

Little Italy, big plans, great movies

Film-makers are breathing new life into abandoned locations, writes **Tom Kington**



A new film festival that admits only movies shot in Italian hamlets is aiming to reverse the fortunes of remote areas suffering the effects of depopulation and abandonment.

Held in Rome yesterday, the Borghi sul Set festival featured two full-length films and four short films shot in some of Italy's 6,000 hamlets, which offer stunning locations but are losing residents to big cities.

"These places are our last memory of an uncontaminated Italy and we hope that if films are shot there, more people will go back and visit them," Catello Masullo, the festival's artistic director, said.

A medieval drama, *Il Pataffio*, which won a jury prize, was filmed at a castle at Vicalvi, an abandoned hamlet east of Rome. "We scouted about 20 abandoned castles as possible sets, discovering an Italy you never otherwise see," Francesco Lagi, the director, said.

The prize for best location went to Contigliano, a tiny settlement topped by a 17th-century church nestling in the Sabine hills, which was used in the short film *Miraggio*, a tale of a woman's return to her childhood home.

"There are many locations like this that are little known, which means directors can find locations to call their own," Marianna Adamo, the director, said.

This year's films were all shot around Rome, but Masullo said future festivals would feature other regions. "Ideally we will hold it in a hamlet and bring in directors a few days before the festival to make films right there, which a jury would judge. The beauty of these places inspires creativity," he said.

Recent efforts by Italian mayors to repopulate their



George Clooney and Sean Connery and other stars have shone a light on hamlets such as Contigliano and, below, Rocca Calascio



...dying towns have included selling houses for €1. The government is planning "digital nomad" visas for foreigners who want to work remotely from a

rural spot. The government has also encouraged the creation of "spread-out" hotels in abandoned villages, where empty cottages become guest quarters. Italy has promised fast internet connections for its ancient villages in a

€1 billion subsidy package, with 21 locations each receiving €20 million and the rest of the cash spread among more than 200 other hamlets.

Among the beneficiaries was Rocca Calascio, set at the foot of a 1,000-year-old castle in the rugged Abruzzo mountains, which has featured in Hollywood productions such as the 1985 film *Ladyhawke*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer, and the 1986 Sean Connery film *The Name of the Rose*.

Rocca Calascio also appears in George Clooney's 2010 thriller *The American*, which makes the most of narrow alleys in Abruzzo towns in its chase scenes. Further south, the abandoned village of Craco in Basilicata was used as a backdrop for the suicide of Judas in Mel Gibson's 2004 biblical tale *The Passion of the Christ*.

"These hamlets take your breath away. They are all about the construction of beauty, and cinema is no different," Masullo said.

DeSantis lays into 'woke' US military

United States

Alistair Dawber Washington

Ron DeSantis has promised "very big changes" to the US military if he is elected president next year, saying that it has become too woke to deal with challenges posed by China.

The Florida governor, 44, who served in the US navy for 15 years, used a Memorial Day interview to promise that he would "rejuvenate" America's armed forces "on day one" as part of his plans for the White House.

"I think the military that I see is different from the military I served in," he told Fox News yesterday. "I see a lot of emphasis now on political ideologies, things like gender pronouns. I see a lot about things like DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion programmes], and I think that that's caused recruiting to plum-

met. I think it's driven off a lot of warriors and I think morale is low.

"So all those issues are important and we'll be rolling out a really strong programme to counter China because I think it is our No 1 threat."

Memorial Day is an annual holiday when Americans mourn US military personnel who have died in the course of their service. President Biden, 80, took part in a service of remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

After months of touring the country in what was in effect a shadow presidential campaign, DeSantis formally launched his run for the Republican nomination last week. Unusually, he took part in an interview on Twitter with Elon Musk, the platform's owner, to announce his intention to stand. The event was hit by technical problems,

with the interview starting 25 minutes after it had been scheduled to begin.

"Everyone knows that if I'm the nominee, I will beat Biden," he told Fox News. "I will serve two terms and I will be able to destroy leftism in this country. I've shown in Florida an ability to win huge swathes of voters while also delivering the boldest agenda anywhere in the country."

According to the polls, DeSantis has a lot of ground to catch up. A survey of Republican supporters by Echelon Insights taken at the end of last week put Donald Trump 30 percentage points ahead of his rival.

DeSantis, who served in Iraq, is seen as the former president's biggest rival for the nomination. He has pitched himself on the right of the party and has described Florida under his leadership as the state where "woke goes to die".

Secret agents die on lake cruise hit by waterspout

Tom Kington

Two Italian secret service agents were among four people killed when a pleasure boat sank after being struck by a waterspout on Lake Maggiore.

They were named last night at Claudio Alonzi, 62, and Tiziana Barnobi, 53. Survivors among the 21 passengers and two crew swam ashore or were picked up by passing vessels when the 52ft craft went down on Sunday evening.

"One moment it was clear then the weather changed extremely quickly and all hell broke loose," an official from the local carabinieri said.

Situated at the foot of the Alps near Milan, the lake offers stunning mountain views and is popular with tourists.

Storms had flared in the area from about 5pm, delaying flights at Malpensa airport nearby.

As the skies darkened, the boat was a few hundred metres from the town of Sesto Calende at the southern end of the lake and joined other vessels in turning back. The carabinieri officer added: "It was unlucky — in another ten minutes it might have made it."

The other victims were the captain's Russian wife and an Israeli tourist.

The body of one victim was spotted floating by a helicopter crew, and divers retrieved three more bodies from inside the sunken vessel, which was found 16 metres down on the lake bed.

The wreck was expected to be brought to the surface yesterday.