

Media Perceptions of Bollywood and Europe
A Report Prepared for FilmInd Project
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The History of Bollywood Films in Europe



Image 1: The film shooting of Salaam-e-Ishq in Oxford, England.

Over the last few decades, Bollywood's emphasis on exploring foreign lands and crafting a touristic imagination of Europe has centred predominantly around western European landscapes. Historically, films like *Sangam* (Raj Kapoor, 1964), *Night in London* (Brij Sadanah, 1967), *Pyar ka Sapna* (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1969), *Purab Aur Paschim* (Manoj Kumar, 1970), and *Naseeb* (Manmohan Desai, 1981) gave Hindi cinema audiences a rare glimpse into the varied spaces and moods of European locations. While these films were still few and far between, the industrial transformation of the 1990s gave Bollywood filmmakers the creative license to experiment with

location shooting in Europe more frequently. As new sources of finance, film distribution, and overseas spectatorship began to filter Bollywood projections, the late 90s and early 2000s witnessed a dramatic rise in Bollywood films shot across Europe. Among the many touristic sites and landmarks in Europe, the picturesque mountains of Switzerland, the vibrant urban vistas of London, and the vast countryside of Scotland became crucial cinematic hotspots for anchoring many of these early Bollywood productions shot abroad.

The aesthetic architect of this emerging genre of Euro-centric Bollywood films was the noted filmmaker, Yash Chopra. Under his production banner, Yash Raj Films, Chopra directed several films such as *Chandni* (1989), *Lamhe* (1991), and *Dil Toh Pagal Hai* (1997), which crucially experimented with narrative techniques as well as foreign locations. His son, Aditya Chopra, took on similar directorial endeavors, notably on films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Mohabbatein* (2000), utilizing the plush streets of London (mainly Trafalgar and Leicester Square), university spaces, country houses, and Scottish countryside to further cement the enveloping bond between Bollywood and Britain. During this period, Yash Raj Films also laid the groundwork for further cinematic explorations abroad. With films such as *Yaadein* (Subhash Ghai, 2001), *Mujhse Dosti Karoge* (Kunal Kohli, 2002), *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* (Shaad Ali, 2007), and *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (directed by Yash Chopra himself, 2012), the production house became frequent visitors to foreign locations, growing especially close to Britain and the city of London. For his efforts and contributions, Yash Chopra became the first Indian to be presented with a lifetime membership to the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 2006. Commenting on his experience of shooting films in Britain, Yash Chopra would later say:

Britain has always been a home away from home. I have shot a lot of my films in Britain and my crew and I have been touched by the warmth of the people and all my shootings there have been memorable.¹

The success of Yash Chopra's experiments with foreign locations also prompted other directorial excursions into Europe, specifically to Britain. Prominent filmmaker Karan Johar made several blockbuster hits such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), and *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (2016) that continued to expand on the trend of shooting Bollywood films in Europe. Other film productions from this period include *Pyaar, Ishq Aur Mohabbat* (2001), and *Kyun...! Ho Gaya Na* (2004), which unfold over Glasgow, Edinburgh, and the idyllic Scottish countryside. Interestingly, several of these earlier Bollywood productions, whether fully or partially shot abroad, were still narratively located in India. For instance, several scenes of the modern-day Gurukul in the film *Mohabbatein* were shot at Longleat House in Wiltshire, England, and the "Raichand Mansion" in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* was the Waddesdon Manor in the UK. Since the mid-2000s, however, there has been an active attempt to include recognizable landmarks and spaces in Europe within Bollywood scripts. Films like *Ramji Londonwaley* (Sanjay Dayma, 2005), *Bhagam Bhag* (Priyadarshan, 2006), *Love Aajkal* (Imtiaz Ali, 2009), *Cocktail* (Homi Adajania, 2012), *Desi Boyz* (Rohit Dhawan, 2011), *Patiala House* (Nikkhil Advani, 2011), *Dhan Dhan Dhan Goal* (Vivek Agnihotri, 2007), *Salaam-e-Ishq* (Nikkhil Advani, 2007), *Cheeni Kum* (R. Balki, 2007), among others, focus on the lives of the Indian diaspora and integrate a touristic appeal within their films. For instance, *Salaam-e-Ishq*, *Namaste London*, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*, and

¹ <https://www.desiblitz.com/content/bollywood-loves-britain>.

Jhoota Hi Sahi all feature scenes involving the London Millennium Footbridge, while the Leadenhall Market can be seen in song sequences from *Love Aaj Kal*, *Desi Boyz*, and *I See You*.

Recognizing these formidable and generative ties between Bollywood and Britain, the Visit Britain Tourist Authority released a special Bollywood map in 2002 to shore up the emergent streams of Bollywood-inspired tourism to Britain. As cited in a Guardian article, the British Tourism Authority (BTA) issued 55,000 Bollywood location maps to be distributed in India and the Middle East as part of a marketing campaign to boost the channels of revenue garnered through Indian tourism.² In the same piece, Prem Subramaniam, who managed the BTA activities in India, remarked upon the developing relationship between Bollywood, Britain, and tourism by suggesting:

For Indian film enthusiasts, visiting British locations where Indian stars have made films is akin to the pilgrimage that other people make to Abbey Road to be photographed on the Beatles zebra crossing. Visitors from India want to follow a Bollywood trail, which they can end with a round of golf and a look at the castle where Madonna got married. Windsor, the Cotswolds, and Windermere now have Bollywood connotations.³

The BTA's Bollywood Trail was also marketed using the star power of several Bollywood celebrities. Sporting a Union Jack T-shirt in the event's promotion, Karishma Kapoor observed: "Having spent most of my holidays in London, I know this favourite city of mine as well as Mumbai."⁴ Shah Rukh Khan, by then a rising global star (who would also later feature in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London), similarly spoke about his pleasant experiences in Scotland: "Great Scot! The green pastures, the serene lakes, and the magic in the summer sky are to die for."⁵ Amitabh Bachchan promoted Scotland as part of a larger marketing campaign for his film, *Badla* (2018). Adapting to newer technology, VisitBritain also launched a Bollywood in Britain Movie Destination Map in 2014 that locates the venues of songs and film sequences shot in Britain.⁶ Thus, consolidated through a host of both on-screen and off-screen events, the deepening connections between Bollywood and Britain have facilitated a steady and dynamic range of filmic collaborations every year.

In recent years, the growing familiarity with British landscapes has also intersected with the rise of genre-specific films in Bollywood. In addition to the YRF-inspired romance sagas (popularly called "masala" films), the British capital London has been creatively stylized and employed within a new set of action films (*Ra.One* and *Fan*), sports films (*Dhan Dhana Dhan Goal* and *Patiala House*), horror films (*1920*), and comedy-drama films (*Bhagam Bhag* and *Desi Boyz*). While several films directed during the last decade have also expanded their production units to countries such as France and Spain, an overwhelming majority of Euro-centric Bollywood films still continue to be shot in the UK and specifically framed through the city of London. In this respect, the producer-director Vipul Shah has recently completed a trilogy of films (*Namaste London*, *London Dreams*, and *Namaste England*) that underscore the centrality of London within

² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/may/06/bollywood.film>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/may/06/bollywood.film>

⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/04/10/bollywood.britain/>

⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/04/10/bollywood.britain/>

⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/04/10/bollywood.britain/>

Bollywood's global imaginary. Several recent productions have added to this growing oeuvre of films located in London, namely *Tanu Weds Manu Returns*, *Housefull 3*, *Mubarakan*, and *Judwaa 2*, to name a few.

Emerging Trends: Bollywood's Movement away from London

Smaller Cities in England

In recent years, the rise of local film production units, distribution agents, and technical staff has helped Bollywood production houses expand their cinematic frames towards smaller counties, cities, and towns within Britain. Recent Bollywood films have journeyed especially to the north of England, often settling their production bases in the more pristine conditions of Yorkshire, the Humber, and Newcastle.⁷ Lee Aliston, the location manager for the 2010 film *Hum Tum Aur Ghost* (earlier titled "Kaun Bola"), spoke about the increasing awareness and confidence that Bollywood producers were starting to show in the northern region. Observing the rise of film production in Newcastle, the manager noted:

I've got about four Bollywood producers wanting to produce films in Newcastle. Logistically, it is a very easy place to film. People are so helpful and here you can turn things around rather quickly. It's a beautiful city with the Edwardian streets and all the bridges are lovely.⁸

Speaking to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about the production of the film *Gold* (2018), director Reema Kagti similarly noted:

I came here (Yorkshire) because I liked the locations. For this film, because it's a period film, I needed architecture that's been maintained. Architecture that existed before the 1930s and has been maintained to date... Yorkshire seems to have a lot of that. They really seem to respect their heritage and look after it.⁹

Apart from the historic beauty of locations, the easy availability of local film production staff has also become a significant factor in boosting production in the local districts and cities of England. For instance, Flame Visuals, an independent film production company based in London, has provided Bollywood filmmakers with creative set design, logistical resources, and technical facilities on several notable films such as *Angrezi Medium*, *Judwaa 2*, *Jawani Janeman*, *Chhichhore*, *Pagal Panti*, *Pari*, and *The Girl on the Train*, along with contributions to many other regional and television productions. Creative England's Production Services team similarly helped director Vikas Bahl obtain film licencing permits, scout film locations in and around Yorkshire, and guide the visual design of the Bollywood film *Shaandaar*. Furthermore, the use of agencies such as Film London has similarly facilitated a greater level of assistance with location advice, pre-production meetings, hiring local film crews and extras, managing accommodations, and procuring travel discounts.

⁷ Yorkshire and Humber had the fastest-growing film and TV industries in the country between 2009-15, as reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40963986>.

⁸ <https://www.livemint.com/Consumer/uSF3D7eyMa46VOs98QYhWI/Newcastle-emerges-as-top-location-for-Bollywood-films.html>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40963986>

Finally, the movement toward northern regional provinces and small towns (away from London) and the recruitment of local film agencies have also been motivated on account of several economic incentives. An article on the British Film Commission’s official website notes that feature film shoots in the UK can now receive a 25% tax rebate upon spending 10% of their budgets within the country. The British Film Commission and the British Film Institute websites also provide further information and assistance on obtaining the aforementioned tax reliefs and other financial incentives to shoot films in Britain. In addition, Bollywood film projects can now also tap into regional funding sources, which have helped accelerate the cinematic boom in the northern quarters of England. Filming in Yorkshire, for instance, allows Bollywood filmmakers to tap into local production funds that provide investments of up to GBP 500,000. The British Location Manager Martin Walker similarly notes that the economic benefits of shooting films in local counties and districts are far superior when compared to shooting in London: "You've got your hotel costs, which are half price, you've got great transport links, and you've actually got a population that still finds filming interesting, fun, and fascinating and is helpful."¹⁰ Sue Bellarby, the unit manager for Gold, suggests that as a result of the monetary incentives “it’s as cheap to film here as it is in India now, and they can actually film the locations for real.”¹¹

A combination of factors has therefore helped bring more Bollywood filmmakers to Britain in the last decade. As a result of the said measures, the Office for National Statistics in Britain reported that movie production in the UK has shot up by 72% since 2014. Bollywood films, as suggested in the figure below, have made significant contributions to this general upsurge in UK-based film production. These figures must be considered alongside other regional vectors of Indian cinema that have gravitated towards British film locations, notably the Bhojpuri, Punjabi, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam cinema industries that have, on the whole, been booming over the last decade.

Indian films shot in the UK		
Years	Number of films	Spend in UK
2006-08	<5	NA
2009-11	8	£16m
2012-14	15	£44.4m
2015-17 (so far)	22	£68.9m

Source: BBC¹²

Wales and Scotland

¹⁰ <https://www.thelocationguide.com/2017/08/bollywood-sports-biopic-gold-now-on-location-in-yorkshire/>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40963986>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40963986>

Along with England, Bollywood film production in the UK has also recently started journeying towards Wales and Scotland. The discovery of Wales as a film destination took off relatively late, with films such as *Jungle Cry*, *Aseq*, and the Punjabi film *Donkey* (to be released later in 2022). In addition to the emerging partnerships on matters of location, the on-screen collaborations have also extended to acting. While Welsh-based actors such as Bandita Sandhu and Ammy Wirk have debuted in recent Bollywood films, Nigel Owens (a Welsh international Rugby Union referee) played the role of a referee in the Welsh-based Bollywood film *Jungle Cry*. Rahil Sayed, the founder of the Cardiff Film Festival and a film producer himself, has been actively involved in setting up Film Tourism Wales in an effort to attract a steadier number of Bollywood film productions. Speaking on the potential for future filming in Wales, he suggests:

It's an unexplored territory for Bollywood and it is a shame Wales has not pushed itself to be more visible, hopefully this will change very soon. For them to come and see these great locations it is always a plus. With Cardiff within 40 minutes, you can be around the countryside, a seashore or a city.¹³

The advantages of film locations have also been used to increase the number of Bollywood film productions in Scotland. Unlike Wales, Bollywood has a long history of film production in Scotland. While the success of early films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and *Pyaar Ishq Aur Mohabbat* suggested a promising future for Bollywood filming in Scotland, the productions in the following decade gradually dwindled to a standstill. VisitScotland launched a Bollywood map in 2015, similar to the VisitBritain campaign, in an effort to rebuild the touristic potential between Bollywood and Scotland (Image 2). Commenting on the touristic value of Bollywood-Scotland collaborations, Vineet Lal, the senior marketing manager of VisitScotland, noted:

Romantic Scotland and the age-old romance of Bollywood are the perfect match. Bollywood film-makers have an enduring love affair with our cities, castles, lochs and glens, making Scotland the perfect stage for their dreamy love songs and elaborate dance numbers. And while Scotland has often starred as a backdrop for musical sequences, it increasingly plays an integral part in the narrative in films such as Edinburgh-set *Mausam* (2011) and the Loch Ness-based thriller *Three: Love Lies Betrayal* (2009). This map will give prospective Indian visitors yet another reason to visit Scotland and step into the magical world of Bollywood.¹⁴

Even as Scottish tourism figures from India are yet to be updated, a report in the TOI provides statistics from 2012 and mentions Scotland as India's 21st largest market in terms of visits, 10th in terms of single-night travel, and 15th in terms of expenditure in the country.¹⁵ The report further adds that of all visits to the UK in 2012, around 5.3% involved a trip to Scotland, with Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively ranking as the third and fifth most visited towns by Indian tourists to the UK. These statistics are predicted to have increased in the last decade, with recent Bollywood productions such as the Amitabh Bachchan-starrer *Badla*, Akshay Kumar's *Bell Bottom*, and Ranveer Singh's *83* adding to the growing list of films shot in Scotland.

¹³ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/film-news/major-bollywood-movie-start-filming-16378122>

¹⁴ <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/visit-scotland/pressreleases/hooray-for-bollywood-1107408>

¹⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/bollywood-map-to-show-favourite-spots-in-scotland/articleshow/46113260.cms>

emerging relationship between Bollywood and Eastern Europe has also yielded increased fanfare and tourism within these destinations, which I shall discuss in the final part of this section.

Of the recent Bollywood-East European connections, the film partnerships with Poland have arguably been the longest, most sustained, generating the most layered collaborations. Although the use of Poland as a film location initially began as an effort to recreate Kashmir in the 2006 film *Fanaa*, later Bollywood productions such as *Aazaan* (2011), *Yeh Jo Hai Mohabbat* (2012), *Kick*, *Shaandaar*, *Bangistan*, and *Chehre* have integrated the country within their storylines. The boost in recent productions is attributed to Bollywood star Salman Khan's visit and promotions in Poland (for his film *Kick*), which, as claimed by several media outlets, have raised the country's profile as a film destination and generated several location inquiries. News websites reporting on the cinematic draw towards Poland have also dubbed it "The New Switzerland" on account of its picturesque snow-clad Tatra Mountains.¹⁶ These views have generally been shared by Indian officials too, most notably by India's former ambassador to Poland, Monika Kapil Mohta. Speaking about Poland in 2014, she remarked:

We have been urging Bollywood producers and directors to use Poland for their outdoor shooting for the past three years. Now they have seen the virtue of using Poland's natural beauty, which is no less than Switzerland.¹⁷

During this period, the cinematic collaborations with Poland have also extended to those involved behind the scenes. Arthur Zurawski, a product of the National Film School in Lodz and now an established Polish director of photography, has gradually made his way into mainstream Bollywood cinema, most notably working on films such as *Aazaan*, *Mardaani*, and *Sultan*. Poland's experienced film crews and technicians have also provided post-production services for Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's sports biopic *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013). In addition to the cinematic tie-ups, Poland has been home to an increasing number of commercials or advertisement films. The Hindu Business Line reported that over 40 commercial films such as Yardley deodorant and Delishus biscuits, among others, were shot in Poland in the year 2013 alone.¹⁸

While Poland is emerging as a favourite hotspot for Bollywood filmmakers, other neighbouring East European countries have also started to receive attention for their natural beauty, historic forts and castles, and architecturally attractive townships. Of the newer cinematic collaborations with Bollywood, Romania has also risen to prominence following several recent encounters with Bollywood. Salman Khan, who earlier also starred in the 2005 film *Kyun Ki* in Romania, has significantly helped garner interest in Romania as a potential filming location. The Bollywood star returned to Romania for the song sequence "Tere Naina" from the film *Jai Ho*, an event that was documented and celebrated across several Romanian and Indian media outlets. Despite the encounter with Salman Khan's stardom, Romanian ties to Bollywood are still quite nascent and have only recently gained traction.¹⁹ Some other films involving Romanian locations include a

¹⁶ https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/poland-hoping-to-be-the-new-switzerland-for-bollywood-films-114021401033_1.html

¹⁷ <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/bollywood/salman-in-poland-to-shoot-upcoming-films-climax>

¹⁸ <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/variety/By-wooing-Bollywood-Poland-hopes-to-win-the-heart-of-Indian-travellers/article20749123.ece>

¹⁹ Further connections with Bollywood and Salman Khan have emerged through the former Miss Romania winner, Julia Verdes. Verdes, who was allegedly dating Salman Khan, made her Bollywood

couple of unreleased films: the Sanjay Dutt-starrer *Dost* and J.P. Dutta-produced *Jee Bhar Ke Jee Le* (2015), *Singh Is Bling* (2015), and *Saaho* (2019). Bollywood film distribution circuits in Romania have also improved over the years, with successful theatrical releases for films such as *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* and *Ek Tha Tiger*. Bollywood has also become a steady feature on Romanian television networks, with 4 channels (namely Bollywood TV, Bollywood Classic, Bollyshow, and Bollywood HD) regularly airing around 3000 hours of content every year.

In the last decade, the increased Bollywood excursions into Eastern Europe have also touched upon several other national frontiers. Imtiaz Ali has extensively featured locations in the Czech Republic (especially Prague) within his directorial projects, *Rockstar* and *Jab Harry Met Sejal*. The latter of these films also feature neighbouring Hungary, a relatively unexplored Bollywood location that has gained further media traction with films such as *Force 2* and *Raabta*. Shah Rukh Khan's travels to Dubrovnik, Croatia (for the film *Fan*) and to Bulgaria and Iceland (for *Dilwale*) have also drawn considerable interest in these nascent Bollywood locations. Among the Baltic nations, Latvia was used as a cinematic backdrop in *Agent Vinod* and *Akaash Vani*, while Estonia will soon feature in the upcoming Bollywood film *Mrs. Chatterjee Vs. Norway*.²⁰ Russia, which has a long history of cinematic associations with India, has also supported the efforts of contemporary Bollywood filmmakers. In addition to a few television commercials shot in Russia, the film *Uddham Singh* shot several scenes featuring St. Petersburg in an effort to recreate London. In addition to Bollywood, Eastern European nations have also hosted several regional film productions from southern parts of India. Serbia, for instance, has not only hosted the Bollywood productions *Uri* and *Soorma* but also provided the location for the Tamil action-thriller film *Cheekha Chivantha Vaanam*, directed and produced by Mani Ratnam. Similarly, V.V. Vinayak's Telugu film *Nayak* and Kannada film *Super Ranga* have all featured attractive Slovenian locations (particularly the Postojna Caves, the alpine resort of Bled, and the historic mediaeval town of Piran). Several other notable film projects have also shifted production to Eastern Europe, such as *Bahubali* and *Mass*, shot in Bulgaria, and Telugu films *Khaidi No. 150* and *Mahanabhavudu*, shot in Croatia.

In addition to featuring romantic song and dance sequences, choreographed action-based spectacles have become a key narrative element that often guides the novel use of foreign spaces in many of these contemporary film productions. In this regard, local production agencies and tourist organizations have significantly helped bolster the growing connections between Bollywood and East Europe. The Budapest-based production agency, Flatpack Films, has helped Bollywood filmmakers organise location scouting, secure licences and equipment, and find supportive casts in Hungary. Speaking about shooting *Raabta*, the producer Zita Kisgergely noted:

The action-packed nature of the shoot presented many complex logistical challenges. A key scene was an explosion involving a helicopter, stunts, pyrotechnicians, and safety divers

acting debut with *U Me Aur Hum* (2009) and has also been featured in several ad campaigns for Ponds, Maruti, and Tanishq.

²⁰ A TOI report cites the difficulty of procuring visas for shooting in Norway as a reason for the film shift to Estonia. Link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/rani-mukherji-starrer-mrs-chatterjee-vs-norway-to-be-shot-in-estonia/articleshow/85234061.cms>

shooting on a barge rigged with barrels of explosives. Safety was obviously a huge consideration. We ensured that highly-trained and experienced explosives experts were on hand to carry out the propane-fuelled explosions within the bounds of safety and regulation. Thankfully, we have top notch pyrotechnicians in Hungary with over 30 years of feature film experience under their belts.²¹

Similarly, the cooperation between Serbian film crews, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, and Serbian armed forces helped Bollywood filmmakers set up the surgical strike operations in the film *Uri*. In matters of post-production services too, Serbia has emerged as a prominent name in the international film circuit over the last decade. Serbian VFX studios, especially Crater Studio, began to be noticed by Indian filmmakers after providing high-quality special effects on *Bahubali 2: The Conclusion*. From thereon, Crater Studio has collaborated on several action-based film projects such as *Thugs of Hindustan*, *Sye Raa Narsimha Reddy*, and *Saaho*, and is also said to be organizing the post-production of the upcoming film *Shamshera*.²² A number of east European studios (including Crater Studio) were also involved in the post-production of *2.0*, a sequel to *Enthiran* starring Rajnikanth, Akshay Kumar, and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan.

The developing relations between Bollywood and East Europe have benefitted significantly on account of the tax relief structures in the region and the generally cheaper cost of production (specifically when compared to shooting in western Europe). Among many others, countries such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, and Iceland have all incentivized film production in their respective countries by offering tax rebates between 20 and 35%. Speaking to IBTimes recently in 2020, the Indian Ambassador to Poland, for instance, noted:

We offer very good locations and we also offer very good incentives. The Polish Institute of Film Industry offers up to 30 percent of the cost refund when the production is in Poland, about Poland and there's a cooperation with some Polish company.²³

These economic reforms are complemented by the cheap costs of recruiting local labour, technicians, and film crews, which significantly bring down the overall costs of filming in eastern European nations. Rohit Shetty, who was recently honoured by the Indian Embassy in Bulgaria for his contributions to bringing Bollywood production to the country,²⁴ was initially persuaded to film in the region because of the financial advantages. Nataranjan Ramji, a location expert instrumental in bringing Shetty to Bulgaria, remarked:

²¹ <https://www.lbbonline.com/news/flatpack-films-reincarnates-romance-for-highly-anticipated-indian-blockbuster>

²² <https://www.filminserbia.com/dont-breathe-crater-studio-word-interview-milovan-mladenovic/>

²³ [https://www.ibtimes.co.in/poland-lures-indian-film-makers-30-rebate-scenic-beauty-icing-cake-exclusive-](https://www.ibtimes.co.in/poland-lures-indian-film-makers-30-rebate-scenic-beauty-icing-cake-exclusive-831505#:~:text=From%20Salman%20Khan's%20super%20Dhit,offer%20beyond%20those%20breathtaking%20landscapes.)

[831505#:~:text=From%20Salman%20Khan's%20super%20Dhit,offer%20beyond%20those%20breathtaking%20landscapes.](https://www.ibtimes.co.in/poland-lures-indian-film-makers-30-rebate-scenic-beauty-icing-cake-exclusive-831505#:~:text=From%20Salman%20Khan's%20super%20Dhit,offer%20beyond%20those%20breathtaking%20landscapes.)

²⁴ <https://www.aninews.in/news/entertainment/bollywood/rohit-shetty-felicitated-for-bringing-bollywood-movie-shooting-to-bulgaria20190815214620/>

I explained how we could shoot a lot of *Dilwale's* action scenes in Bulgaria. In India, all we see are Tata Sumos and Scorpios being blown up for the sake of action. But in Bulgaria, I could offer Porsches, Jaguars and Bentleys at the same price it would cost us to hire auto-rickshaws here.²⁵

In the following years, these cinematic links between Bulgaria, action scenes, and Bollywood are expected to grow due to Shetty's active presence in the location. Shetty's current project in Bulgaria involves playing the host for the television reality show *Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi*.

Finally, an important factor to consider in the development of Bollywood-Eastern Europe links is the active support of national film and tourism agencies in the region. In Poland, for instance, several news websites and articles attribute the emergence of Bollywood in the region to the collective push generated by national agencies such as the Polish Tourism Organization, Film Polska Productions, and the Krakow Festival Office.²⁶ The Film Commission Poland and Polish Film have also actively supported Bollywood filmmakers, mainly by providing logistical support and advice on procuring local funding sources. Compared to filming in the UK, Bollywood directors have also noted easier access to obtaining visas and licence permits for shooting in Poland.²⁷ In Slovenia, similarly, the Indian ambassador to Slovenia, Jayakar Jerome, is actively inviting filmmakers to undertake cinematic projects in the region. *Nayak*, the first Indian and Telugu film to be shot in Slovenia, was issued quick permissions and single-window clearances upon request. Supporting the production of the film in Slovenia, Jerome observed:

In case of *Nayak*, local authorities were quite positive and attaining permissions for filming at popular spots was a smooth process. My doors are open to all Indian citizens... I am prepared and willing to knock on the doors of local authorities in Slovenia if such endeavours serve the interest of Indian filmmakers, businessmen and citizens.²⁸

In addition to Slovenia and Poland, many national government organizations in east Europe have begun to recognize the potential streams of Indian tourism that these on and off-screen collaborations with Bollywood can engender. The systemic introduction of cash rebates, advice on obtaining local sources of funding and logistical support, and easier access to travel visas, licenses, and permits for film crews across Eastern Europe are therefore all catered towards highlighting the region as a tourist attraction. Outside government promotions and marketing, Bollywood fans in the region have occasionally organized cultural events to celebrate the growing connections between Eastern Europe and Bollywood. Hungary, for instance, has regularly conducted Indian film festivals, the last of which was held before the pandemic in 2019 and visited by actor Raima Sen, director Rahul Mitra, and several other officials and dignitaries belonging to both the Indian Embassy in Hungary and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary.²⁹ Filmmaker and

²⁵ <https://www.bollywoodpresents.com/bollywood-in-bulgaria/>

²⁶ In 2012, the agencies also helped orchestrate an audio-visual co-production agreement between India and Poland, which stated that films that were co-produced in both nations would be collectively classified as national films in both countries.

²⁷ *Kick*, which was originally to be shot in the UK, shifted its production to Poland after facing difficulty obtaining visas for its film crews.

²⁸ <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/280103/its-now-slovenia-calling-bollywood.html>

²⁹ <https://www.indiablooms.com/showbiz-details/F/12005/5th-edition-of-indian-film-festival-hungary-opens-in-budapest.html>

Bollywood fan Marion Trotte helped choreograph the first Bollywood flash mob in Ljubljana, Slovenia, which involved several Indian students and other fans based in the capital city.³⁰ Noting the growing popularity of Bollywood films in Slovenia, the nation has also hosted an annual Indian film festival and featured several prominent Bollywood productions in the Ljubljana International Film Festivals. These developments have resulted in a greater and more layered degree of connectivity between India and Eastern Europe, which can be properly understood in the context of Bollywood and the gradually strengthened networks of Indian tourism in Eastern Europe.

While the relations between Bollywood and Eastern Europe are still in their nascent stages and will require further work in the coming years, the increasing levels of collaboration between the two indicate emerging new trends in Indian tourism. Many Indian pop culture pages, tourist vlogs, and travel websites and blogs have begun featuring itineraries, travel plans, and information about famous tourist destinations in Eastern Europe. More significantly, these tour guides and packages are often addressed by way of framing Bollywood films that have been shot in these specific regions. On Thomas Cook's website, for instance, one can find a wide range of summer and winter packages titled "East European Dhamaka". Bookings.com has similarly designed blogs titled "Move Over Switzerland: The New Bollywood Film Sets," which are specifically marketed to Bollywood fans who wish to visit Eastern European film locations.³¹ While precise tourism figures for recent years are yet to be released (specifically in the context of Bollywood), an Economic Times article from 2018 records a substantial increase in the number of Indian tourists visiting Eastern Europe annually.³² Among the many countries in eastern Europe, the article cites Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania as the most popular draws to the region. Drawing on statistics from SchengenVisaInfo.com, the article mentions that the number of visas issued by Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic has shot up from 10 lakhs to 14 lakhs between 2017 and 2018. VFS Global similarly estimates an 89% annual growth in the number of visa applications issued by the Czech Republic. Travel-providing agencies such as Make My Trip, Thomas Cook, and Cox and Kings have similarly registered a high level of inquiries about visits to east European nations. In this regard, a spokesperson from MakeMyTrip suggests:

On an average, we have seen over 60% growth in the number of bookings for Eastern Europe on our platform compared to last year. While Prague, Vienna and Budapest are top favourite cities to visit in the region, the Croatian coastline is catching the imagination of a lot of travellers and we foresee a lot of growth in outbound travel for this region.³³

Thomas Cook, too, has registered a positive outflow in the number of Indian tourists visiting eastern Europe. The organization observes a travel increase of 25–30% in the region, which exceeds the number of visitors to mainland Europe, which saw an increase of only 10-15%. Predicting a greater influx of travel to newer regions in the eastern parts of Europe, Romil Pant (the Senior Vice President, Leisure Travel, Thomas Cook) notes:

³⁰ <https://www.firstpost.com/fwire/slovenia-to-get-its-first-bollywood-flashmob-1467385.html>

³¹ <https://news.booking.com/move-over-switzerland-the-new-bollywood-film-sets/>

³² <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/travel/eastern-europe-getting-popular-on-the-radar-of-indian-travellers/articleshow/66443224.cms>

³³ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/travel/eastern-europe-getting-popular-on-the-radar-of-indian-travellers/articleshow/66443224.cms>

The Balkan states of Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia Montenegro constitute another belt that is emerging besides Hungary Poland and Austria. A lot of Bollywood films have been shot in locations like Serbia. WOW air is starting direct operations from India this year so we hope the Iceland numbers will also go up.³⁴

These projections give us some initial ideas about the ways in which Bollywood, East European spaces, and the tourism sector have started to consolidate. While the lack of direct air connectivity, language barriers, and the lack of financial incentives and filming infrastructure in several east European nations still continue to hinder and limit the successes of these newly emerging connections, this report hopes to provide some initial patterns and insight that might help us track further vectors of growth in the evolving relations between Bollywood, eastern European locations, and Indian tourism sectors.

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³⁴ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/travel/eastern-europe-getting-popular-on-the-radar-of-indian-travellers/articleshow/66443224.cms>

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