

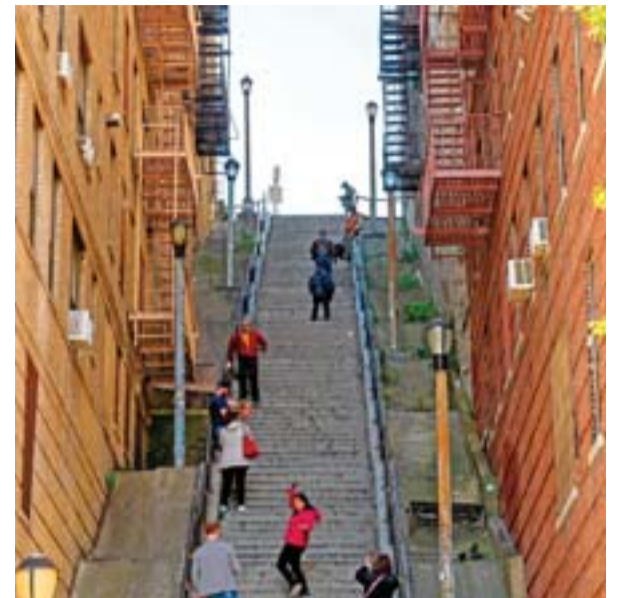
Lifestyle | Features



Visitors hold a Joker pose for pictures on the staircase in the Bronx, made famous by the movie "Joker," October 23, 2019 in New York. — AFP photos



A woman poses next to a joker face painted on the staircase in the Bronx.



People pose and take selfies on the staircase in the Bronx.

Movie fans flock to 'Joker' steps in New York

Tourists are flocking to a flight of stairs in the Bronx area of New York that Joaquin Phoenix dances down in an iconic but controversial scene from hit movie "Joker." Film buffs have even had to queue before being able to snap photos of themselves recreating the character's pose that appears on the poster of the Todd Phillips-directed blockbuster.

"It looks even better than in the movie," Tasula Ceballos, a young Russian living in Miami, told AFP, slightly disappointed that the crowds meant her photos didn't come out quite as she had hoped. "I love when directors shoot in real places. Usually they film in studios like Warner Brothers but this is a real place. We can come and we can touch the floor," she added. Before "Joker" hit theaters in early October, the 132 steps between Shakespeare Avenue and Anderson Avenue were about as far away from the tourist trail in New York as you could get.

Now visitors are swarming to them from all over the world to upload pictures to Instagram or create hilarious memes to share online. "I've been a huge fan of Batman

since I was small and I'm really happy to come here," said French teenager Noa Angenost, who planned to post his photos on Instagram. In the film, Phoenix dances down the steps — with a backdrop of streetlights and classic New York fire escapes — after transforming himself into the Batman villain.

Many reviewers were outraged, however, that the song he danced to was by convicted pedophile Gary Glitter. The former glam rocker is in a British jail for sexually abusing three girls in the late 1970s. This is not the first time that a staircase featured in a film has become a tourist draw — the steep, narrow flight of 75 stone steps in Washington's Georgetown neighborhood seen in "The Exorcist" have drawn crowds for decades.

In the Bronx, the sudden "Joker" craze is not appreciated by everyone. Elliott Raylassi, carrying his white bike on his shoulder, tries to disrupt the photo shoots. "It's my neighborhood and I have to do what I can to defend it," he told AFP, saying it was a "shock" that his area was suddenly under the microscope. "The movie came out and within

a week, people came to visit one of the worst neighborhoods in the borough. "There's a trend in New York City that when a neighborhood garners a lot of tourists' attention, it sparks the interest of developers," he added. Frankie Astacio, who lives on the other side of the street from the steps, welcomes the interest though. "It's good for the neighborhood. It makes it more exciting," he said.

'Joker' gets the last laugh

Meanwhile, Warner Bros' "Joker" won a battle of the supervillains this weekend, selling an estimated \$18.9 million in tickets to edge out "Maleficent: Mistress of Evil" and regain the top spot in North American theaters, an industry group reported Sunday. The Joaquin Phoenix scarefest slipped from last weekend's take of \$29.2 million for the Friday-to-Sunday period, but still bested the \$18.5 million taken in by "Maleficent," a dark fantasy from Disney starring Angelina Jolie. "Joker," with Phoenix incarnating Batman's notorious nemesis, accomplished the rare feat of returning to No 1 in its fourth week out. It has now

taken in an impressive \$849.1 million globally, becoming the most successful R-rated movie in history, according to Variety.

With Halloween only days away, scary movies did well overall. In third spot was "The Addams Family" from United Artists, at \$11.7 million. The computer animation, following the spooky Addams family and some creepy relatives, features the voices of Oscar Isaac, Charlize Theron, Snoop Dogg and Bette Midler. In fourth, at \$11.6 million in its second week out, was Sony's "Zombieland: Double Tap," a comedy starring Woody Harrelson, Emma Stone and Luke Wilson. New release "Countdown" from STX films placed fifth at \$9 million. The low-budget horror film tells the tale of a nurse (Elizabeth Lail) who finds an app that predicts exactly when people will die — and learns her own death is only days away. — AFP



In this file photo taken on January 6, 2016 Netflix CEO Reed Hastings gives a keynote address, at the CES 2016 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

Climate experts ask you to Chill your Netflix habit

Movie nights once required driving to the local video store to rent, rewind and return the latest blockbuster. Now on-demand video content providers offer countless binge-worthy options at the touch of a finger. But experts say the ease of streaming services comes with a hefty environmental price tag.

Watching a half-hour show would lead to emissions of 1.6 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent, said Maxime Efoù-Hess of French think tank the Shift Project. That's equivalent to driving 3.9 miles. Last year, online video streaming produced emissions equivalent to Spain and that amount may double in the next six years, according to the Shift Project. While most of the online traffic — 34 percent — is related to streaming videos, on Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu, for example, the next biggest sector is online porn.

"Digital videos come in very large file sizes and (are) getting bigger with each new generation of higher definition video," said Gary Cook of Greenpeace, which monitors the IT sector's energy footprint. "More data equals more energy needed to maintain a system that is ready to stream this video to your device at a moment's notice," Cook told AFP. Much of the energy needed for streaming services is consumed by the data centre, which delivers data to your computer or device, explained Cook. The centers contribute about 0.3 percent of all carbon emissions, according to an article by Nature. Experts remain divided on how much that number will grow.

'Waste of resources on all levels' -

"For energy consumption to stay flat for the next five to 10 years, significant improvement in IT equipment and data centre energy performance must be made or our appetite for computations must diminish," said Dale Sartor of the Center of Expertise for Data Centers, linked to the US Department of Energy. Anders Andrae of Huawei Technologies told AFP he estimated they would consume as

much as 4.1 percent of global electricity by 2030.

Web-based video traffic is expected to increase four times from 2017 to 2022 and account for 80 percent of all internet traffic by 2022, according to the CISCO Network. Netflix is continuing to expand globally — the company reported a 53-percent increase in international revenue for streaming subscriptions between 2017 and 2018. And Disney and Apple are launching their own streaming services this year.

Meanwhile, the equipment used to view videos is getting larger — the average screen size shot up from 22 inches in 1997 to an expected 50 inches by 2021, according to the Consumer Technology Association. "The changing screen size and related shift to digital video technology has set the stage for higher definition and thus larger file sizes that we are streaming," said Cook.

Screens with 4K resolution use about 30 percent more energy than high-definition screens, according to a report by the Natural Resources Defense Council. Last year, 8K screens made their debut. The consequence is "a waste of resources at all levels", added Laurent Lefevre of the French Institute for Research in Computer Science and Automation.

Experts suggest that viewers disable autoplay and stream over Wi-Fi in lower-definition formats. The worst-case scenario is watching over a 3G connection on a mobile device, said Lefevre. The Shift Project offers a browser extension that monitors internet use, displaying the amount of electricity used, the CO2 that electricity produces, and how far the user would have to drive to match those emissions. Cook emphasizes the most impactful change consumers can make is through their wallets. "Exercising collective responsibility, with individuals demanding internet giants rapidly transition their data centers to renewable energy, has been the biggest driver thus far," he said. — AFP

Streaming TV gears up for ad targeting

In the new world of streaming television, advertising is not going away, but is evolving to become more like marketing on the internet — targeted to specific groups or individuals. While some subscription streaming services including Netflix, Apple+ and Disney+ have pledged to be ad-free, others including those from WarnerMedia and NBCUniversal are expected to have some ad-supported options, as does Hulu.

Because these new platforms operate online, they will also be able to deliver targeted or "addressable" ads based on viewing habits, location and other data it may collect, in the same manner as Google and Facebook. According to the research firm eMarketer, addressable TV ad revenue — which includes some ads on traditional TV — in the US is likely to grow from \$1.5 billion in 2018 to \$3.5 billion in 2021.

Smaller players

Streaming services are making it easier for smaller companies and marketers to get on television through self-serve ad platforms without the big budgets required for broadcast TV, according to eMarketer analyst Ross Benes. "There are a lot of new companies coming into television advertising" as a result of streaming, Benes said. "TV is still a place where you can get a massive amount of people's attention."

Roku, a television platform for many smart TVs, announced plans this month to buy data, which provides automated self-serve ads for what is known in the industry as "over the top" or OTT services. "TV advertising is shifting toward OTT and a data-driven model focused on business outcomes for brands," said Anthony Wood, chief executive officer at Roku.

Fresh privacy issues

The rise of streaming could raise a fresh set of privacy concerns over how data on TV viewers is collected and shared across various platforms and devices. A recent academic study found smart TVs, streaming dongles and other connected devices sending data to companies such as Netflix and Facebook.

"There is a small number of these cloud providers that are getting a lot of insight into what you're doing with these devices," said David Choffnes of Northeastern University, who led the research. The researchers wrote that these devices "have the potential to learn and expose extensive information about their users and their surrounding environment. Much of this information has major privacy implications."

Alan Wolk, co-founder and lead analyst at the consultancy TVrev, said he expects streaming ads to be less intrusive than those which follow users around the internet. "The TV industry has learned from digital that people find that kind of advertising creepy," he said. Wolk said streaming services are aiming for fewer ads compared with broadcast television that will be "less painful" for viewers because they are more relevant. An apartment dweller, for example, might not be interested in a lawn care ad and a 24-year-old may be turned off by messages for retirement. And advertisers will pay more if they know their messages are being delivered to people interested in their products. "The ultimate goal is to be able to get fewer, better targeted ads that brands will pay more money for and consumers are happy to watch," Wolk said.

Limits of targeting

Targeting for television has limits, however. It is never really clear which member of a family is watching a specific show, or whether it is seen

live or recorded. Charles Taylor, a marketing professor at Villanova University, said addressable TV advertising is on the rise, but that platforms are likely to be sensitive to consumer privacy concerns, and aware of new laws including a strict statute in California.

The California law, he said, "won't allow marketers to build data management platforms where they are merging data from various sources." As a result, Taylor said the targeting is likely to be "behavioral," or based largely on viewing habits, without the detailed profiles that Facebook and Google use. "Almost nobody would want health information shared; on the other hand most people don't mind more targeted ads based on their real preferences," Taylor said.

2020 political ads

Addressable TV advertising also opens up a new channel for political ads, potentially impacting spending in the 2020 US election campaign. "I don't think there's any doubt this will play a

role" in the election campaign, Taylor said. "The databases out there are pretty effective at knowing someone's political affiliation and a well-built data management platform should be able to give you a good idea of which voters might potentially be swayed."

Mark Jablonowski, managing partner at the digital ad consultancy DSPolitical, said these new platforms may not be able to get the kinds of details of internet services, but that they may still be useful for candidates. "For now the platforms are well suited to geographical targeting — which can be quite powerful in politics," Jablonowski said. "Candidates running in 2020 would be smart to include these platforms in their media mix because, at the end of the day, political advertising is all about getting in front of voters wherever and whenever possible." — AFP



In this file photo taken on September 5, 2019 posters of the Friends cast are seen during the Friends New York City Pop-Up press preview in New York. — AFP

UK train firm searches for missing rare violin

A British railway company said yesterday it was helping a renowned violinist track down a 310-year-old violin he accidentally left on a train. Southeastern, which runs commuter services to London, is working with police to try to locate the instrument, worth a reported £250,000 (\$321,000, 289,000 euros). Renowned musician Stephen Morris accidentally left the violin, which was made by Roman master craftsman David Tecchler in 1709, on a suburban train last Tuesday.

"We're doing everything we can to find Stephen's treasured violin," Southeastern said in a statement. "Our colleagues have already been going above and beyond to see if we can find out what has happened to it." The train company added its staff and officers from the British Transport Police were reviewing security camera footage from the train as well as stations. Morris was due to

play the violin while leading the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in two Andrea Bocelli concerts at the weekend, according to the BBC. "I was really only its custodian — one of many people who have played it — and I had hoped to pass it on to another violinist eventually. "It is like having my arm cut off," he said. The instrumentalist, who has played on film scores including The Lord of the Rings and James Bond movies, and recorded with David Bowie and Stevie Wonder, has begged for its return. Tecchler was part of the renowned Roman School of Violin Making in the 17th and 18th centuries. Morris said he bought his instrument, which had been recently restored, in 2003 and described it as "a piece of history." — AFP