

Amazon extends video streaming to more than 200 countries

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Amazon's Grand Tour can now be seen in 200 countries

Amazon said Wednesday it was extending its on-demand video streaming service to more than 200 countries, placing "The Grand Tour" and other shows in head-to-head global competition with "Narcos" and other Netflix hits.

Until now, Amazon Prime Video was available only in the United States,

Britain, Germany, Austria and Japan.

The giant retailer announced it was offering the service at no additional cost to existing customers of Amazon Prime in Belgium, Canada, France, India, Italy and Spain.

For customers in the new markets, the service is being offered at an introductory price of \$2.99 (euros) per month for the first six months, instead of the standard \$5.99 (euros).

Programmes can be watched at any time through an app for smartphones and tablets, and through internet-enabled TV, Amazon said. Subscribers can also download all titles to mobile devices for viewing offline.

Netflix expanded to 190 countries at the start of 2016, billing itself as the first global television service.

Amazon's flagship programme is "The Grand Tour," a lavishly-funded and critically-acclaimed version of BBC's laddish car series, "Top Gear".

The company hired its colourful host, Jeremy Clarkson and two loyal co-stars, after the BBC dropped Clarkson for punching a producer.

The BBC came back with a rebooted version featuring new presenters but the programme suffered mediocre reviews.

Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are investing heavily in programming, winning plaudits for creativity.

Together they have spent some \$7.5 billion—more than competitors CBS, HBO, or Turner, according to analysts IHS Markit.

Netflix's hit series include "House of Cards," "Orange is the New Black"

and "Narcos".

It has planned for more than 1,000 hours of original programming next year and expanded its content budget to some \$6 billion.

Original Amazon productions "Transparent" and "Mozart in the Jungle" won prestigious Emmy Awards in the US.

Prime Video is a perk of an Amazon subscription [service](#) that includes free delivery of products bought at its online store, which has moved dramatically beyond its early days as a bookseller.

Amazon has not disclosed the number of Prime subscribers, but research company CIRP estimated in late September that in the US alone there were 65 million, up 38 percent from a year earlier.

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