

Italy taps German archaeologist to oversee Pompeii ruins

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A German-born archaeologist has been chosen to be the next director of Pompeii, which is still revealing its ancient mysteries centuries after a volcanic eruption destroyed the Roman city and is one of Italy's most popular tourist sites.

Culture Minister Dario Franceschini announced Saturday that Gabriel Zuchtriegel won out over 43 other candidates for the job.

Zuchtriegel, 39, has been directing another ancient marvel in southern Italy, the state archeological park of Paestum and Velia. He took up that post after Italy in 2015 started considering foreign candidates for state museum directorships, a change intended to bring fresh ideas and leadership approaches to the cultural institutions.

The Culture Ministry noted that since 2020, Zuchtriegel also has held Italian citizenship.

Archeological digs in Pompeii's ruins have yielded amazing discoveries in recent years, and large swaths await further excavation. In early 2015, Zuchtriegel himself worked on a project involving the Pompeii area.

He told Italian state RaiNews24 TV his new job will be "a great challenge."

The incoming director said Pompeii "is also a living place," referring to both recent exciting discoveries and the cultural events that are

occasionally held at the archaeological park south of Naples, Italy.

Pompeii, a Roman city destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., has enjoyed a renaissance after falling on hard times. Parts of excavated sites crumbled from weather erosion and a lack of timely maintenance. Years of neglect and mismanagement had put Italy at risk of losing European Union funding.

But Italy embraced the challenge, making Pompeii safe for its visitors and preserving brilliantly hued frescoes and other unearthed wonders.

Pompeii is a superstar in the galaxy of Italian tourist sites. In 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic gutted tourism in Italy, Pompeii attracted 4 million visitors.

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