

Make the most of the Sun Valley Film Festival and the Idaho International Film Festival

by [Jeremiah Robert Wierenga](#)

Have you ever had the urge to stay up late watching movies, partying with artists and occasionally attending an educational workshop? Here's your chance. This month, Idaho residents will have access to two area film festivals, without having to suffer the transcontinental costs of Cannes or the shiver-inducing snows of [Sundance](#). If you aren't ready for summer to end and want to see some uplifting or unusual films, set aside some time to check out the [Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival](#) and the [Idaho International Film Festival](#).

Now in its fifth year, the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival (Sept. 18–20) originated in conjunction with the [Dalai Lama's](#) 2005 visit to Idaho. After the success of the initial event, festival organizers saw a huge increase in the number of submissions and community attention. This year, SVSFF attendees will be treated to 24 different films culled from a pool of 340. The three-day festival will screen documentaries and shorts--as well as one feature--from locations across the globe, including Tibet, Japan and Lebanon.

Although stories of the divine are screened, the festival does not promote individual religions as part of its mission, but rather seeks to "enhance the public's understanding of, and respect for, diverse spiritual traditions from around the world."

"We have the most broad definition possible of spirituality ..." says Dr. Mary Gervase, the festival's executive director. "There is something that will resonate with every walk of life."

This year's group includes such eclectic topics as Buddhist boxers, extraterrestrial blessings and shamanic pilgrimages.

Tipping the scales in favor of entertainment, rather than enlightenment, the Idaho International Film Festival (Sept. 24–27) enters its seventh year with a staggering 49 films. The IIFF has a dual focus, both bringing outside films to the Treasure Valley--their [Global Lens series](#) includes works from Mozambique, Iran and Argentina--as well as promoting and supporting local filmmakers. In addition to the Local Heroes short-film showcase, this year's Gem State representation includes a world premiere of [Andrew Ellis'](#) and [Will Schmeckpeper's](#) [The Highly Contested Election for Payette County Sheriff](#) and [Wes Malvini's](#) surrealist narrative [Nausea](#).

Making the most out of attending a festival requires the preparation, speed and decisiveness of a ninja. Following are a few tips.

Plan your attack

With multiple choices each day--and simultaneous screenings at the IIFF--it's helpful to draw up a schedule to ensure you don't miss out on a must-see. Fortunately, both festivals have online event programs that can be downloaded, marked up and scrapbooked later. The Web sites also give succinct synopses and links to trailers, so you know what you're getting into.

click to enlarge



The Day After Peace, one of the movies at the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival this month.

Make sure you leave some room in your schedule to discuss the films and share the experience with your fellow attendees. And iron out that little black dress or sport coat for one of each festival's late-night galas.



Meet and greet

Equally as important as seeing the films is meeting the filmmakers. Festivals are a unique opportunity to chat up, grill or shake the hand of those men and women who have forgone payment, social lives and sleep to bring their work to Idaho audiences. Both festivals boast an impressive guest list of producers, directors and actors willing and eager to share their war stories.

In Sun Valley at the SVSFF, former Hollywood producer [Stephen Simon](#) (*Somewhere in Time*) will share his vision for thought-provoking filmmaking, and Sun Valley native [Brendon McQueen returns to Idaho with his short *Skip Rocks*](#). Also in attendance will be [Stephen Kiesling](#), editor-in-chief of *Spirituality and Health Magazine*.

In Boise, the IIFF will host director [Faye Jackson](#) with the U.S. premiere of her vampire film *Strigoi*, and martial arts expert/actor [Jeffrey James Lippold](#) will present the action flick *Samurai Avenger*. Local composer [Eric Sandmeyer](#), whose scores have been featured in the past two festivals, will be present at the screening of baseball documentary *Time in the Minors*, along with director Tony Okun.

"It's special to be showing it here," says Okun. "Not only do I get to attend, but there's a Q and A afterwards, so people can ask their questions."

Learn from the masters

While you might think seminars might take the fun out of a festival, the workshop lineup at both events demonstrates that education can be quite enjoyable.

At the SVSFF, panelists will discuss the notion of spiritual film, how it can be defined and who is its audience, as well as where the future of spirituality in mainstream moviemaking might be going. A Sunday afternoon talk will look at the intersection of science and spirituality and even demonstrates the benefits of chocolate with an audience sampling.

In the interest of promoting the local filmmaking culture, the IIFF will offer three public workshops covering government grants, festival submission guidelines and a how-to on short filmmaking. Barbara Robinson, the artist service director for the [Idaho Commission on the Arts](#), will talk about the grants and awards available to Idaho filmmakers.

Overused warrior analogy aside, take advantage of one or more of these opportunities to go celebrate the expression and excitement of cinema. If you're a part of the local filmmaking community, or just a fan of

independent movies, go support the artists and check out some of these little-seen, much appreciated films.

For a full list of show times and ticket information, visit svspiritualfilmfestival.org and idahofilmfestival.com.

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