

AWARDS // TRAVEL



Must-see: 10 best film festivals in the US for 2024

Celebrations of cinema

Best Film Festival (2024)

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Move over, Cannes! The film festival circuit in the United States is packed with fantastic events, from heavy hitters to up-and-comers screening tomorrow's biggest names in cinema.

To find the best, we asked an expert panel to nominate their favorites, then our readers voted for their top picks to determine the winners. Here are the 10 best film festivals in the United States for 2024.



Photo courtesy of [maybe: ummm guy](#)

No. 10: Chicago Underground Film Festival - Chicago, Illinois

Chicago Underground Film Festival (CUFF) is the longest-running underground film festival in the world, and you'll find daring documentaries and avant-garde narrative films here that push boundaries that other festivals don't. In addition to showing the work of new filmmakers, the genre-defying festival also pays tribute to underground legends like John Waters or Kenneth Anger, with retrospective showings of their classics.



Photo courtesy of [Karen Cammack](#)

No. 9: BendFilm Festival - Bend, Oregon

BendFilm celebrates independent film with a combo of in-person and virtual film screenings, as well as filmmaker discussions and mentor sessions for the public. It's one of only 27 Academy-qualifying film festivals in the U.S., with winners in the animated, Indigenous, and narrative short film categories eligible for Oscar nominations. Most of the screenings are held at the boutique arthouse Tin Pan Theater, a local community venue in downtown Bend.



Photo courtesy of [Hal Axler](#)

No. 8: Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival - Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival celebrates cinema and storytelling with 200 films from 40 countries, including a selection of world premieres. There's an impressive lineup of films, as well as directors, producers, actors, and special guests that attend, in addition to a red carpet ceremony and a classic church-turned-cinema hosting screenings. With the fabulous Fort Lauderdale beaches as a backdrop, all the more reason for this festival to be a winner on all fronts.



Photo courtesy of [Atlanta Film Festival](#)

No. 7: Atlanta Film Festival - Atlanta, Georgia

The 11-day Atlanta Film Festival highlights a diverse lineup of creative media, including virtual reality, episodic content, and music videos, alongside more traditional offerings. The event includes panel discussions and nearly 200 films from across the globe. It's also an Academy Award-qualifying festival.



Photo courtesy of [Washington West Film Festival](#)

No. 6: Washington West Film Festival - Reston, Virginia

Film and philanthropy come together at this Virginia film festival, where all box office proceeds are donated to communities in need. The festival screens films from several categories and genres, as well as hosts Q&A sessions and panel discussions with some of the industry's top names.



Photo courtesy of [James Wilson](#)

No. 5: Tallgrass Film Festival - Wichita, Kansas

Hosted by the Tallgrass Film Association, the four-day Tallgrass Film Festival is the largest independent film festival in the state of Kansas, showcasing the best films from around the world each October. There are parties across Wichita, discussions with filmmakers, classes on the art of filmmaking, and many of the films are screened at the historic Orpheum Theatre, a Wichita landmark and vaudeville venue that dates from 1922.



Photo courtesy of [Sher Pruitt / Out On Film](#)

No. 4: Out On Film - Atlanta, Georgia

Out on Film was established in 1987 as one of the first film festivals dedicated to LGBTQ stories and artists. The festival now spans 11 days, with a full lineup of film screenings and premieres. Documentaries shine, many with a focus on timely issues, like discrimination, HIV/AIDS, religion, and marriage equality.

Photo courtesy of [NewFilmmakers Los Angeles \(NFMLA\)](#)

No. 3: NewFilmmakers Los Angeles - Los Angeles, California

While most film festivals only come around once a year, NewFilmmakers Los Angeles has a monthly festival of shorts, documentaries, and feature films from around the world, followed by Q&A sessions with each filmmaker. Each of the monthly festivals has a specific focus, ranging from LGBTQ, Latin, and Black cinema to topics like immigration, disability, or international animation. There's something of interest for everyone here.

Photo courtesy of [Porter Loves](#)

No. 2: Pittsburgh Shorts Film Festival - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

For those who just can't budget the time to sit down to hours of feature films, this festival is for you, with nothing but short films from around the globe being screened at the landmark Harris Theater in downtown Pittsburgh. The festival is diverse, mixing local and international shorts, and also hosts a filmmaker conference, red carpet interviews with guest filmmakers, and even live readings by local actors of the winning entries in the festival's script competition. The festival only lasts four days, but it's absolutely packed with shorts and other events.

Photo courtesy of [Erin Brown Thomas](#)

No. 1: Salute Your Shorts Film Festival - Los Angeles, California

Salute Your Shorts was started by filmmakers for filmmakers and is now considered one of the top short film festivals in the country, noted for offering top-notch programming and a weekend of inspiring and thought-provoking cinema. Judges are directors, have won Oscars, have served at Sundance, and curated for Vimeo, meaning you're in good hands at this annual happening.

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