

# Film Festival Frame of Mind

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*By Jeanne Lee*

Paul Sloop admits he thought movies were just another form of entertainment.

That is, until a friend dragged him along to watch a Swedish film about a boy who is sent to live with relatives when his mother becomes ill. Sloop had low expectations.

â??I had always mocked subtitled films, making jokes about who wants to have to read when you go to the movies,â?• he says. But before the lights dimmed, a festival organizer got on stage to introduce the film to the audience. â??I had never experienced someone speaking before a film, offering background about both the film and the filmmaker. It infused the experience with a special sense of gravitas.â?•

It was the 1980s. The film? *My Life as a Dog*.

It was the first feature film from director Lasse HallstrÃ¶m, who then was known mainly for ABBA music videos, and it moved Sloop deeply.

â??I saw something more real in that film than I had ever experienced before,â?• Sloop says. His exhilaration at being one of its first viewers compounded when the movie earned an Oscar nomination. It soon became a much-beloved, international classic and a significant part of movie history.

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Sloop has been hooked on festivals ever since.

â??Thereâ??s a vibe and an energy that goes with a film festival thatâ??s quite different than just going to the average cineplex,â?• he says. â??Some of that is having the actors and filmmakers in attendance and experiencing Q&A sessions after the films, and often, getting to meet and speak to filmmakers directly. But itâ??s also the passion of the audience that gathers to celebrate the art of independent filmmaking.â?•

After his first festival, Sloop became a regular volunteer, then an organizer, and now serves as the director of programming for three festivals: the Cleveland International Film Festival in Ohio, Film Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and the Cordillera International Film Festival in Nevada.

The most prestigious festivals, like Sundance, Venice, and Cannes, evoke images of red carpets, celebrities, and extra-long standing ovations. But there are thousands of film festivals every year, and these magical experiences are not reserved only for entertainment industry insiders. Anyone can attend and share in the excitement of these multi-day debut celebrations for the some of the best movies of the year.



**Plan a Movie Getaway**

A film festival can be the backbone of a unique family vacation, since so many are in scenic locations. Imagine savoring a filmâ??or two or threeâ??each day with your favorite people, while relaxing in a mountain resort, a beach town, or a desert.

Take the Sedona International Film Festival as an example. â??Itâ??s in a beautiful part of Arizona and features an excellent program of films for a mainstream audience (not just film industry professionals), plus amazing live shows, Q&As, super fun parties, and an awards ceremony that

everyone is welcome to attend,â?• says Dr. Rebekah Louisa Smith. A Texas-based consultant also known as The Film Festival Doctor, Smith helps creators get their films recognized and screened at festivals.

â??You automatically feel like youâ??re there with family and friends,â?• she says. â??And you make new friends while youâ??re there.â?•

Whether you prefer heartfelt dramas, independent comedies, documentaries, shorts, or any other genre, there is a festival for you.

Do you also enjoy wine? If so, the McMinnville Short Film Festival may be a good fit. â??The town of McMinnville, Oregon, is charming, walkable, friendly, and gorgeous,â?• says Smith. â??Itâ??s also in wine country, offering many free wine samples and plenty of tasting opportunities. Itâ??s the kind of festival that is so welcoming that, if

you attend once, youâ??ll want to come back every year.â?•

A great festival for the young at heart is the Mammoth Lakes Film Festival, described as â??a summer camp with hot springsâ?• by MovieMaker Magazine, a respected industry source.

MovieMaker also highlights the Marthaâ??s Vineyard AA Film Festival and the Woods Hole Film Festival as vacation-worthy events. Both take place in beautiful settings.

Whichever festival suits your fancy, the common theme is the wonder and energy created when an enthusiastic audience comes together with the artists who made the film.

â??When you put people together in a dark room with a big screen and allow them to share the full experience as a community, then discuss what they saw with the artists themselves, it elevates the power of the filmgoing experience,â?• says Sloop. â??And it exponentially adds to the filmâ??s ability to educate, entertain, inform, and inspire.â?•

**What Ticket to Buy**

Film festivals offer several tiers of entry, including single-day or weeklong passes, individual film tickets, and, usually, a rush line: a festival tradition that offers last-minute entry to otherwise sold-out shows.

## MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS

Interested in art-focused philanthropy? If so, take note of the many perks that come with donating to a film festival.

Members and donors get priority access to the best screenings, plus special chances to engage with film communities. For example, at Sundance, members at various levels can buy pre-sale tickets and choose screenings before the general public. At the Toronto International Film Festival, benefits for patrons include industry parties and film talks, while top-level donors are invited to attend its celebrity-laden opening and closing night galas.

To best experience the full buffet, choose an all-access pass. â??This will ensure that you have access to sold-out screenings, avoid the stress of individual ticket booking, and secure priority seating,â?• says Smith. â??Passes often also include exclusive access to panels, networking events, and VIP lounges, allowing for a deeper, more cost-effective immersion into the festival experience.â?•

Prefer to sample the festival Ã  la carte?

â??Using me as an example, Iâ??d say buy a single ticket, attend a single screening, and you never know what might come of it!â?• says Sloop. â??At a minimum, youâ??ll have a very different and impactful experience and, if the stars align, like they did for me, you might just find a new lifelong passion.â?•

Single tickets or multipacks offer convenience and flexibility with less time commitment.

For peak spontaneity, join the rush line. Youâ??ll be part of a unique communal experience with other filmgoers who share your taste in actors and directors. With any luck, youâ??ll score a last-minute ticket and get to watch the movie with new friends you made in line.

**About the Author**

*Jeanne Lee is a Cleveland, Ohio-area writer specializing in lifestyle, wellness, and personal finance. For VESTED, she writes about purposeful living, pursuing new passions, and giving back to the community. She also keeps an eye on emerging technology and whatâ??s coming next. Her work has appeared in Fortune, Money, and USA TODAY, and on Health.com.*

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