NEWS RELEASE

Brand USA Spotlights Oscar-Winning and Nominated Films That Showcase Iconic U.S. Destinations

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Featured Image: *Chippewa Square, Explore Georgia*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 12, 2026) – The Academy Awards, broadcasting this weekend, spotlights films that define the moment in cinema—but many of the stories honored on Hollywood's biggest night share another common star: the places where they were filmed. Across deserts, beaches, small towns, and iconic cities, Brand USA is shining a spotlight on the locations throughout the United States that have helped shape some of the most celebrated films in Oscar history.

"The United States has long been the epicenter of 'movie magic,' with landscapes and cities that bring the world's most memorable stories to life," said Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA. "We're seeing that inspiration translate into travel. Nearly 40% of travelers interested in visiting the U.S. want to see locations featured in movies or television, and one in five recent visitors say films influenced their trip planning. Awards season shines a global spotlight on these destinations and inspires travelers to experience them firsthand."

Increasingly, travelers are seeking out these locations themselves, a trend known as "set-jetting," where movie lovers visit the real-world settings that brought beloved stories to life. From coastal California and the American Southwest to historic Midwestern towns and East Coast city streets, these destinations offer travelers the chance to step into scenes from award-recognized films while discovering the culture and landscapes that made them unforgettable on screen.

The West

In Los Angeles the sunlit coastline became part of one of the most recognizable films of recent years: Barbie, which earned multiple nominations at the 2024 Academy Awards, including Best Picture. While much of the movie takes place in the fantastical world of Barbieland, several sequences—most memorably the rollerblading scenes along the coast—were filmed along the Venice Beach Boardwalk. Visitors today can cycle or stroll along the shoreline where Pacific Ocean views, street performers, and more capture the carefree atmosphere that helped inspire the film's colorful energy. Additional filming locations in the Los Angeles area include Santa Monica, Downtown Los Angeles, Century City, and Long Beach.

The creative spirit of Los Angeles takes center stage in La La Land, which won six Oscars—including Best Director for Damien Chazelle—at the 2017 Academy Awards. The film's dreamy musical numbers unfold across some of the city's most scenic locations, from sweeping freeway overpasses to the hilltop terraces of Griffith Observatory, where a memorable dance sequence takes place beneath the planetarium dome. Today, visitors can stand on the observatory's terraces for panoramic views of Los Angeles and the Hollywood Sign, experiencing the same sense of cinematic possibility the film celebrates.

Farther east in the American Southwest, the vast desert landscapes of Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park along the Utah and Arizona border appear in the Oscar-winning drama Nomadland, which won Best Picture, Best Director for Chloé Zhao, and Best Actress for Frances McDormand at the 2021 Academy Awards. Towering sandstone buttes rise from the desert floor in scenes that emphasize both solitude and beauty. Travelers can explore the same landscapes along Monument Valley's scenic drives or guided tours led by Navajo guides, gaining deeper insight into the cultural and geological significance of this iconic setting.

The South

In Richmond, Virginia, history and cinema intersect in Lincoln, Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning historical drama starring Daniel Day-Lewis, who won Best Actor at the 2013 Academy Awards for his portrayal of Abraham Lincoln. Filmed over 53 days across Virginia, the production used Richmond's preserved architecture and historic streets to recreate the atmosphere of the Civil War era. Production designer Rick Carter noted that "history is alive in Richmond in a way you don't find it in the rest of the country," calling the city a place deeply shaped by Lincoln's legacy. Today, visitors can walk in the footsteps of the cast and crew while exploring Richmond's Civil War landmarks, museums, and historic neighborhoods that bring this pivotal period of American history vividly to life.

The historic charm of Savannah, Georgia helped shape one of the most beloved Oscar winners of the 1990s, Forrest Gump. The film won six awards—including Best Picture and Best Actor for Tom Hanks—at the 1995 Academy Awards, and its most iconic scene features Forrest recounting his life story from a bench in Chippewa Square. While the original bench now resides in a museum, the square remains a centerpiece of Savannah's historic district, where oak trees draped in Spanish moss and stately homes create one of the most atmospheric cityscapes in the American South.

In Newport, Kentucky and across Northern Kentucky, scenes from the 1988 Oscar-winning drama Rain Man helped bring the film's cross-country journey to life. The movie—starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise—won four Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Actor for Hoffman, and follows two brothers traveling across the United States. Several moments were filmed at local landmarks, including the longtime Italian restaurant Pompilio's Bar & Restaurant and nearby Evergreen Cemetery. Today, visitors can stop at these sites while exploring the Ohio River towns that served as part of the film's memorable road-trip route.

In Austin, Texas, filmmaker Richard Linklater spent more than a decade capturing everyday life for Boyhood, which received six nominations at the 2015 Academy Awards and won Best Supporting Actress for Patricia Arquette. Shot almost entirely in and around Austin, the film follows a Texas family over 12 years, weaving the city's neighborhoods, schools, and parks into its narrative. Visitors today can experience Austin's vibrant culture firsthand—from live music venues and independent shops to the walking and cycling trails surrounding Lady Bird Lake—the same everyday settings that give the film its sense of authenticity.

The Midwest

In Chicago, Illinois, two very different films helped showcase the city's streets and architecture to audiences worldwide. Christopher Nolan's The Dark Knight—which earned two Oscars at the 2009 Academy Awards, including Best Supporting Actor for Heath Ledger—transformed downtown Chicago into Gotham City, using dramatic urban landmarks like Lower Wacker Drive for high-speed chase scenes. Years earlier, the holiday classic Home Alone, nominated for two Oscars at the 1991 ceremony, captured the warmth of Chicago's suburban neighborhoods in the story of Kevin McCallister's famously booby-trapped home. The house used in the film sits in nearby Winnetka, where fans continue to visit the quiet tree-lined streets that helped make the movie a seasonal favorite.

The rural landscapes of Wisconsin play a central role in the romantic drama The Bridges of Madison County, which earned Meryl Streep an Oscar nomination at the 1996 Academy Awards. Set in the small farming communities of southern Iowa but filmed partly in Wisconsin, the story centers on historic covered bridges that have become iconic symbols of rural America. Travelers can explore similar historic bridges across the Midwest, where scenic country roads and rolling farmland evoke the quiet beauty captured in the film.

The Northeast

In Philadelphia, one of the most famous training montages in movie history unfolds on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in Rocky. The film won three Oscars—including Best Picture—at the 1977 Academy Awards and turned the staircase into an enduring cultural landmark. Today, visitors regularly recreate Rocky Balboa's triumphant run up the steps before posing with the nearby Rocky Statue, making the location one of the most recognizable film sites in the United States.

New York City has served as the backdrop for countless award-winning productions, including West Side Story, which earned Best Supporting Actress for Ariana DeBose at the 2022 Academy Awards. Director Steven Spielberg returned the beloved musical to the streets that inspired it, filming across neighborhoods in New York City. Today, visitors can explore cultural landmarks like Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts or wander through the surrounding Upper West Side streets that capture the city's enduring creative energy.

Lights, Camera, Travel

While award-winning films have been shot across the country, the center of Hollywood's biggest night remains Los Angeles, where the Academy Awards have been held for nearly a century. Since the first ceremony in 1929, the Oscars have taken place primarily in Los Angeles theaters—from the historic Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, where the first awards banquet was held, to today's ceremony at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. For film fans visiting the city, landmarks tied to the industry—from the Hollywood Walk of Fame to studio tours across the region—offer a behind-the-scenes look at the creative ecosystem that produces many of the world's most celebrated films.

Because for more than a century, filmmakers have turned to the United States for landscapes that elevate storytelling—from sweeping national parks and historic towns to world-famous city skylines. Many of the destinations that helped bring Oscar-recognized films to life remain open to travelers today, inviting visitors to experience these cinematic settings beyond the screen. As new generations of filmmakers continue to find inspiration across the country, the United States remains both a stage for award-winning stories and a destination where travelers can step directly into the scenes they love and admire.

For trip planning inspiration or to learn more, visit AmericaTheBeautiful.com.

Note to the Editor
Accompanying high resolution imagery can be found here.

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About Brand USA
Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.

Media Contacts

Chris Heywood
Senior Vice President, Public Relations & Chief Communications Officer

Jennifer Tong
Senior Director, International Public Relations

Andrew Felts
Senior Manager, Media Relations & Communications

Lisa Campos
Senior Director, Media Relations & Corporate Communications