

Tokyo's Premier Anime Fest Adapts to Changing Times

TOKYO, JAPAN, March 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- By hosting an international animation festival annually, Tokyo has reasserted itself as a key global hub for the art form. Now the event is poised for a makeover to adapt to a changing landscape in the thriving content industry.

The 13th Tokyo Anime Award Festival (TAAF) closed on March 16 with its organizers announcing the showcase will “move onto a new stage in a new form”. “The landscape surrounding anime has been changing dramatically,” TAAF Executive Committee Chairperson Ishikawa Kazuko told the award ceremony at the TOHO CINEMAS Ikebukuro.

Ishikawa, who heads the Association of Japanese Animations, added that the revamped festival will hopefully “pave the way for the future of anime.” Details of the new format were yet to be released, apart from plans to hold a festival pre-event this autumn.

Tokyo Anime Award Festival 2026 official website:

<https://animefestival.jp/en/>

Grand Prizes: Forbidden Romance in N. Korea, Housewife's Weekend Blues

The festival's competition section was diverse and vibrant with the Feature Animation Grand



Tokyo Anime Award Festival 2026 – Award Ceremony



Competition Winners (Short & Feature Animation) – Feature Animation Grand Prize: The Square / Short Animation Grand Prize: Because Today Is Saturday

Prize going to “The Square” by South Korean director Kim Bo-sol. The 73-minute drama depicts a relationship between a Swedish diplomat and a local traffic officer in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, where they are kept under constant surveillance while dating under cover.

“Because Today Is Saturday” by Portuguese animator Alice Eça Guimarães was honored with the Short Animation Grand Prize. The 12-minute co-production of Portugal, France and Spain reflects the weekend inner conflict of a homemaker living with her husband, daughter and son. “It is a bit based on my own life,” Guimarães told the ceremony. “But I wanted to make it to be very universal and everyone would understand it.”

Kim and Guimarães each received the Governor of Tokyo Award as well.

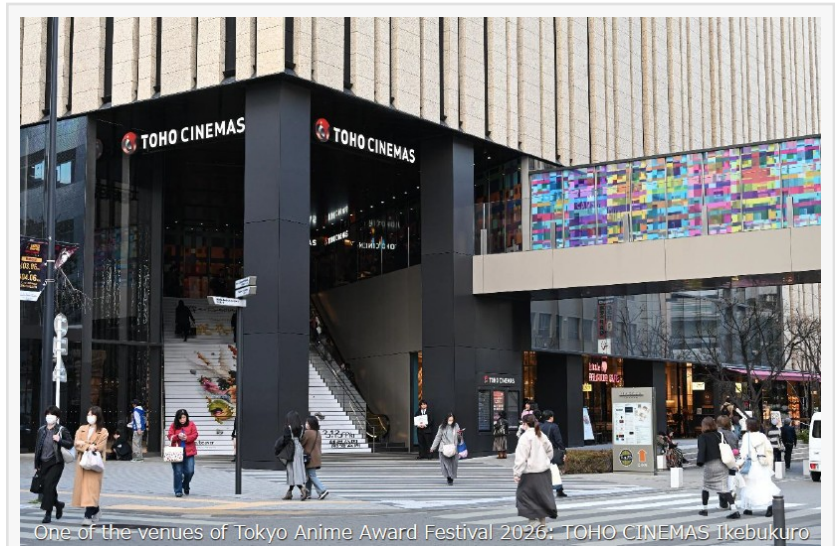
Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko, whose administration has been co-hosting the TAAF, congratulated the winners, saying: “This festival will serve as a bridge between the creative frontline and the wider world, powerfully promoting Japanese anime culture to the international community.”

She also pledged to back up the revamped festival “as a base for cultural outreach and a driving force for industry that are part of a new current shaping the future of Tokyo.”

Establishing Tokyo as the ‘Hub of Contemporary Animation’

Under the slogan of establishing Tokyo as the “Hub of Contemporary Animation,” this year’s TAAF welcomed 1,036 entries from 74 countries and regions (39 feature and 997 short animations). Four feature and 23 short works were nominated for the final competition at the festival.

TAAF Festival Director Nishioka Junichi noted in media interviews that many works were “socially



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Fan Meeting with Go Nagai, legendary Japanese manga and anime artist and creator of Devilman and Mazinger Z

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conscious” and dealt with war, the environment and sexual minorities. “There are creators who wished to join us but were unable to attend in person,” due to tensions and conflicts, he told the festival opening ceremony on March 13.

Apart from the competition, the four-day festival featured special screenings of select works and seminars on industry challenges, including Tokyo’s help in training Saudi animation aspirants, as well as basic-skill workshops for children.



These programs took place at theaters and public facilities in Ikebukuro, an entertainment and commercial district that boasts a concentration of anime businesses, including a flagship Animate store, and attracts animation enthusiasts from across the planet.

In late 2023, the Anime Tokyo Station was established. As an animation culture hub, it stores around 50,000 items and provides spaces for exhibitions and events. It is operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Association of Japanese Animations.

‘Grendizer’ Creator Nagai Go Peps Up the Festival

The TAAF 2026 also got a boost from legendary Japanese manga and anime artist Nagai Go, the creator of *Devilman* and *Mazinger Z*, as he attended a fan meeting aimed at pepping up the festival.

Nagai talked about how new ideas have popped up in his nearly six-decade career, what he feels about his immense popularity worldwide, notably in the Middle East, and more. “I’m over 80 now,” Nagai said in conclusion, “but I hope to keep drawing manga in good health.”

His creations are so much admired across Europe and the Middle East that he is reportedly treated courteously in France, Italy and other countries. And a 33.7-meter statue of Grendizer, a giant robot debuted in 1975, was erected in the Saudi capital of Riyadh in 2022. It is recognized by Guinness World Records™ as the “largest metal sculpture of a fictional character (supported).”

He has never seen the statue in person but felt his immense popularity when he toured Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates in 2009. “At every stop, there was a commotion. Big theaters were not only fully packed but also surrounded by people who could not get in,” he recalled. “I indeed realized that my robot anime was a hit over there.”

Feature Film Grand Prize: 'A Sense of Realism' as in Live Action

The four jurors unanimously picked "The Square" for the Feature Animation Grand Prize. The drama portrays how a secret romance between a blonde and blue-eyed Swedish Embassy first secretary and a local traffic officer is interrupted by security police. The diplomat has to return home after his request for extended assignment is turned down while his lover is banished from Pyongyang.

The animation was directed by Kim Bo-sol, a 2019 graduate of the Korean Academy of Film Arts in Seoul, South Korea. It gives a rare look at life inside the north of the Korean Peninsula.

"Set against a political backdrop, it is rendered in powerful hand-drawn animation that delivers a sense of realism as in live action," said one juror and Japanese animation director Kamiyama Kenji.

Kim, born in 1988, said: "I am truly delighted that the people of Japan, the country closest to us, have shown such understanding of a situation in North Korea and that I have been awarded this prize."

Short Film Grand Prize: Making Motherhood 'Easier for Everyone'

Portuguese director Alice Eça Guimarães, who won the Short Animation Grand Prize with "Because Today Is Saturday," said the film reflects her own life and that "It is also a bit of activist film."

Graphical with bold colors, the 2D film portrays a housewife stuck with daily chores even on Saturday morning. She struggles to find time to reflect and write. But her husband, daughter and son keep dragging her back to reality.

"I hope that everyone who watches it will help change society and make motherhood easier for everyone," Guimarães, who has worked both in advertising and animated films for over a decade, told the award ceremony.

The Portugal director said backstage that the anime-centric Tokyo looked at first "very different from the culture I've grown up in." "Then I started to know more about anime and I understand the emotions and the feelings and the characters are the same as in my hometown or the films that I see in Europe. And I feel strong connections."

Slices of Pie for Demon Slayer, Mobile Suit Gundam and Astro Boy

Through voting by industry professionals, the festival also conferred the Anime of the Year Awards to anime films that were broadcast, screened and/or streamed in Japan in one year to September 2025. "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba Infinity Castle" was honored as the Best Feature Film and "Mobile Suit Gundam GQuuuuuuX" the Best TV Series Film in this category.

Nine forerunners in the Japanese anime industry—including a producer, an original author and a historian—were selected for the Achievement Award. Among them was anime producer Matsutani Takayuki, 81, who assisted Tezuka Osamu, the creator of Astro Boy, from 1973 until his death in 1989. He remains President of Tezuka Productions.

Debuted in 1963, Astro Boy is widely regarded as the primary catalyst for the global success of Japanese anime. It was the first popular animated Japanese television series to be exported and widely broadcast overseas, particularly in the United States.

Animation Markets Growing at Local, Regional and Global Levels

Japan's anime market continues to expand with its annual size reaching a record high of some 3,840 billion yen (approximately 24 billion dollars) in 2024, up 14.8 percent from the previous year, according to a report released in February by the Association of Japanese Animations. Of the total, 56.5 percent accounted for overseas business.

Meanwhile, the global animation market size is valued at some 462 billion dollars in 2025 and is expected to reach 953 billion dollars by 2035, according to a report by Precedence Research, a global market research and consulting organization. North America captured 33.97 percent of the global market, compared to 24.29 percent for Asia-Pacific.

"The animation market in the Asia-Pacific region has experienced significant growth lately," the report says. "It revolves around creating motion visuals with a collection of static images. This type of animation is prominent in entertainment, advertising, gaming, and education. Countries such as China, Japan, India, South Korea, and Australia are at the forefront of producing and enjoying animated content."

The report notes that the region's animation industry is bolstered by "increased demand for animated content, advancements in technology, and a growing audience." "Featuring numerous excellent studios, skilled artists, and innovative thinkers, this sector is poised for continued growth in the years ahead."

In Tokyo, the metropolitan government considers anime as one of the capital city's attractions to ensure foreign tourists keep flowing in at record levels. "We will continue to refine Tokyo's diverse appeal including anime, food, and Edo culture," Governor Koike said last year. "We are advancing initiatives to realize Tokyo as the world's best tourist city." Edo, as Tokyo was called during the shogun-ruled stable era that lasted about 260 years from 1603, saw popular culture flourish.

In addition to the "Anime Tokyo Station" complex, the administration launched a center last October to train promising young manga and anime creators in cutting-edge digital technology and management know-how.

"It is the Time" to Produce Good Animations Across Borders

A total of about 200 Saudi animation aspirants have undergone training in Tokyo with the help of Japanese professionals since Saudi Arabia lifted a 35-year ban on public cinemas in 2018.

A few of them have debuted professionally, working at a Japanese publishing company or having their products distributed across the Middle East, prominent Japanese content business producer Koga Tetsuya told a seminar on global cooperation at the TAAF 2026.

Koga has arranged the Saudi youth program and other cross-border education and exchange efforts. Until last year he was the head of Kadokawa Contents Academy, a school for content creators, affiliated to a major media conglomerate. Saudi creative company Manga Productions has been cooperating in the project.

“Totally regardless of ethnicity and such, I think it is meaningful, perhaps inevitable, for the industry to train foreigners,” Koga said noting a foreseeable decline in human resources. “Many people from Argentina, Chile, Africa and so on are actually working at publishing houses or animation productions.”

“Asia, the Middle East, South America and so on have been so far consumers. But it is the time for them to become producers. China is a great example. It has completely transformed from a consumer to producer,” he said. “People around the world change from consumers to producers this way. We certainly should build the momentum to produce good things together.”

Tokyo Anime Award Festival 2026 List of Competition Winners:

(Feature Animation)

Grand Prize (plus Governor of Tokyo Award): “The Square”

Director: Kim Bo-sol

Country: South Korea

Award of Excellence: “The Songbirds' Secret”

Director: Antoine Lanciaux

Country: France, Belgium

(Short Animation)

Grand Prize (plus Governor of Tokyo Award): “Because Today Is Saturday”

Director: Alice Eça Guimarães

Country: Portugal, France, Spain

Award of Excellence: “There Will Be No Other End”

Director: Piotr Milczarek

Country: Poland

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