Wailuku Film Festival Returns for Year Two, Expanding Its Vision as a Premier Hub for Cinema in the Heart of the Pacific

Early Bird Submissions Open October 8 for the June 2027 Festival, Showcasing Hawai□i, Indigenous, Watersports and Global Storytelling Across Six Film Categories



WAILUKU, HI, UNITED STATES, October 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Following a remarkable inaugural year that brought thousands of film lovers, filmmakers, and creative voices to Maui, the Wailuku Film Festival (WFF) announces its return in mid-June 2027, with an expanded vision, new film categories, and an ambition to establish historic Wailuku Town as one of the Pacific's most compelling destinations for independent cinema.

Early Bird submissions open today, October 8, 2026, inviting filmmakers from Hawai□i, across the Pacific, Indigenous communities, and around the world to join a festival where local stories meet global perspectives, emerging talent connects with industry professionals, and cinema brings communities together.

> Our first year exceeded all expectations. Both residents and visitors showed up, which positively impacted small businesses in town."
> *Festival Director Brian Kohne*

Under its Year Two theme, "Where Stories Gather," WFF is building a world-class film festival rooted in Maui's cultural richness, celebrating Pacific voices, Hawai□i's legendary surf culture, and bold, original storytelling from across the globe.

An initiative of the Maui Film Office supported by the County of Maui, the inaugural five-day festival in 2026 drew

more than 5,300 attendees across historic Wailuku Town and the Maui Arts & Cultural Center. The program presented more than 100 films, including over 55 Hawai□i-produced films and more than 30 student films, representing 15 countries and Indigenous Nations. Multiple screenings at the historic □Īao Theater sold out, and the festival generated more than 12.5 million media impressions with high praise from filmmakers and attendees alike.





Beyond the numbers, WFF activated Wailuku Town, connected students with industry professionals through workshops and panels, supported local businesses, and created a platform for filmmakers and audiences to exchange ideas, discover new voices, and build lasting relationships that will inform and define the next generation in cinema.

The inaugural festival laid the foundation for a growing creative ecosystem capable of nurturing local talent, attracting international filmmakers, and positioning Maui as a top destination for independent film and cultural exchange.

Festival Director Brian Kohne, also Maui's Film Commissioner and an Assistant Professor at the University of Hawai□i Maui College, sees that momentum as the beginning of a larger opportunity.

"Our first year exceeded all expectations. Both residents and visitors showed up, which positively impacted small businesses in town. For year two, we endeavor to expand the program while attracting greater levels of participation. We formed many important partnerships in 2026, and

will collaborate with even more sponsors, supporters, and filmmakers in 2027 to grow forward a vision of Wailuku as a premier gathering place every summer, and eventually throughout the year."

Kohne also emphasized the festival's commitment to developing Hawai□i's creative industry.

"The Student category extends Maui County's commitment to island creatives from education through to industry. Along with the Creative Media program at the college, the Wailuku Film Festival represents a vital piece of infrastructure in the build of an Independent Film Industry rooted in Hawai□i."

Six Categories. A World of Stories.
For 2027, WFF returns with its four cornerstone categories—Hawai□i, Indigenous Voices, Watersports, and Student Films—while introducing two new categories: Animation and Ocean Conservation.

With surfing deeply woven into Hawai□i's cultural identity and the global imagination, Watersports remains one of WFF's signature categories, welcoming surf films, ocean adventures, athlete profiles, and stories exploring the communities, traditions, and lifestyles shaped by the sea. From legendary breaks and pioneering wave riders to the next generation of surfers, WFF aims to bring the global surf filmmaking community together in the birthplace of modern surfing.

The new Animation category welcomes imaginative visual storytelling and creative experimentation, while Ocean Conservation invites cinematic perspectives on marine ecosystems, environmental stewardship, and humanity's relationship with the sea.

Together, the six categories offer a dynamic platform for narrative and documentary filmmaking, Indigenous storytellers, surf filmmakers, emerging artists, and creative voices pushing the boundaries of independent cinema.

Where Stories Gather: Building a Creative Destination in the Pacific
Set against the dramatic backdrop of the West Maui Mountains and historic Wailuku Town, WFF offers an experience where cinema extends beyond the theater and into the community.

Through screenings, filmmaker conversations, workshops, industry panels, and cultural gatherings, WFF aspires to become a must-attend destination on the independent film festival calendar—championing emerging talent, celebrating surf and ocean culture, elevating Indigenous and Pacific voices, and connecting Hawai□i's creative community with the global film industry.

Rooted in Hawaiian values of aloha (love and compassion), kuleana (responsibility), and mālama (care for people and place), the festival celebrates cinema's power to preserve cultural

knowledge, inspire understanding, and connect people across generations, cultures, and oceans.

Early Bird Submissions Now Open
Filmmakers are invited to submit through FilmFreeway beginning October 8, 2026, with discounted Early Bird submissions available through January 1, 2027.

2027 SUBMISSION DATES
October 8, 2026: Early Bird Submissions Open
January 1, 2027: Regular Submissions Begin
March 1–April 1, 2027: Late Submission Period
April 1, 2027: Final General Submission Deadline
May 1, 2027: Student Film Submission Deadline

High school and college filmmakers receive an extended deadline through May 1. Juried and audience awards will recognize outstanding narrative, documentary, feature-length, and short-form storytelling.

The Second Annual Wailuku Film Festival takes place in mid-June 2027 in historic Wailuku Town, Maui, Hawai□i.

Wailuku Film Festival. Where Stories Gather.

SUBMISSIONS & FESTIVAL INFORMATION
Submit your film: https://filmfreeway.com/WailukuFilmFestival
Festival website: https://www.wailukufilm.com/

ABOUT THE WAILUKU FILM FESTIVAL
An initiative of the Maui Film Office supported by the County of Maui, WFF celebrates independent cinema, elevates Hawai□i and Indigenous voices, cultivates emerging filmmakers, and connects local and international creative communities through screenings, educational programs, industry engagement, and cultural exchange.

MEDIA CONTACT
360 MEDIA CONSULTING LLC
Amber H. Bobin
ahbobin@gmail.com

Keely H Badger
360 MEDIA CONSULTING
+1 928-274-4355

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