't stop at soundstages. LED panels, grip and electric gear, cameras and set-construction facilities have been popping up all over the state in the last 12 months.

"A lot of people from the West Coast have no idea what New Jersey is all about. And they don't know if we have the infrastructure," says Crowley. "We have everything you need for production. If you want to do work on a

volume stage, we have three different companies that handle that. You need G&E gear — got it. We did not have motion picture cameras in the state for a time. Now, one of our companies, PRG Gear, took on the task and brought in [several]."

The state is also home to two lumber companies: LeNoble Lumber in Edison and Prince Lumber in Newark. New Jersey also boasts Levy's Eastern Effects, a location lighting equipment and studio rental and trucking company. Levy brought the company to Wood-Ridge in 2021 after 25 years in New York.

"We moved Eastern Effects to New Jersey to capitalize on the much better cost of operating in New Jersey as a business," says Levy. "Every type of service we have used has been less expensive than in New York. All boats rise with more business in Jersey. More soundstages and studios will help draw more full-time workers, more productions, and thus, more economic benefit to the state."



Top-Tier Crews Thrive in New Jersey

The combination of experienced crews and training programs creates a sustainable ecosystem for film and TV production **BY MEREDITH OGILVIE-THOMPSON**

The concentration of experienced film professionals living in New Jersey is proving a powerful advantage in the state's ambitious push to become a major hub for film and television production. And, with some 40% of the greater New York area's film crews already calling the Garden State home, it may well be a secret weapon in a broader strategy of inclusive economic growth.

"We have the largest experienced workforce outside of New York City or Los Angeles," says Gov. Phil Murphy. "While a great number of the tristate area's skilled workers already live in New Jersey, we are developing programs to grow that number locally, thanks to coordinated initiatives with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), the production community, the local unions and our higher education institutions. It's an inclusive approach that is about creating more opportunities for all people."

Specifically, the state is launching a major workforce training push through the New Jersey Film Academy to support its booming film industry. Starting in spring 2025, four community

"Workforce development is a key factor in ensuring that we create a pathway of properly trained New Jerseyans who will be ready to work on these productions close to home."

— GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY

colleges will begin offering hands-on training programs designed to prepare students for jobs in film and television production.

The initiative, developed through the Center of Workforce Innovation for Film and Television Production with support from the New Jersey Council of Community Colleges, aims to help students attain the credentials they'll need for a job in the industry. Experienced instructors and programs developed with industry input will help ensure the academy provides the kind of practical training that production companies are looking for.

"Getting folks in on the earliest phases and stages of their career into the film industry is a huge opportunity and friendly obligation of ours," says Tim Sullivan, executive director of the NJEDA.

For New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission executive director Jon Crowley, providing meaningful, in-depth coursework across various disciplines, such as lighting, grip work, art department and editing, is paramount.

"We're talking a lot about workforce development and with the unions about

helping us with teaching," says Crowley. "Not only survey classes or bootcamps, but also meaningful, in-depth courses that provide best-practice training from pros who are currently working in the industry."

Being able to work locally is an appealing and far less expensive alternative to commuting into New York City, notes Scott Levy, who opened an outpost of his Eastern Effects studio, 10 Basin Studios, in Kearny in 2021.

"For us, operating the studio facility in New Jersey versus being in New York lends itself to being more financially friendly — [it's a more] affordable operation," he says. "And those savings get passed on to the end user, which are the film and television productions that come from all over."

Simply put, having such a substantial portion of skilled workers already based in New Jersey means easier logistics and, often, more enthusiastic participation, especially given the lower cost of living, better schools and better availability of housing in the state than its competitors in California and New York.

"Studios and networks understand that happy crews are productive crews,

PHOTOS: SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

and we know that New Jersey crew members prefer to head down the parkway to get to work rather than slug their way over a bridge or through a tunnel to start the day,” says Murphy.

The presence of film crews is already creating ripple effects throughout the local economy. Beyond direct employment, productions also support numerous local businesses. The economic impact extends to hotels, hardware stores, cleaning services, catering companies and other vendors who both support and benefit from the industry’s presence.

“There are a lot of states around the country that have film tax credits that I’m sure are doing fine but are not on their way to [catalyzing] a billion-dollar film industry,” says Sullivan. “They don’t have the locations. They don’t have the infrastructure. And they don’t have the experienced crews.”

As major studios establish permanent production hubs in New Jersey over the next few years, the concentration of film crews living in-state could prove increasingly decisive. The state’s comprehensive strategy — leveraging existing crew talent while developing new workforce pipelines, offering competitive incentives and providing hands-on production support — appears to be creating a sustainable ecosystem for long-term industry growth.

“Workforce development is a key factor in ensuring that we create a pathway of properly trained New Jerseyans who will be ready to work on these productions close to home,” says Murphy. “The economic impact of a growing film industry will be felt far beyond the soundstage and will take the form of permanent jobs in a host of ancillary services.”



State’s Film Future: Making the Numbers Work

Through strategic financial incentives, New Jersey has positioned itself as a major filming destination **BY MEREDITH OGILVIE-THOMPSON**

Given its history as the birthplace of motion pictures, it was only a matter of time until New Jersey reclaimed a starring role in the film industry.

“I am thrilled to report that total production spending has grown significantly in the past two years,” says Gov. Phil Murphy.

Film productions generated \$67 million in 2017. In 2023, the annual



Economic benefits include permanent job creation, increased tourism activity and spending, and support for local businesses and vendors.

amount of production spending surged to \$592 million. Despite a national downturn in production, as the industry grappled with the effects of the multiple union strikes and work stoppages, spending was poised to hit \$600 million in 2024.

“Our top-notch tax incentives make filming here a smart economic choice,” Murphy says. “And because our administration made those incentives

a priority, our film industry is rapidly expanding.”

While the final accounting for 2024 won’t be available until early 2025, numbers from 2023 indicate the industry has taken notice: 547 projects were filmed in New Jersey, generating \$592 million in total qualified spend.

To put things in cause-and-effect perspective, in 2017 — the last full year before Murphy’s tax program was



introduced — projects filmed in New Jersey only generated some \$67 million in revenue.

So what's the secret? Well, it helps that the state's incentives are generous and apply across a broad spectrum of content creation.

Film-lease production companies and studio partners can qualify for 40-45% and 35-40% in tax credits, respectively, for feature film, television series and digital media productions at targeted facilities.

Aligning business interests with social progress is also key — New Jersey offers an additional 2 or 4% in incentives for productions that meet diversity criteria. Specifically, the program incentivizes productions to include diversity plans for recruiting and hiring marginalized groups across all areas of production, with additional benefits for those that hire union performers who are women and/or minorities and state residents. The results speak for themselves: In 2024, 33 out of 35 projects qualified for the diversity bonus.

"We are laser-focused on creating a stronger and fairer New Jersey for everyone, and that means expanding economic opportunities for communities that have previously been excluded," says Murphy. "I am very proud that it is utilized by a whopping 92% of all productions that take part in our tax incentive program."

"We've made the tax credits really long term — our programming is on the books until 2039, which has given the industry a high degree of confidence."

— **TIM SULLIVAN**
CEO of the New Jersey
Economic Development Authority

The extension of the tax credit program has also been a clear signal to studios and networks that New Jersey is the hub for East Coast production and has given them the confidence to commit a larger portion of their production slate as they plan future projects.

"We've made the tax credits really long term — our programming is on the books until 2039, which has given the industry a high degree of confidence," says Tim Sullivan, CEO of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. "If you're thinking about shooting a TV show — [given] most showrunners are hoping to do three, four, five, if not 15 seasons — you want that predictability."

Put another way, the incentives are designed to keep productions on the ground longer.

"There are more discussions about bringing series here — which is great because that keeps our crews employed for far longer," says Jon Crowley, executive director of the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission. "We have talk shows moving into the state, which represents a commitment of 40 to 50 weeks ... a definite 'needle mover' in terms of jobs and local spend. Our incentives, experienced crews and variety of locations have a lot of projects planting their flags here in the first and second quarters for 2025."

While the goal of the tax incentive program is to attract production companies to film in New Jersey, the associated economic benefits — from permanent job creation and decent living wages to increased tourism activity and spending, and support for local small businesses and vendors — tell a compelling story of overall economic growth.

In 2022, filming activity supported approximately 8,500 jobs in fields like set design, construction, catering and security, while the film and digital media tax credits helped subsidize more than 14,600 in-state jobs that year. The state's Film Ready program, launched in April 2023 after a successful pilot, is helping standardize the filming process across New Jersey. To date, 22 municipalities and counties hold the Film Ready designation, with approximately 150 more working toward certification.

"The economic impact of a growing film industry will be felt far beyond the soundstage, and will take the form of permanent jobs in a host of ancillary services," says Murphy. "These projects are filmed throughout the state, creating a need for lodging, food, fuel, tutors, lumber, cleaners, hardware... the list is endless. The dollars from movies and television series are spread on a local level throughout the state."

PHOTOS: SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT

A large-scale film production set in New York City. In the foreground, there are several dolly tracks and equipment on a grassy area. In the background, the New York City skyline is visible, including the Freedom Tower. A helicopter is also visible in the sky. The scene is set on a rooftop or elevated platform.

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New Jersey has doubled for Washington, D.C., 1950s New York City, Africa, the Middle East, and so much more. To make filming here even easier, many counties and municipalities have completed the state's *Film Ready* program, which prepares them to accommodate film crews. It's never been simpler to film in New Jersey's breathtaking variety of locations and landscapes.



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