

# SSFF & ASIA 2026 Concludes with Star-Studded Award Ceremony in Tokyo, Unveiling the Future of Cinema Across AI and Emerging Formats

Asia's premier Academy Awards®-accredited short film festival serves as a global stage for industry-defining announcements, including a major Disney+ streaming partnership, full-AI premieres, and the rising power of vertical filmmaking.



TOKYO, JAPAN — The Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia (SSFF & ASIA) 2026, an Academy Awards®-accredited festival and one of Asia's largest international short film platforms, successfully held its grand Award Ceremony at LINE CUBE SHIBUYA, Tokyo. At the ceremony, the festival's highest honor, the George Lucas Award (Grand Prix), was officially bestowed upon South Korean director Jiin Oh for her outstanding short film, SPEEDY!. The festival also announced the Best Short Award winners for the Live-Action, Non-Fiction, and Animation competitions—all of which receive official eligibility for nomination at the upcoming Academy Awards® ([For a complete list of winners and jury motivation, please refer to our previously distributed awards press release](#)). Bringing together prominent filmmakers, global industry leaders, and creators from around the world, the 2026 ceremony not only celebrated these cultural achievements but also functioned as a high-profile forum where the future of visual storytelling was actively redefined.

## 1. Human Imagination vs. Generative Tech: The AI Debate

Aligned with this year's festival theme, "Cinema Engineering," the intersection of artificial intelligence and human creativity was one of the most talked-about highlights of the ceremony:

**World Premiere of Full-AI Film *Chimney Town*:** Renowned Japanese creator Akihiro Nishino showcased a new short film from his blockbuster *Poupelle of Chimney Town* universe, produced entirely through generative AI. Addressing the global industry's current anxieties over AI, Nishino delivered a provocative statement on stage: *"Over the past year, we've witnessed reality catch up—proving that imagination, which we believed was humanity's final sanctuary, is actually an area where AI excels. This film is a provocation. It forces us to ask: What is the remaining role of human labor in this new era?"*

**Two-Week AI Digital Twin Production:** The festival also debuted *CINEMA TRAVELER 2*, an adventure short starring an AI digital twin of Festival President Tetsuya Bessho. Remarkably, the entire piece was generated using AI within a mere two weeks following the festival's opening ceremony.



Akihiro Nishino



CINEMA TRAVELER 2  
(C) Dir: Hiroki Yamaguchi (GAUMAPIX)

## 2. Vertical Cinema: Embracing the "Blue Ocean" of Mobile Storytelling and Social Media Horror

As short-form vertical video continues to dominate global platforms, the ceremony highlighted SSFF & ASIA's position as an international pioneer in treating the 9:16 format as a legitimate artistic medium, breaking new ground in both comedy and horror.

**The CyberAgent Vertical Award:** Presented to Chavo's *AIDOL KACHO*. Hit filmmaker Katsuyuki Motohiro (*Bayside Shakedown*) urged traditional creators on stage to embrace the medium: "As a director who has spent a career trying to master the traditional widescreen format, I see vertical video as a wide-open blue ocean. There are no fixed rules yet. We are standing at the threshold of seeing a new wave of master directors born specifically from this format."

**The Best Thrill Award Supported by CRG:** Highlighting the terrifying potential of vertical cinema tailored for the social media era, this horror and suspense competition drew **273 submissions nationwide via a public callout on social media**. The top prize was awarded to Haruki Kawanaka's *The Ghost Photo Studio*. Takashi Shinomiya, CEO of CRG, highly praised the unique impact of the format: "The origin of entertainment lies in horror. This winning piece not only excelled in original ideas and structure, but its utilization of unique vertical expressions brought a striking new layer of surprise and dread to the audience."



CyberAgent Vertical Award Winner: "AIDOL KACHO"



The Best Thrill Award supported by CRG Winner: Director Haruki Kawanaka of "The Ghost Photo Studio"

## 3. Massive Domestic Impact: Distribution via Disney+ Japan

Underscoring the festival's enormous commercial viability and domestic influence, a major streaming partnership was announced during the event. Starting **July 31, 2026**, a curated selection of **20 short films** from SSFF & ASIA will be distributed on **Disney+ for the Japanese market**. This initiative highlights how independent, short-format cinema is successfully breaking into major commercial streaming landscapes, offering localized discovery for high-quality storytelling.

## 4. Kodansha's ¥10 Million Grant Project Celebrates Global Success

Yoshinobu Noma, President of **Kodansha**, one of Japan's largest publishing powerhouses, took the stage to highlight the roaring success of the *Kodansha Cinema Creators Lab*. Launched in 2022 with the pitch "We'll give you ¥10 million to make your short film," the project has officially supported indie filmmakers in securing awards and selections at **over 60 international film festivals** to date. Noma also announced that Kodansha will expand its footprint by launching a brand-new award segment in September focused on strategic corporate branded movies.



Mr. Yoshinobu Noma, President and CEO of Kodansha Co., Ltd.



Tetsuya Bessho, President of SSFF & ASIA, Tamotsu Hiiro, Representative Director and President of The Walt Disney Company (Japan) Ltd., Gaku Narita, Executive Director of Local Content Production at The Walt Disney Company (Japan) Ltd.

## Closing Remarks from the Festival Presidency

Reflecting on the conclusion of the 2026 ceremony, SSFF & ASIA President Tetsuya Bessho stated: "Independent short films have always possessed the raw emotional power to transcend borders. But as we move forward, our mission is to actively bridge that creative passion with technological and commercial evolution—turning visual experiences into strategic assets that move both global audiences and the entertainment ecosystem itself."

**Festival Streaming Availability:** Nominated and winning films across the Live-Action, Non-Fiction, and Animation competitions remain available for international streaming on the **Festival Online Grand Theater until Tuesday, June 30, 2026**. <https://app.lifelogbox.com/shortshortsonlinegrandtheater>

## **[Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia 2026 Overview]**

### **■ Festival Period :**

Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup> : Opening Ceremony

Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup> : Screening at Tokyo

Wednesday, June 10<sup>th</sup> : Award Ceremony

※Online Venue: Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday, June 30<sup>th</sup>

### **■ Screening Venues :** MoN Takanawa: The Museum of Narratives

(Box1000, Tatami, Park Terrace)

Akasaka Intercity Conference, Euro Live,

WITH HARAJUKU HALL, LIFORK HARAJUKU

※Dates and programs vary by venue

### **■ Official Website:**

<https://www.shortshorts.org/2026/en/index.html>

※Full Lineup Announcement: Scheduled for April 23, 2026.

### **■ Ticket Sales:**

#### **[Advance Tickets]**

General: 1,500 yen, University Students/ U29/ Seniors / Persons with Disabilities: 1,200 yen

Elementary School · Junior High School · High School Students: 1,000 yen

Preschool Children (under elementary school age): Free

#### **[Same-Day Tickets]**

General: 1,800yen, University Students /U29 / Seniors / Persons with Disabilities: 1,500 yen

Elementary School · Junior High School · High School Students: 1,200 yen

Preschool Children (under elementary school age): Free

#### **[Passports]**

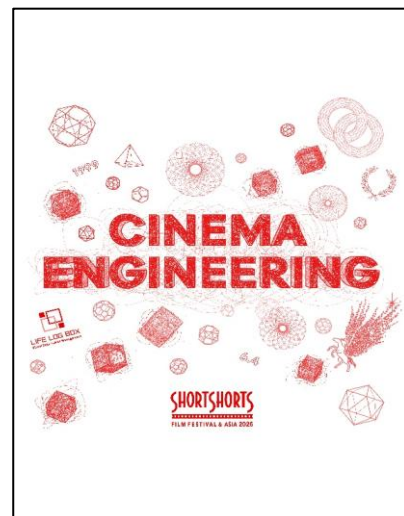
General: 7,000 yen, Students / Seniors / Persons with Disabilities: 5,500 yen

**[Online Venue]** 2,500 yen (Within Japan) / 15 USD (Outside Japan)

\*passport for the Online Venue will be on sale from May 25<sup>th</sup>.

■ **General Inquiry :** [info@shortshorts.org](mailto:info@shortshorts.org)

■ **Host :** Committee for Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia



### **OFFICIAL STILLs ARE HERE**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D9pmASdjh0Ze7zVhnCnB1o73H9FVO-qY?usp=sharing>

### **[PRESS INQUIRY]**

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