

# Explore Michigan's *Small Town* FILM FESTIVALS

WRITER | NICOLETTE CHAMBERY PHOTOS | TRAVERSE CITY FILM FESTIVAL

No matter where you live or what type of cinema you're into, Michigan has no shortage of film festivals for the avid moviegoer. A range of directorial styles, genres, actors, and themes enhance the festival experience.

Among the top festivals in Michigan are the Traverse City Film Festival and the Lansing Film Festival. There are also lesser-known but equally intriguing film festivals in Mt Pleasant, Royal Oak, and Ann Arbor, to name a few.

The Royal Starr Film Festival, typically held in October, is an international compilation of films brought to attendees with the intent to "excite, showcase, educate, and entertain the community in the art of film." By screening a range of films—short, feature, and documentary—in addition to films produced by high school students, RSFF offers a diverse smattering of films to engage in. Awards are granted to films in each of the following categories: Audience Choice, Short Film, Feature-Length Narrative, Feature-Length Documentary, and High School Shorts.

Each February, the Central Michigan International Film Festival commences, connecting audiences with 12 short films arranged according to theme as well as 11 feature-length films shown separately. This year, a wide array of judges independently selected films by director William R. Coughlan, an award-winning screenwriter, and director. Eight of his films were featured this past February, all of which are under 20 minutes in length, and many under 8 minutes.



Cinetopia International Film Festival takes place in Ann Arbor each June and features full-length films and documentaries in the categories of drama and comedy. These films are selected from the world's best festivals (Cannes, SXSW, Sundance) honoring the rich heritage of cinematic culture. The festival provides

a forum for enlightening presentations, panel discussions, and Q&A sessions with actors, directors, and writers there to speak about their craft.

The Traverse City Film Festival, founded by actor and director Michael Moore, is unique in the sense that it's not an industry festival trying to sell the film, but a filmmaker's festival designed to be a celebration of film that brings people together. Industry representatives from all over the world come to talk about the films they've seen and the ways they've been changed as a result. Held in late July through early August, the festival operates with the motto that "One Great Movie Can Change You: Just Great Movies."

Meg Weichman, the festival's creative director, reflected on her experience with the festival, stating, "I've met a lot of amazing people in the area of generosity of spirit. They're really cool and like to work hard and have fun. We come from places and with perspectives that others know nothing about. We share them with each other here and through film."





The festival relies on approximately 300 volunteers to make the event, which shows 250 films, run smoothly. The event is funded locally, so there are no corporate sponsor commercials or promotions before or after screenings to detract from viewers' overall experience at the festival.

To keep the festival as accessible as possible, Weichman and team strive to keep attendance prices low, including the concessions that are offered. They also provide a number of free events!

A final annual film festival worth noting is held in Lansing in early April and is known as the Capital City Film Festival (CCFF). CCFF is a multimedia showcase of independent films and live touring bands. It celebrates international artists whose work fosters diversity in film and music.

From cinematic orchestras to animated and experimental shorts, these film festivals offer a true immersion in the art and craft of filmmaking, highlighting an array of styles and celebrating them all. They remind us of the power of a story and the ways it can change us—open our minds, expand our perspectives—in ways that other mediums cannot.

Whether you're single or a family of ten, these festivals provide myriad opportunities for you to venture out and experience culture in a unique and impactful way. □

