

# PUNCHING above its weight

LUANG PRABANG FEST AIMS TO BE THE REGION'S PREEMINENT CINEMATIC PLATFORM

RETAINING ITS small-town feel and old-world charm, Laos' former royal capital and World Heritage city doesn't yet have a multiplex cinema, but that hasn't stopped it from hosting the Luang Prabang Film Festival, which is dedicated to showing the best of the region's filmmakers have to offer.

For its fourth-annual edition in December, the LPFF will host the world premieres of two films from Laos, which has only recently started putting itself on the region's movie map. Entries from Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are among other highlights as the festival emerges as an important platform for Southeast Asia's film professionals and fans to network and promote their work.

"We have had such a great response from our participating filmmakers and distribution companies about our lineup, and their desire to send the film's directors and producers to the festival," says festival director Gabriel Kuperman. "I am confident that this the strongest lineup we have had thus far."

The opening film will be "Big Heart", directed by Laos' Mattiphob Douangnyxay. It's about a young boxer overcoming personal obstacles while falling in love.

The other Lao premiere will be "I Love Savanh" by Bounthong Nhotmanhkong. It's about a Japanese expat working in southern Laos and taking romantic interest in a weaver.

"These impressive titles are the feature film debuts for both directors, and both show incredible promise for the filmmakers," Kuperman says.

Other highlights are two films by acclaimed "Love of Siam" director Chookiat Sakwearakul. He's expected to be on hand to present his award-winning Chiang Mai-set drama "Home" as well as his teen comedy "Great Fictions".

Noted Thai indie filmmaker Nontawat Numbenchapol will also be there, showing his documentary "Boundary", covering the Thai-Cambodian border dispute around the Preah Vihear temple.

More views from across the border come from Cambodian genocide survivor and activist Youk Chhang, who will present "A River Changes Course", which won the World Cinema Jury Prize at this year's Sundance festival. Directed by Kalyanee Mam and produced by Chhang's Documentation Centre Cambodia, it's a look at how the country's ancient culture and fragile environment is being devastated by globalisation.

And from Vietnam, Thi Nhung Mello-Pham will present "Here ... or There?". At age 65, she's made her debut feature, a semi-autobiographical drama about a Vietnamese woman who retires with her European husband to a remote Vietnamese fishing village.

In all, there are 28 features, with the highlights showing each evening on the big screen in the Handicraft Market town square, while others are shown during the day at the festival's indoor venue.



A new Lao drama, "Big Heart", about a struggling boxer, will open the Luang Prabang Film Festival on December 7.

## THAI FRAMES

WISEKWAI

"Our main open-air screenings will mostly be Lao and Thai films. This is so our biggest audience, the local Lao people, are able to watch films on the big screen without struggling to read English subtitles," Kuperman explains. "These also tend to be more mainstream films, as the Lao audience is not yet accommodated to the art-house style, though it seems over the past few years they have learned to appreciate them more than before."

Here's the line-up selected by the festival's "motion picture ambassadors (film experts in each of the participating countries):

- "13:00 Sunday", Laos
- "A River Changes Course", Cambodia
- "Ah Boys to Men", Singapore
- "Big Heart", Laos (world premiere)
- "Boundary", Cambodia-Thailand
- "Contradiction", Malaysia
- "Denok and Gareng", Indonesia
- "Great Fictions", Thailand
- "Hak Aum Lum", Laos
- "Headshot", Thailand
- "Here ... or There?", Vietnam
- "The Hidden: Wrath of Azazil", Malaysia
- "Home", Thailand
- "I Love Savanh", Laos (world premiere)
- "Karaoke Girl", Thailand
- "Kil", Malaysia
- "Lovely Man", Indonesia
- "Mater Dolorosa", Philippines
- "P-047", Thailand
- "Red Scarf", Laos

## 'Pee Mak' blows in for East Winds fest

THAILAND'S BOX-OFFICE record-breaker "Pee Mak Phra Khanong" will make its European premiere at the East Winds Film Festival, which runs from October 31 to November 3.

Put on by Coventry University's East Asian Film Society, it's England's biggest showcase of Asian films outside of London.

"Pee Mak" director Banjong Pisanthanakun will join the fest, which will also screen his hit 2010 romantic comedy "Hello Stranger".

The Thailand Showcase will also feature the international premiere of the "Pawnshop", directed by Parm Rangsi and starring Krissada Sukosol Clapp. It's about a down-on-his-luck bar owner who trades his soul to an unscrupulous pawnbroker. It's part of the festival's Halloween night "East Winds Chills" programme.

Another highlight is the opening, the European premiere of veteran actor Dustin Nguyen's directorial debut, the action-packed epic "Eastern western", "Once Upon a Time in Vietnam".

- WISE KWAI, THE NATION

## BIG SCREEN

- The Luang Prabang Film Festival runs from December 7 to 11.
- All screenings and activities are free and open to the public.
- To book discounted tours and travel arrangements, e-mail Khiri Travel, the festival's official travel partner, at sales.laos@khiri.com.
- For more details, see [www.LPFilmFest.org](http://www.LPFilmFest.org) or [Facebook.com/lpffilmfest](https://www.facebook.com/lpffilmfest).

- "Rising Sun on the Horizon", Myanmar
- "Scent of Burning Grass", Vietnam
- "Tang Wong", Thailand
- "Thy Womb", Philippines
- "What is it about Rina?", Brunei
- "What isn't There", Philippines
- "What They Don't Talk About When They Talk About Love", Indonesia

In addition to the features, the festival will have several short-film programmes, including all 21 Southeast Asian documentary films from DocNet's first ChopShots collection and six shorts from the festival's "Our Lives on Film" documentary workshop.

Other events include panel discussions, a concert, dance and puppetry performances and exhibitions, including the best designs from the festival's movie poster competition (accepting entries until Tuesday), and the latest from the Southeast Asia Movie Theater Project.