

# The world's hottest production facilities

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*Poland's Alvernia Studios*

## Brazil, Germany and others woo filmmakers

### BRAZIL

#### Polo Cinematografico de Paulinia

In a bold move to swap petrol dollars for film bucks, the small city of Paulinia is completing an overhaul that will reposition it as a major film center, complete with state-of-the-art shooting facilities, schools and theaters.

The standout in this ambitious project is a new studio, Polo Cinematografico de Paulinia, which hopes to attract big-budget film productions from around the world while creating new employment opportunities locally.

Paulinia, the seventh-richest city in Brazil -- strategically located just 67 miles from Sao Paulo -- funded the entire project, the brainchild of former Mayor Edson Moura.

Projected costs are estimated at \$60 million - \$70 million, which will cover five soundstages, 120 3D animation stations, 3D scanning, a 1,000 CPU render farm and the allocation of more than 5.2 million square feet of surrounding land reserved for building film sets.

Effi Wizen, the head of visual effects for Estudios Quanta, a major Sao Paulo-based regional film industry player, believes "a studio of this size will completely change the visual effects field in Brazil, bringing it to a different level."

Wizen's company helped make the city's dream a reality by converting factory land once used for producing refinery components into an ultra-modern film production facility.

He will now oversee the studio's animation department.

The full complex should be running at 100% in the very near future, with the postproduction services completely ready in July and motion capture and the body scanning facilities finished by next year. -- R.T. Watson

## CHINA

### Wuxi film studio

With China's rising demand for more quality homegrown movies, the government of Wuxi (a city of 4.5 million in Jiangsu province that's 45 minutes by train northwest of Shanghai) is again making sounds about long-standing plans to build a soundstage that rivals China's biggest film production facilities in Shanghai, Hengdian and Beijing.

"Chinawood," as the project is dubbed, would get millions in funding from the local government of the city, which Forbes named 2008's third-best business city in China. Nicknamed "Little Shanghai" because of its proximity to China's biggest city and its rapid urbanization and booming economy, Wuxi is best known as home of the largest solar panel manufacturers on earth.

### China's Wuxi film studio

Built on the shores of Lake Tai, the city could lend itself nicely to location shooting; it almost doubles, in places, for Shanghai's famous riverside Bund. In fact, Wuxi has long been home to a production base built by China Central Television in 1987, which churns out hundreds of TV dramas a year.

Skeptics say the Wuxi film studio development could be a real estate scam in an overheated market cooked up by shady developers eager to raise the value of the land around the site. But in China, wilder success stories have come true: In the mid-1990s, a farmer-turned-millionaire started building a film studio in Hengdian, in neighboring Zhejiang province. By the early 2000s, Hengdian World Studios was one of the largest in Asia, boasting more than 815 acres.

In China's boom economy, Wuxi hopes to attract the growing number of co-productions from overseas that are interested in shooting in China -- and that want to secure access to the nation's growing boxoffice, up 43% in 2009 to \$909 million. -- Jonathan

Landreth

## FRANCE

### Paris Studios/Cite du Cinema

After years of shying away from France, Hollywood producers will be able to have their gateau and eat it too thanks to a new mega-studio. That comes at the same time as a new French tax credit, aimed to lure foreign production, continues to attract major directors. Paris Studios, which should open in 2012, aims to be a one-stop shop for filmmaking. The \$40.7 million location is a joint venture from EuropaCorp, Euromedia and Quinta Communications and will be part of the Cite du Cinema film complex, which will also open its doors in 2012.

EuropaCorp's Luc Besson and Quinta's Tarak Ben Ammar are hoping the studio will rival London's Pinewood and Berlin's Babelsberg, and attract major Hollywood shoots. Many foreign productions, including Besson's own, have been forced to use other European studios because France didn't have any.

The studio will feature nine soundstages in addition to several screening rooms. It will become home to EuropaCorp's many upcoming projects, even though the group's investment is limited to \$8.1 million, along with other Gallic or international titles looking for studio space here.

So will the new location be able to reel in the U.S. majors?

"I've had projects that would have easily shot in France, but ended up filming in other countries since there wasn't the studio space," says Raphael Benoliel, a line producer

who has worked on Stephen Frears' "Cheri" and Woody Allen's Paris-based summer 2010 project.

Maybe. But French laws that prohibit technicians from working six-day weeks or more than 12-hour days will have to be modified first.

"We need not only a major studio, but also the ability to work in an Anglo-Saxon style and offer competitive prices," Benoliel says. "We need an agreement with the French workers' unions that's consistent with other European countries, otherwise the Americans will continue to shoot elsewhere." -- Rebecca Leffler

Germany's Studio Babelsberg

GERMANY

Studio Babelsberg

While other studios have been fighting for survival in recent years, Studio Babelsberg seems to have weathered the global economic uncertainty, with Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds" and Roman Polanski's "The Ghost Writer" just two of a slew of recent productions that found a home outside Germany's capital.

If anything, Babelsberg had trouble expanding, after a much-publicized plan to turn Tempelhof airport into a Babelsberg-auxiliary was scuttled by Berlin's political leadership. Instead, according to the studio's president and CEO, Carl Woebcken, the focus turned to growth within the geographical boundaries of the lot.

When the German TV movie "Crashpoint Berlin" came inquiring about a plane set, Babelsberg partnered with the producers and built one, which it subsequently acquired.

Same with a water tank, which was recently needed for a scene in Jaume Collet-Serra's Liam Neeson starrer "Unknown White Male" and is now one of the studio's added attractions.

"We built them to somewhat higher specifications than the production needed, so we'd be able to use them for future productions," says Woebcken, adding that Babelsberg will find needed space or locations outside the lot, if need be. In the case of "Basterds," the studio built three entire sets for the film's climactic burning of the cinema.

"We thought we could do it completely within the studio, but as it turned out, the fire could have consumed the entire soundstage," Woebcken says. "So we built it three times: Once on the soundstage for the smaller fires, once on an industrial site with bigger ceilings, and yet again on the lot on our 'Berlin Street.' "

The German tax rebate DFFF should help Babelsberg stay competitive. Woebcken is making sure that subsidies and co-production deals (Babelsberg is a co-producer on most of the films shot here) keep on coming. That way, 16 soundstages that include 270,000 square feet of space, a water tank and an airplane set, will remain. -- Karsten

Kastelan

ITALY

Centro Sperimentale del Cinema

Milan is already the most important city in Italy when it comes to fashion, banking and insurance. Now the city is taking steps to make sure it's in the discussion when it comes to cinema.

Last summer saw the opening of the first part of its ambitious Centro Sperimentale del Cinema (Experimental Cinema Center), built on the site of a former state-run tobacco plant. The section now open includes about 35,000 square feet of film labs and administrative areas.

Massimo Zanello, who's overseeing the \$13.5 million project for the local government, believes it could nearly double in size in the next couple of years and expand to include film and television sets and postproduction facilities.

Much has been made in the Italian press about whether the new center will seek to rival Rome's storied Cinecitta studios. That's a threat Milan officials brush aside, arguing they are looking to highlight their city's natural strengths and not compete with the rest of the country.

"Milan's a television hotbed, with Mediaset and Sky-Italia based in the city, and a long association with cinema," Zanello says. "There are talented production engineers and a well-informed public, and those are the aspects we are looking to build on. We can't be a Cinecitta, but we think we can become one of the poles for the Italian cinema industry."

The Milan facility will work with other film commissions and cinema centers, says Alberto Contri, head of the Lombardy Film Commission (Lombardy is the region that includes Milan). "This kind of center can benefit Milan a great deal -- and, if we work together, it can benefit Italy as well." -- Eric J. Lyman

## SOUTH KOREA

### AZ Works

The vibrant resort town of Pusan isn't just attracting a flood of cinephiles to its annual film festival; a movie studio run by the city's film commission is also quickly emerging as one Asia's leading VFX centers.

Affordable labor costs, competitive facilities and speedy production have been the big selling points for major Chinese producers, including Huayi Brothers, who have struck multiple deals with AZ. The studio's handling of these major Chinese productions -- a potential goldmine largely untapped by many international FX houses -- has been promising.

AZ is working on computer graphics for a large-scale war scene in Wei Te-Sheng's "Cydeokebarai," an \$8 million Taiwanese blockbuster. The company is also overseeing CG work for Huayi's period martial-arts suspense thriller "Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame" from director Tsui Hark.

AZ's postproduction facility, which opened last year within a giant complex that also houses a department store and various entertainment facilities, includes a studio with a centralized editing facility for film development, computer graphics, post digital work and sound operations.

The Pusan Film Commission offers a generous discount package for foreign film companies shooting in the region, including up to 30% in rebate incentives for location shooting and a 10% rebate for postproduction expenditure at AZ. Annually, about 40%

of Korean location shooting now takes place in Pusan.

Italy's Centro Sperimentale del Cinema

"It's a competitive deal in the region, and it will continue to grow," says Chris Kim, a VFX producer at AZ. "Our next target is Hollywood." -- Park Soo-mee

MALAYSIA

KRU Studios

Founded in 1992, KRU Studios recently relocated to a new 15-acre facility in Cyberjaya, about 30 miles south of Kuala Lumpur. The state-of-the-art locale, which handles production and postproduction, includes a 435,600-square-foot backlot, two soundstages (8,611 square feet and 2,486 square feet), full HD suites, 3D and VFX workstations, color grading suites and a full-fledged audio production studio.

KRU Studios executive president Norman Halim says the facilities will allow the company to produce international feature films akin to "300" and "Storm Warriors," where almost 100% of the production is filmed on soundstages. His studio's backlot will be available for outdoor sets until the company starts construction on additional soundstages in a second phase of development, planned for 2012.

"We are open for bookings of our soundstages commencing this June," says Halim, adding that KRU Studios facilities will be HD-ready by December with a tapeless environment from production to postproduction. KRU is also setting up a lab for digital encoding for theatrical exhibition and stereoscopic 3D. To date, KRU Studios has

produced six Malay feature films, including "Cicak-man," which had the biggest local boxoffice in 2006, and "Duyung," which had the biggest local boxoffice in 2008.

KRU also co-produced "Deadline" with the late actress Brittany Murphy, where the entire visual effects of the film were done in Malaysia at its old facilities. The company will announce its new slate of international feature films in Cannes, Halim notes. It will also be releasing the "The Malay Chronicles: Bloodlines," an epic adventure, in first-quarter 2011; rights have already been sold for distribution in the U.K., France, Germany and Russia, among others. -- Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop

## PHILIPPINES

### Bigfoot Studios

Located on the tropical resort island of Mactan, just off Cebu island in the Philippines, Bigfoot Studios' production facilities are a 10-minute drive from a small international airport. The main facility contains two soundstages -- one 11,000 square feet -- along with a Dolby mix theater, ADR and voice-over stage, a foley stage, four large edit and effects suites and 10 dedicated editing bays, all fully equipped with Final Cut Pro and fiber connectivity to a central storage, enabling real-time concurrent HD editing. Bigfoot also has an "underwater" studio with a main shooting tank 16 feet deep.

### Malaysia's KRU Studios

Last year, Bigfoot expanded its operations to another property on the main island of Cebu City, which offers four additional shooting stages, each at 11,000 square feet, along with onsite fabrication and storage facilities. To keep in line with the industry's push for HD technology, Bigfoot has acquired three Sony Cine Alta HDW F900R cameras and three RED One cameras.

Bigfoot Entertainment CEO Kacy Andrews says the studio has several feature films in postproduction, as well as a solid pipeline of projects in the coming months.

"We shot a thriller called 'Girl With No Number' that wrapped last year, and we are also in the midst of planning a big-budget action film and a