



Civita di Bagnoregio, near Rome, was founded by the Etruscans in the 8th century BC and is said to have inspired the animated film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, below

Asian cinema buffs breathe new life into Italy's castle in the sky

Italy

Tom Kington Rome

Standing in the hot autumn sun, the Chinese tourist counted off the places that her tour group was visiting on its whirlwind tour of Italy. "Venice, Rome and, of course, here we are at Civita di Bagnoregio, which we couldn't miss because we have all seen the film," said Queenie Chung, 22, a student from Hong Kong.

Unknown to many European tourists, the tiny village is perched on a plug of rock near Rome, and is known locally as "the dying town" because of the landslides that threaten its existence. It is enjoying a new lease on life, however,



with hordes of tourists visiting each year — 250,000 of them from the Far East, drawn by a wildly popular 1986 animated film. *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, by the Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki, follows two children searching for a legendary floating castle said to be inspired by Civita di Bagnoregio. Linked to the outside world by a footbridge, it appears to float when surrounded by morning mists.

Now a fixture for tour groups from Japan, China, South Korea and Taiwan, the village hosted 18,000 visitors on a single day in Easter, despite having only seven full-time residents.

"I first heard of the film connection ten years ago when the Japanese ambassador called me

to say Civita was a magical destination and could he visit," said Francesco Bigiotti, the mayor.

Tourism boomed after the town began charging a €1.50 entry fee in 2013. "We have gone from 40,000 visitors in 2010 and have now raised the ticket to €5 in high season," Mr Bigiotti said. "Strangely, the more it goes up, the more people come."

That is a cautionary tale for Venice, which is considering introducing an entrance fee to cut tourist numbers.

Civita, founded by the Etruscans in the 8th century BC, has become ever less accessible as the land around it erodes. "In an earthquake in 1695 the hospital and prison fell into the valley and in the 19th century a landslide took an entire neighbourhood with it," said Luca Costantini, a local geologist.

When an access road crumbled in the past century, a bridge was built to connect the few remaining residents to the

new town springing up beside it. Now, with a total of one million visitors expected this year, Mr Bigiotti will have a €2.5 million windfall to help to shore up the crumbling clay and tuff rock perch on which Civita sits.

The cash is also coming in handy to scrap local taxes, offer free school lunches and even pay utility bills for low earners among the 3,700 residents of the new town.

One of the seven remaining residents of the "dying town" told *The Times* that he was nonplussed by the tourism boom. "Tourists climb on walls to take pictures and pee in the street. I thought charging entry would stop people coming, but the opposite happened," said Sandro Rocchi, 74.

He admitted that some good had come from the influx. "My son runs a restaurant here and got married last week — the first time we had a local wedding in decades."

Record catch means even chickens feast on caviar

Russia

Marc Bennetts Moscow

If black caviar was the food of the tsars, salmon roe has always been a delicacy most Russians could afford.

Now, after the most bountiful salmon catch in more than a century, even farm animals are being fed "red caviar" and tons of fish are being dumped in forests and at the side of roads.

Piles of salmon have been seen rotting in remote areas of the Kamchatka region, a huge volcanic peninsula 4,200 miles from Moscow in the country's east. Photos shared on social media show chickens and sheep eating excess red caviar that producers have disposed of rather than swamp the market.

This season 612,000 tons of mainly pink and chum salmon have already

been caught. The haul is the biggest since records began in 1908.

Red caviar is produced from salmon, trout, or cod roe while black caviar is made from the roe of sturgeon.

Many Russians eat red caviar, which costs around £10 for 200 grams. Black caviar sells in Moscow for anything up to £450 for the same amount.

Experts have struggled to explain this year's record catches, which followed Alaska's near-record salmon harvest in 2017.

Andrei Aronov, a Russian fishing industry official, suggested that vast numbers may have fled Alaska after undersea tremors. "Salmon shoals are easily frightened," he told Moscow's BFM radio station. "Their unpredictable behaviour makes it difficult to predict the size of harvests."

Help yourself: store opens with digital honesty box

United States

Will Pavia New York

New York's newest store is a small, rectangular parlour with gold lettering on the windows, just like other shops on the Lower Manhattan street. From the outside, at least.

Dirty Lemon sells potions that promise to calm the stomach, support the liver or sharpen the mind, at prices that will make your eyes water. What the shop lacks is a check-out or anyone who can take payment.

Inside there are three fridges stocked with cold drinks and, for this week only, a woman offering explanations to bewildered shoppers. On the back of each bottle of drink is a tele-

phone number: after picking up their All Day Energy or Beauty Elixir, customers text the number to arrange payment. Merel Petri, Dirty Lemon's communications director, said the idea was "to make our customers' lives as easy as possible".

After texting the number on a bottle of All Day Energy, a sour-tasting concoction with ginseng and lemon juice, a response arrives 15 minutes or so later, saying: "Can we have your name and email?" It was accompanied by the reassurance: "We manually reply (humans here) x".

Then comes a link to a page on which to enter credit card details, and the receipt is sent by email.



Steam train lost in 1852 to be pulled from Rhine

Germany

Oliver Moody Berlin

The large blob of metal lurking beneath a waterlogged gravel bank in the Rhine could be an unexploded bomb or it could be the lost golden treasure of the Rhine maidens.

Then again, it might just be the steam engine that Horst Müller has been pursuing for more than half of his adult life. Mr Müller, 68, a retired train driver and railway fanatic from Cochem, a town near the Mosel's confluence with the Rhine at Koblenz, first read about the sunken locomotive when he was 12. "We used to live near the train station," he said. "From our home I could look out and see the lines and the depot and observe the steam engines passing by. That was where it started."

The locomotive, *Der Rhein*, has an almost mythical status among German train buffs. If Mr Müller and his team succeed in hauling it out of the water next month, it will be the country's oldest surviving steam engine. *Der Rhein* was built in 1852 by Emil Kessler in Karlsruhe, to replace a British-made engine of the same name.

A freight ship called *The City of Koblenz* set off to carry it down the Rhine to Düsseldorf but never arrived. A storm caught the ship's sails and tipped 20 tonnes of cast iron into the river. A



Horst Müller, right, and friends with a model of the lost locomotive

fortnight later, 400 men toiled in vain to raise *Der Rhein* with a pair of giant chains. The locomotive began to rise, then fell back with a lurch. One of the chains had broken. After a third attempt with a ship's anchor went awry, *Der Rhein* sank into oblivion for more than a century. Then Mr Müller rediscovered the story in a railway magazine three decades ago. He hunted for the locomotive with a lover's ardour. "It took about 25 years just to investigate where the location is," he said.

In 2008 he found what he was looking for, buried in the archive in nearby Speyer. Comparing old newspapers with maps and engineering records, he found a spot near Germersheim, 12 miles downstream of Karlsruhe.

Four years later, after several false starts, Mr Müller and Bernhard Forkmann, professor of geophysics at the Technical University of Freiberg, found the magnetic signature of a substantial chunk of iron beneath 2m of water and 5m of gravel.

The world will discover whether the sunken mass is *Der Rhein* on October 21, when the local aquatic engineering firm OHF plans to raise it from the grave where it has lain for 166 years. Last week the engineers set up a pontoon, digger and 21m iron beam, which will anchor 200 tonnes of scaffolding.

Mr Müller estimates that rescuing the engine, shipping it to Mannheim and then taking it to be restored in Darmstadt will cost about half a million euros, €220,000 of which his team are seeking to raise from the public. "It would be wonderful," he said. "I've been waiting for this moment since 1986."