

Akira filming to put California in spotlight

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Features

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A live-action movie version of manga film Akira is planning to shoot entirely in California using substantial incentive support, spotlighting the state as a big-budget production centre.

Set in a dystopian Japan of 2060, the film is scheduled to shoot in California for 71 days. Producers have qualified for tax credit support of \$18.5m from eligible in-state spending of \$92m, according to the [California Film Commission](#).

Katsuhiro Otomo directed the iconic 1988 animated movie Akira that was set in a dystopian 2019 version of Tokyo.

Leonardo DiCaprio is involved as a producer of the new movie and Taika Waititi (pictured), a veteran of Marvel's [Thor: Ragnarok](#), is set to direct.

Ravi Mehta, executive vice president of physical production and finance at Warner Bros. Pictures, cited California's experienced crew base and varied location options as key reasons for the decision to base the movie in the state.

Akira is set to become the 13th big-budget feature to base itself in California under the state's boosted '2.0' filming incentive support programme.

"Most people want to film in California if they can," says Amy Lemisch, executive director of the California Film Commission, in comments to KFTV. "But they usually need the state's financial support to make it happen."

Los Angeles is still California's main production hub and the majority of shoots are based within the so-called 'thirty-mile zone' – or 'TMZ' – within which producers can film without having to budget for overnight hotel stays for LA-based crew.

"For years we had no new studios in Los Angeles, aside from the occasional extra stage built at an existing facility," says Lemisch, "Also, TV shows often simply pay to leave their sets standing between seasons, in which case the stages are occupied year-round.

"But now we have two more in development – Quixote Studios will be opening five stages later this year and Line 204 is building nine stages for next year."

Quixote's new site will offer stage space in the Pacoima region of northern Los Angeles in the coming months, adding to existing facilities in Griffith Park and West Hollywood. The new facility from boutique studio developer Line 204 will also add to the brand's existing LA studio infrastructure.

One of the main objectives of the California Film Commission is to encourage producers to shoot elsewhere in the state to deliver production spending beyond Los Angeles.

Santa Clarita is positioned just north of Los Angeles – though still within the TMZ – and has become a Californian production hub, primarily for TV shows. The local film office recorded nearly 1,400 location filming days in 2018 and is well known for its high-profile 'movie ranches' that offer a broad range of standing sets that can double for locations around the world.

San Francisco got a specific boost recently by hosting location filming for the big-budget Transformers spinoff Bumblebee (pictured above). The city offers iconic visuals but lacks purpose-built sound stages.

“Producers want the San Francisco look,” says Lemisch, “They also have access to Film Mare Island in Vallejo that’s become a very popular filming location.”

Film Mare Island is a former naval base positioned at the confluence of the Napa River and the northern extension of San Francisco Bay. Its military history means that it offers a broad selection of expansive warehouse facilities that are available as production spaces, with purpose-built stages also planned.

Bumblebee has been the highest-profile recent visitor but the site also hosts a school set for the Netflix drama series 13 Reasons Why, a show that charts the social impact of a teenager’s suicide.

Seventy-five miles south of San Francisco is Santa Cruz, which is also growing in popularity as a production location. Santa Cruz County appears in the Netflix horror film Bird Box and Jordan Peele’s horror movie hit Us (pictured above) used Santa the city’s historic waterfront boardwalk and amusement arcade as a key story setting.

Us begins with scenes set on the city’s boardwalk as it looked in 1986. Peele and his team dressed the existing structures with period signage and built several of their own arcade-style amusement games and rides, as demanded by Peele’s script.

The new adaptation of Akira looks set to follow superhero movie Captain Marvel (pictured above) as a tent-pole feature release to significantly boost California’s production industry.

Producers have the security of a state filming incentive that has been extended through to 2025, presenting a financial bedrock on which authorities can continue to build California’s national appeal.

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