

Puerto Aventuras International Film Festival Celebrates Season 3, Opens Season 4 Entries, Adds Verticals

Riviera Maya destination festival highlights international growth, filmmaker community, cash stipend prizes, and year-round momentum

PUERTO AVENTURAS, MEXICO, April 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Puerto Aventuras International Film Festival (PAIFF) has officially concluded its third season after showcasing 79 films from 28 countries and presenting 43 awards at an exclusive VIP red carpet gala honoring excellence across feature films, documentaries, shorts, music videos, screenwriting, performance, technical craft, and new festival categories. With another successful year in the books, the Riviera Maya destination festival is now setting the stage for Season 4, to be held in March 2027, and will officially open its call for entries on May 1, 2026.



PAIFF Season 3 Winners Celebrate at the VIP Red Carpet Gala Event in Puerto Aventuras, Mexico

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John Norris Ray

The Puerto Aventuras International Film Festival is proud to celebrate the winning films and artists of Season 3, a year marked by strong international participation, adventurous storytelling, and an increasingly vibrant connection between filmmakers and audiences. From intimate cultural storytelling and vérité documentary to

experimental work, family programming, music videos, and emerging filmmaker recognition, Season 3 showcased the kind of bold, independent cinema that continues to define PAIFF.

Among the most celebrated titles of the festival was Audience, directed by Florida filmmaker Tom Miller, which emerged as a standout with multiple top honors including Best Feature Film, Best Director, Best Actor for Shamrock McShane, Best Producers, and Audience Choice Award.

Other strong multi-award showings came from In The Wee Hours producers Dan and Ganna Hertzog, Jesse Stewart's Piggy Duster, and Jessica Kourkounis' The Space Between Attack and Decay, reflecting the range and ambition of the films recognized this season.

Season 3 also recognized a number of standout works across documentary, environmental, short-form, and culturally driven storytelling. Among them were Big Mama Thornton: I Can't Be Anyone But Me, directed by Robert Clem (USA), winner of Best Documentary Feature Film; Sargassum, directed by Claude Barnes (Canada / USA / Mexico), winner of Best Environmental Film; and The Reach, directed by Luca Caserta (Italy) and adapted from a short story by Stephen King, which earned both Best Short Film and Best Actress for Jana Balkan as "Stella Flanders." The festival also honored Leaving Beringia, an anthropological cinéma vérité film directed by Barbara Hager (Canada / USA / Mexico), with the award for Best Innovative Cultural Storytelling.

PAIFF's continued growth is not only reflected in its programming, but in the festival experience itself. Across its first three years, the event has built momentum as a uniquely immersive festival where filmmakers are encouraged to engage directly with audiences, participate in Q&As, and become part of a warm and increasingly global creative community in Puerto Aventuras.

"Their vision and hospitality turned a film festival into a true creative community," said director Tom Miller. "We're grateful for the platform and the warmth extended to every filmmaker who made the journey."



PAIFF Award Winner Ganna Hertzog Accepts Producer Award at Puerto Aventuras, Mexico



Actor Alex Berg interviewed on the Red Carpet at Puerto Aventuras International Film Festival

Filmmaker testimonials from this season reinforced the festival's growing reputation as a filmmaker-friendly destination with an unusually personal atmosphere.

"It would be easy to talk exclusively about the beauty of Puerto Aventuras and what a gem of a location it is," said Walter Haussner, winner of Best Film Noir Short for Xpendable. "However, the real gems of this festival and its community are the people. By the end of the festival, you truly feel you are part of this amazing community and they are rooting for you and your work. This is an experience we've never had at a festival and one we believe truly sets PAIFF apart."

"As advertised, this is a fantastic festival in a great location," said John Norris Ray, winner of Best Family Film for The Family Photo. "[PAIFF] did an amazing job of management and coordination. Incorporating the local school kids on the family-friendly session was great also. Lots of Q&A sessions with the filmmakers. I look forward to attending again."

Walter Bender, winner of Best Music Video for Miami Creek, described PAIFF as "a hidden gem of a festival," praising its beautiful venues, strong communication, filmmaker interaction, and welcoming experience for international guests.

In addition to a keynote delivered at the VIP gala by community patriarch and architect Roman Rivera Torres, one of the major highlights of Season 3 was a featured discussion on Vertical and Episodic Filmmaking, also framed through the rising language of microdramas. That conversation helped set the stage for one of the festival's biggest announcements moving forward: the addition of a new Vertical Filmmaking category for Season 4 with cash award stipends.

Organizers report that the festival has grown significantly since its inaugural season, with Season 3 continuing a strong upward trajectory in submissions, visibility, and international reach. With momentum building and broader awareness now taking hold, organizers believe the festival could make another substantial leap in Season 4. "Our focus in scaling this festival is to bring high-quality independent films from around the world, and the artists behind them, into meaningful connection with our community here in Puerto Aventuras," said Festival Director Dewey Paul Moffitt. "Just as important is our commitment to encouraging emerging young filmmakers through a platform designed to celebrate their creativity. We are truly grateful to have such a participatory public building this journey with us."

PAIFF is also proud to announce its Film Festival Alliance affiliation, further strengthening its standing within the global independent film festival community. The organization also continues to expand its year-round footprint through its sister festival, [Roswell Shorts](#), the short independent film festival in Roswell, New Mexico, now midway through its second season. Together, the two festivals and organizational alignments reflect an ongoing commitment to filmmaker support, discovery, and community-building across multiple regions.

A full list of Season 3 winners is now available on the festival's website at PAFilmFestival.com, where viewers can also watch the entire one-hour panel discussion on Vertical and Episodic Filmmaking free of charge.

Set in the breathtaking Riviera Maya community of Puerto Aventuras, Mexico and recently named one of the "12 Must-Attend Film Festivals in North America" by Destination Film Guide in its 2025 annual edition, PAIFF continues to gain recognition as a rising cultural destination.

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