

Luang Prabang Film Festival Unveils Lineup, Shifts Online

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The pioneering Southeast Asian film event, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, was forced to go with an all-digital format in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The Luang Prabang Film Festival, a Laos-based boutique event showcasing emerging cinematic voices from Southeast Asia, has unveiled an ambitious lineup despite being forced to shift its activities entirely online in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The festival, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, will screen 24 features and 10 shorts, including the critically acclaimed human trafficking thriller *Buoyancy* and Thai drama *Manta Ray*, about the plight of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The festival runs Dec. 4- Dec. 10.

Regular Luang Prabang festival attendees will no doubt be missing the event's unique atmospherics this year — held in the Unesco World Heritage town of its name, the festival stages many of its

screenings after sunset in the city square, backdropped by ancient Buddhist temples — but the fact that the event is going forward at all in 2020 is a testament to the considerable hustle of its organizers.

All of the films in Luang Prabang's 2020 selection will be streamed free of charge to viewers in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam — no small feat considering the complicated array of regional distribution rights that festival organizers had to untangle.

In their selection announcement, Luang Prabang's programmers highlighted that 12 of the films showcased are by women filmmakers, eight by first-time directors, and three from Lao filmmakers, each a recipient of the Luang Prabang Film Festival's own Lao Filmmakers Fund. The event will also host the Southeast Asian premiere of the Indonesian animated documentary *kOsOng*, which follows five women from Java and the pressures and revelations they face in living a childless life.

"Having a film that is finished in 2020 is a unique experience," says Chonie Prysilia, director of *kOsOng*. "The audience of Southeast Asia is one of the reasons why we made the film. I am glad that the Luang Prabang Film Festival is giving its best effort to connect my film to its audience."

In addition to the official selection, Luang Prabang also will stream a ten-year anniversary strand called "From the Archives," which will highlight distinguished films from past editions of the festival.

Said Luang Prabang's festival director Sean Chadwell: "We're well-known for bringing audiences to a film festival in an ancient town without a movie theater. This year, we can't bring the audiences, so we're taking the festival to them."

The festival's streaming platform will be accessible at lpfilmfest.org starting Dec. 4.