

Off the track in San Sebastian: Festival de Cine Fantástico y de Terror

Waves, pintxos, beaches, bikinis, nightlife, and restaurants, that is what San Sebastian in Northern Spain is known for. But the city bears more, especially cinematic pleasures. For over fifty years now, San Sebastian celebrates its yearly International Film Festival that, in its best years, was a European counterpoint to other festivals of this sort, situated mostly in the USA.

Cannes beat San Sebastian, and, correspondingly, the festival lost much of its glamour. Surprisingly, for nearly twenty years now a counterpoint to San Sebastian has been getting established. At the same time, the San Sebastian Horror and Fantasy Festival competes with LA's *Screamfest* and the Horror Film Festivals of Chicago and New York City.

In first place, its strengths are to be seen in the preference for European films as well as for both short and feature films. Every year in October, during the Halloween week, the festival decorates parts of the whole city, like the theatre and the boulevard, in a scary fashion. Additionally, in the festival itself you find a classics corner, a children's cinema section and the every year's retrospective dedication to an important person of the fantasy and horror film genre.

But the real highlights of the festival are its contests. One gets to see around twenty-five feature films, from out of which approximately fifteen compete for the Premio del Público, endowed with 6000 Euros. Two short film contests also attract the attention, a Spanish and an international one. About fifteen short films are shown there, and nearly all of them participate in the competition.

This is not much in comparison with other film festivals. But in its small size lies another strength of the Horror and Fantasy Festival, since you can easily get in touch with people from the genre's film scene, at least more easily than elsewhere. And to regenerate from the exhausting film parties, one can get a board and have fun within the waves, which are supposed to be there in large numbers during October.

In connection with this, there is another, rather unknown, film festival in San Sebastian: the Surfilm Festival, where you can find everything from classics to new films related to surfing and its culture. But here, to be frank, the cinematic aspect shrinks to its minimum.