

An Insider's Guide to BIFF

[Planning Your Schedule](#)

[Choosing Your Films](#)

[Read the Guide](#)

[What country is it from?](#)

[Subtitles](#)

[The "Guest Visit"](#)

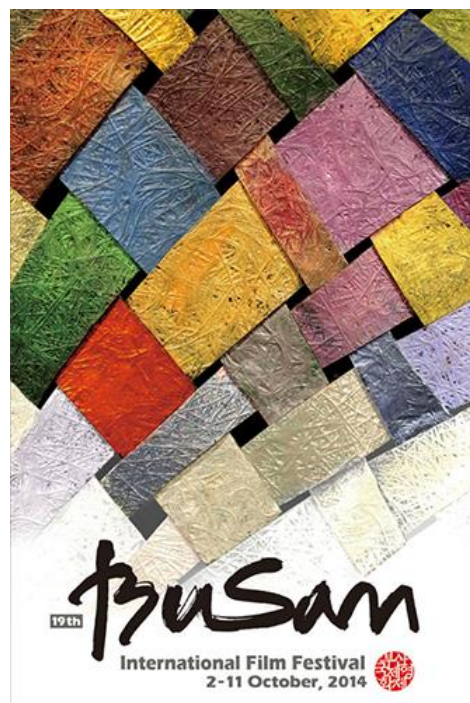
[How to Buy Tickets](#)

[On-line Purchase:](#)

[Busan Bank Purchase:](#)

[Same Day Purchase:](#)

[Exchange Booths](#)



An Insider's Guide to BIFF

By Matthew Sidgreaves

(with contributions from Sarah Hansen and Michele Bournier)

It's that time of year again when the Busan International Film Festival rolls into town and for once Busan is truly the most dynamic town around. If you've never experienced it then you are missing out. Whether you call it BIFF or PIFF, the film festival is without doubt the number one event in the Busan calendar and there is a palpable buzz and energy around the city. The event is truly international with big name stars, directors and a huge media circus all amassing in Busan. So take full advantage of this amazing opportunity; pick out some films, enjoy and be part of the BIFF experience.

The following guide is aimed at first timers and the casual festival goer. I hope that it helps you get the best out of the festival.

Planning Your Schedule

This is probably the easiest bit because if like me you work for a living there are only going to be certain times you will be available to see films. The opening weekend is when most will do the majority of their movie viewing. It's possible to watch four or even five films in a day, but this can be extremely tiring. It's important to not burn yourself out and leave time to do important stuff such as rest and eat.

If you are watching back to back films ensure that you leave yourself enough time to get to the next screen or theater. Fortunately, with the building of the new BIFF Cinema Complex, most of the films are in cinemas that are close to one another.

To get from the BIFF Cinema Complex to the nearby Shinsegae CGV and Lotte Cinemas in Centum City allow at least 15 minutes walking time. Both CGV and Lotte are on the top floors of the stores so you will have to factor in waiting around for elevators. If you are more than fifteen minutes late for your movie you will often be denied entry.



There are also four other locations that are showing films this year: two of the locations, the Sohyang Theater and the Community Media Center, are very near to the BIFF Cinema Complex. The other two are the Haeundae Megabox and the Busan Megabox located all the way across town in Nampodong, so pay close attention to the screening venue when selecting your films. You don't want to suddenly find out that you have to get from Haeundae to Nampodong in 15 minutes! Even getting from Haeundae to Centum City in a short amount of time can be quite a challenge. The subway is the best option and is usually quicker than a taxi. There is also a shuttle bus service available that runs every 10 minutes from outside the Megabox building in Haeundae to Centum City and the BIFF Cinema Complex. How long it takes is totally dependent on traffic and it also makes stops at all of the major hotels, so don't rely on it if you are in rush.

Choosing your Films

Choosing the right films is the key to having a good festival. A lot of excellent films will be shown, but there will also be plenty that will leave you bewildered, bored or even suicidal! So doing your research, for the most part, is going to pay off.

The BIFF program can be daunting. This year's program boasts 314 films from 79 countries with 98 world premieres and 36 international premieres. So how to choose?

Read the Guide

There are short synopses of all the films on the BIFF website: <http://biff.kr>. There is also a BIFF Ticket Catalogue, which is available from all branches of Busan Bank. The catalogue should be available on Monday, Sept. 22 or a PDF version can be downloaded from the website

Category	Country	Title	Director	Year	Runtime	Language	Subtitles	Screening Times
Official Selection	Korea	1. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		2. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		3. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		4. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		5. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		6. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		7. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		8. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		9. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00
		10. The Man from Nowhere	Lee Joon-ik	2010	115	Korean	English	19:00-20:00

here: http://121.254.228.195:8081/api.link/3d_baLkXGbrFRQ~~.zip

The write-ups often can differ greatly depending on the reviewer or translator; not all were created equal. Most of the write-ups are decent and give a fair reflection on what the movie is about. However, in the past, there have been some reviewers that have written massive spoilers giving away important plot lines and even the ending. Unfortunately, there is no way this can be avoided, so it's up to you if you still want to see it. Also, there are times when the synopsis and the actual movie you end up watching seem to bear absolutely no relation to each other, but that's part of the fun of the festival! It's also worth comparing the on-line site and the ticket catalogue because sometimes they can have two entirely different synopses from different writers.

What country is it from?

Some countries just seem to have a proven track record when it comes to film making. Any film from a Scandinavian country is always a solid bet; most of the time you are pretty much guaranteed hilarious, bizarre or just plain depressing. Countries with a successful domestic film industry, such as Iran and India, are also always worth consideration because production values are normally high. If you've never seen a Bollywood film then this is your perfect opportunity.

Korean movies are, of course, the most widely represented at the festival. They can also be some of the hardest to get tickets for because Koreans like to watch Korean films! With so many Korean films showing there will be a myriad of genres to choose from; from the melodramatic to thought provoking and sometimes quite shocking films. If you've ever seen any of the films from Korean heavyweight directors such as Park Chan Wook (Oldboy), Kim Gi Duk ([Pietà](#)) and Bong Joon Ho (Snowpiercer, Memories of Murder) then you will know that Korea produces some of the finest films in world cinema today.

Japanese movies can be quite a mixed bag. But what they do excel at is the screwed up, bizarre and just plain weird! It's a genre of movie that is quite unique to Japanese cinema and can be quite the experience. So if you find yourself reading the synopsis of a Japanese movie and end up

saying, “What the Heck!!”, or words to that effect, then go see it. For fans of animation and Japanese Anime there are usually several films showing. From the family friendly to head scratching disturbing, so choose carefully if taking the kids! (And also note that children under the age of 6 will not be permitted into screenings.)

When it comes to European and North American movies there is often the advantage that many will have already been shown at other film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto and Sundance and therefore will have already been reviewed in the industry press and on websites. It’s best not to read the full review though, as it may contain spoilers; usually scanning the introductory paragraph and conclusion will suffice. The BIFF guide also tells you which films were in competition and the winners at these other film festivals. Tickets for these films are often in high demand, but most have multiple screenings during the festival week. However, many of them, especially the English language films and many of those from established film making countries, such as France, get wide releases after the film festival season has finished, so there is often the chance to see them later.

This year’s festival has a special “spotlight” on films from Bangladesh, Iraq and Lebanon because films from these countries have been ignored in the past. There is also an “In Focus” category this year which is showcasing “Georgian Women Filmmakers” and “New Turkish Cinema”. The fact that the film festival organizers are highlighting films from these countries hopefully means that they have been selected carefully, so they might be worth considering.

Of course there are a ton of other countries I haven’t mentioned, so don’t only go by what I’ve mentioned above. The key is to go with your gut when reading the synopsis and trusting in the person who wrote it. If it seems good, then it’s worth trying to see.

Subtitles

If you are watching a film that doesn’t have English dialogue then make sure it has English subtitles. The vast majority do, but there are always a few that don’t. If a film has the letters “KK” or “KN” next to it on the schedule, it means there are no English subtitles.

The “Guest Visit”

The guest visit (coded as GV on the schedule) is a unique opportunity to hear the director and sometimes the actors speak about the film after it has finished screening. It usually involves the director talking about their movie and then a question and answer session with the audience. Personally, if there is a guest visit for a film I’ve chosen I will try my best to see it, as it can help explain, clarify, enhance and at times, totally change your perception of the film you’ve just watched. However there are a few provisos to a guest visit that you should be prepared for:



Beware of having no English translation, especially for Korean movies. Sometimes they will ask if anybody wants an English translator, so take advantage if you can. Usually though, either the director speaks English or there are both English and Korean translators who do alternative translations. Some translators are absolutely brilliant at their jobs, but there are others who are just plain terrible. Even if there is no translation, it's sometimes worth staying, you can always leave if you have no idea what is going on!

Beware the "Over Zealous Korean Film Buff"! Guaranteed there will be at least one at every guest visit you see. They will spend minutes rambling on giving their own personal analysis of the film, often at the bemusement of the director, without really asking any questions at all, but if they do it will normally fall into the next category.

Beware downright stupid questions from the audience. The festival audience are usually a very knowledgeable and amiable bunch and quite different from the cinema goers you get at your regular Korean cinemas. However there will always be the dumb question, it can be quite funny and embarrassing in the same instance!

Finally, guest visits seem to be added and be cancelled frequently. Visit the Notice section on the BIFF website for up-to-date information on the GVs:
http://www.biff.kr/artboard/board.asp?bid=9611_05

How to Buy Tickets

Once you have chosen your films then the fun starts: Trying to buy the tickets. To maximize your chances you have to be available to buy tickets on the first day they go on sale and at the first moment they go on sale. Tickets for some films are sold out in minutes and for the opening and closing films often seconds.

**The opening and closing film tickets go on sale at 2 p.m., September 23.
All the other tickets go on sale at 9 a.m., September 25.**

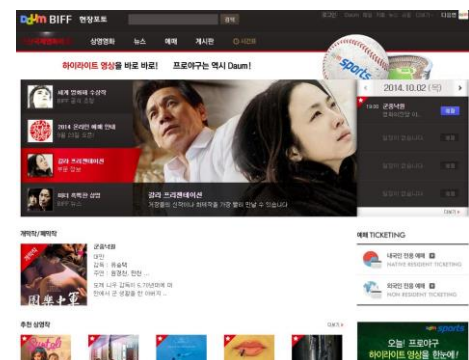
For purchasing tickets the day they go on sale and up to the start of the festival, your two best options are to buy them online or to buy them in person at a Busan Bank branch.

On-line Purchase:

This is by far the easiest, quickest and best method. BIFF uses the on-line Korean portal Daum.net to sell their tickets. <http://biff.movie.daum.net/>.

NOTE

In the past number of years, to buy tickets online you **MUST** have a credit card. It can be international or domestic, but it **MUST** be a credit card. Check cards may not work. Also, if you're using a non-Korean credit card, be aware that the payment will be processed slower than a domestic card, so using a Korean credit card is best.



On the ticketing website, look to the right of the page and you will see two options: “Native Resident Ticketing” and “Non Resident Ticketing”. For those of us with Alien Registration Cards, it is possible to sign up as members and use the “Native Resident” option, however the registration site is all in Korean and you will have to use the Korean ticket purchase portal if you choose this option. The “Non Resident Ticketing” sales site is all in English and no pre-registration is required, so it’s much easier to just use the “Non Resident” option.

You need to enter your e-mail address and a 9-digit PIN when first entering the site and any subsequent visits thereafter. You **MUST** remember the email address and PIN you use in order to access your tickets throughout the festival. There is no confirmation email sent, so it’s on you to remember what information you use to access the site.

Tickets for the opening and closing films can only be bought online—and they sell out in roughly 45 seconds!! So, you have to be online, ready, and fast with your mouse to get them. There’s usually a team of 4 of us trying to get tickets for the opening and closing tickets and most years we end up with a couple for the opening and a good amount for the closing. If you fail to get tickets in the first minute of sales, don’t despair yet. For the opening, keep trying the website right up until the day before the festival. People will return tickets and if you’re online when they’re being returned, you can win. Your other option, which I’ve used many times in the past for opening night and closing night tickets, is to show up at the theater around 5:30 or so and buy tickets off scalpers. You’ll pay more than the 20,000 per ticket, but you’ll get your ticket. Closing film tickets are much easier to get, relatively speaking. Just keep visiting the ticketing website regularly and chances are you will get lucky.

When it comes to actually purchasing the tickets for the rest of the festival, you are going to need your wits about you. But there are several tactics you can use to increase your chances of success:

The first thing you should do is make a list of your movies **by CODE NUMBER**. The code for each film can be found on the screening schedules immediately after the showing time and can be found below the film summaries.

832	СЕР СЕРТИФИКАТ	10-10 10:00	
305	ПРЕДПОСЛАВЛЕНИЕ	10-08 13:00	
381	ВСТУПИТЕЛЬНЫЙ СЕРТИФИКАТ	10-02 13:00	
CODE	THEATER	TIME	INFORMATION

It’s a three-digit number and it’s what you’ll want to use to book your films—not the film titles. Also, after entering the code number in the code box on the ticket purchase website, ensure you click the “Search” button on the site. **DON’T** hit Enter on your keyboard as this defaults back to the opening movie and it will show as being sold out.

Once you’ve made a list of the codes of the movies you want to see, I recommend the following:

1. Purchase the tickets for films shown on the weekend first. These are the tickets that sell the quickest because for most people, it’s the only time they have free. There are also two national holidays this year during the festival which will also create high demand. The first is the first Friday, October 3 and then other is the following Thursday, October 9.
2. It’s stating the obvious, but try to purchase the movies you want to see the most first; if they happen to be on the weekend then good luck. If they are showing on a workday, especially

during the daytime, then you probably still have a good chance of getting them if you drop them down the list a little. Not always though! I'm usually left unsuccessful and disappointed about not getting tickets for at least one of my top choices every year. Note also that the films in the "Gala" section also sell out really quickly, so if you have your heart set on seeing one of those, it should be at the top of your priority list.

3. If there are two or more of you wanting to see the same movie then pool your resources. You can only buy two tickets per film at a time, but if planned correctly you can vastly increase your chances of success by deciding who is buying what. Divide up your list between you. If there are some movies you both really want to see then both try for these. (See the next point).

4. If there are more than two of you buying, don't be scared of buying too many tickets for the same movie. You can always return any excess tickets and get a full refund before the festival starts. If you return them after the festival starts you are charged a 1,000 won fee.

5. Have back up movies. Purchase them last, but it's better to have tickets for something if you don't get your first choice.

5. Be prepared for the on-line ticketing system to hang and sometimes crash. If nothing seems to be happening after selecting your movie, then start again.

6. If you get to the "Select your Seat" screen, then you are halfway there. However, especially on the first day of sales, hundreds and sometimes thousands of people are trying for the same movie and there might be someone else selecting the exact same seat as you. For whatever reasons, Korean buyers seem to go for the seats at the front and middle first, so by choosing seats further back or aisle seats you will increase your chances, but if the system hangs after selecting your seats, somebody beat you to the punch!

7. If you get to the payment screen this usually means you've succeeded, but not always. Be very careful entering your credit card details. Make a mistake here and you have to start all over again.

8. If you don't get your tickets not all is lost. Many people cancel their tickets before and during the festival, so it's always worth clicking through your films you missed out on whenever you have the time. For some reason a lot of these returns are made late at night, so try then. It's also worth looking at the schedule again and seeing if there is anything else that appeals to you.

NOTE: Tickets for all films are available for on-line purchase up until the day before the screening of the film. This also applies to returning and refunding tickets. If you wait until the day of the film you will not receive a refund. (If this does happen, see the "Exchange Boards" section below).

Busan Bank Purchase:

The Festival has only relatively recently offered online ticket purchases, so in the past, all tickets needed to be purchased through Busan Bank (at a teller, at an ATM or via phone banking). Some BIFF ‘old-timers’ prefer buying their tickets via a Busan Bank teller to risking using online purchasing (in previous years, the online ticketing was TERRIBLE. Since switching to the Daum ticketing portal, though, it has become significantly more reliable!). If you’re more comfortable buying tickets from a person, much of the advice in the “On-Line Purchase” section stands.

1. Make a list of your codes and write them in order of priority.
2. Again, you can only buy two tickets per film at one time. If you need to buy more than 2 tickets, repeat the code lower in your list. Sometimes the teller will notice the repeat and refuse to sell you two more, but more often than not, that ruse works.
3. Once you get to the teller, give her your codes, cross your fingers and hope that (a) she wins on most of your shows and (b) her computer doesn’t crash (in the past, crashes at the bank were the norm).
4. You will have to pay for your tickets in cash and once they’re issued. Credit cards are not accepted.

If you failed to get tickets to the films you wanted to see in the madness of first-day sales, don’t despair. There are other ways to get tickets.

Same Day Purchase:

The festival holds back 20% of all of the tickets for same day purchase—EXCEPT for films showing at the Haeundae Megabox and Nampdong Busan theaters. This is great for those that are not free when the tickets go on sale on-line. However, you need to be up very early to be there when the box office opens to have a chance at getting the films you want to see.



This year, same-day purchase box office locations are at the ground floor (likely outdoor) box office of the BIFF Center and the outdoor Shinsaegae Box Office. They start selling the held-back tickets at 8:30 am. On weekends and holidays, I recommend being in line by 7:30, especially if you want to buy tickets for more than one show. Earlier is much better, though. At 7:30 there will be large lines, but remember, there are hundreds of films being screened each day and the people in line can only buy 2 per film—the chances of everyone wanting to see the same films are low-ish.

That being said, if you’re not an early bird there will still be tickets available for something on the day. Large boards are set up outside and inside all the main screening venues telling you what is available. (They cross out movies as they are sold out). However by this stage you are often getting the dregs of the festival, although you might stumble upon a gem!

Exchange Booths

The absolute last option for scoring tickets the day of the screenings is the ticket exchange booths that are set up outside every theater. A BIFF rule is that you cannot get a refund for a ticket on the day of the screening, but stuff happens and sometimes people end up with tickets they can't use. Look for volunteers camped out at little tables in front of white boards. If someone has a ticket they want to get rid of, they bring it to the volunteers who record the title of the film (almost always in Korean) and the code on the whiteboard. If a show you want to see is on the board, talk to the volunteers and pay them for the ticket. They will then send a text message to the person who left the ticket who then goes to pick up his/her money. It's a neat little system-and sometimes you can get lucky!

One final point: Respect the volunteers. The film festival would never happen if it wasn't for the scores of volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure that BIFF is a success. Most are university students who are looking to interact with foreigners and give their résumés a little boost! They do a fantastic job and as said, without them there would be no festival. So if things aren't going your way, try to keep this in mind.

Please note that all of the above purchasing information is based on previous years' festivals and therefore could be subject to change. I also take no responsibility if you pick a bad movie! Enjoy your festival

About the Author:

I saw my first BIFF film in 2002, the only film I saw that year. Since then it has become a bit of an obsession, to put it mildly! For the entire ten days of the festival I spend pretty much every spare minute I have watching films. The amount I see each year varies, but it's usually in double figures. It can be tiring and other commitments in life often take a back seat, but it's also an amazing privilege that such an event is held here in Busan. Being able to see so many films from so many different countries is quite staggering. For the rest of the year I rarely place a foot in a regular movie theater, so when BIFF comes around I take full advantage of this unique opportunity afforded to me.