**The Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme 2024**

**2 February to 31 March 2024**

**Unforgettable: Memories, Times and Reflections in Japanese Cinema**



**(Clockwise from top left) *Shadow of Fire*; *The Snow Flurry* (©1959 Shochiku Co., Ltd.); *A Man*; *Lonely Castle in the Mirror* (©2022 “Lonely Castle in the Mirror” Film Partners)**

Having run for over twenty years, the UK’s largest festival of Japanese cinema, the **Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme** (**JFTFP24**), returns with its biggest showcase ever for 2024.

Memories play a powerful role in the mind. Shaped fluidly by individuals or time, they have been a source of inspiration for many filmmakers, fuelling their creativity to craft colourful stories. Under the theme ‘**Unforgettable: Memories, Times and Reflections in Japanese Cinema**’ the JFTFP24 delves into Japanese cinema to explore how memories are employed in the cinematic voices of Japanese filmmakers, from films where memories are a focal point to works where they play a subliminal role in driving or affecting people’s minds and behaviour. With an incredibly diverse range of films all based on memories, time, and reflections, this year’s programme is set to provide UK audiences with memorable stories and unforgettable moments.

Under this theme the packed programme will showcase highlights including the **UK Premiere** of ***Shadow of Fire****,* the latest work from festival favourite **Tsukamoto Shinya** (*Tetsuo: The Iron Man*), a new entry in the **Roman Porno** genre, ***Hand***, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Nikkatsu’s controversial line of erotic cinema, visually stunning anime ***Lonely Castle in the Mirror***, a retrospective classic from the Golden Age of Japanese cinema in **Kinoshita Keisuke**’s ***The Snow Flurry*** and an incredible selection of new titles tackling contemporary Japanese social issues through heartfelt drama, tense thrills, inventive sci-fi and quirky comedy. Special guest directors will also be present to introduce their films including director **Maeda Tetsu** with his topical care home mystery ***Do Unto Others*** and director **Chihara Tetsuya** with vibrant and visually engaging generational women’s stories in ***Ice Cream Fever***.

After blazing a way onto the film scene with his hugely influential body-horror masterpiece *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* in 1989, director **Tsukamoto Shinya** has become a firm favourite of international audiences earning acclaim and notoriety in equal measure for such works as *Tokyo Fist* and *A Snake of June*, along with notable acting roles including in Martin Scorcese’s epic *Silence*. Receiving its **UK Premiere**, ***Shadow of Fire*** (2023, 95 min)is Tsukamoto’s latest searing and stylish cinematic work. A return to the subject of World War II following 2014’s *Fires on the Plain*, *Shadow of Fire* is set in the aftermath of a war ravaged Tokyo. In this unforgiving reality, a young war orphan sneaks into a local tavern-turned-brothel, where a destitute woman sells her body to make a living. Their interaction ignites a faint glimmer of hope but the fragile peace is soon shattered… Following its premiere at Venice Film Festival 2023, where it earned the Best Asian Film Award, the film has earned recognition at Toronto and Tokyo International Film Festivals.

Another Venice premiere, director Ishikawa Kei’s thoughtful false-identity drama ***A Man*** (2022, 121 min) stars popular actor Ando Sakura, acclaimed for roles in *Shoplifters* and *100 Yen Love* as well as starring in recent hit *Godzilla Minus One*. Here she plays a bereaved woman who discovers her husband is not who he claims to be, and the subsequent investigation to reveal his true identity. Based on a best-selling novel, this acclaimed film festival hit poignantly explores many of the social issues faced in Japan today. Another title which tackles the pressing issues facing modern Japan via a shocking mystery is director Maeda Tetsu’s ***Do Unto Others*** (2023, 114 min, Director present at select screenings). When the dead bodies of an elderly man and his care centre’s director are found early one morning, Munenori (Matsuyama Kenichi, *Norwegian Wood, Death Note*), a dedicated caregiver responsible for the elderly man’s care, becomes the prime suspect… and it’s soon discovered that over forty deaths have occurred since he began working at the centre. This gripping mystery examines the problems associated with an ageing society and the breakdown of the care system. The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 shook the country to its core and the effects are still being felt today, some of which are explored in heartfelt drama ***Voices in the Wind*** (Dir. Suwa Nobuhiro, 2020, 139 min). Set eight years after the disaster, emotionally scarred Haru (Motola Serena) silently embarks on a 1,300 km solo hitchhiking journey to her hometown of Otsuchi, where her family died. Guided by an unseen force, will the journey help heal her pain? Expertly directed by Suwa Nobuhiro, who helmed a segment in the 2006 anthology film *Paris je t’aime* alongside a host of top international directors, *Voices in the Wind* premiered at Berlin International Film Festival. Based on real-events, ***Winny***(Dir. Matsumoto Yusaku, 2023, 127 min) is the powerful retelling of the story behind the peer-to-peer file-sharing program. The revolutionary software of choice for online piracy in Japan in 2002, Winny would see its genius programmer Kaneko Isamu arrested, tried, and ultimately found guilty of enabling copyright violations, with this film offering a fascinating account of the legal battle in a story which has continued relevance today. Celebrated with a retrospective at the 2023 Tokyo International Film Festival, but still little known outside of Japan, prolific director Jojo Hideo’s latest ***Twilight Cinema Blues*** (2022, 99 min) focuses on the crises facing independent cinemas, particularly in a post-pandemic world. This delightful tragicomedy follows a penniless young man who takes up a job in a small cinema on the verge of closure, and through interactions with the ragtag bunch of customers and staff, begins to confront and reconcile his own past. Premiering at San Sebastian Film Festival, ***The Zen Diary*** (Dir. Nakae Yuji, 2022, 111 min) is based on an essay about food and cooking by leading Japanese author Mizukami Tsutomu and offers a charming meditation on zen cuisine and seasonal scenery. The film finds writer Tsutomu (Sawada Kenji, *The Happiness of the Katakuris*) living in a secluded mountain cabin, who, unable to confront the loss of his wife, has instead devoted himself to farming and cooking, skills he learned as a young monk. But a series of incidents soon awakens new emotions inside him. Offering audiences a glimpse into the joys of a slow, simple life seen through the lenses of bonds, memory, and love, and filled with cooking scenes, *The Zen Diary* is a delight.

In the 1970s, leading film studio Nikkatsu would look to combat the threat of television on cinema audiences by introducing the Roman Porno genre, a new type of erotic film which would prove popular for the sex and violence they offered, while new and upcoming young directors would use the format to push boundaries and develop into major talents. Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the line, ***Hand***(Matsui Daigo, 2022, 99 min) represents the first of three films created as part of the ‘Roman Porno Now’ project, which aims to promote the diversity, entertainment and artistry on display in Roman Porno works. *Hand* follows 25-year-old office worker, Sawako, who has an uneasy relationship with her father and a passion for older men, often dating and collecting photos of their hands, but as she grows close to her young co-worker (Kaneko Daichi), her feelings begin to transform. Set against the backdrop of contemporary Japanese society, the film is a sensitive adaptation of award-winning author Yamazaki Nao-Cola’s short story and a must-see contemporary revival of the iconic Roman Porno label.

A selection of films in this year’s programme which journey through fantasy, sci-fi and horror include the latest stunning work from leading animation director Hara Keiichi (*Miss Hokusai, Summer Days with Coo*), ***Lonely Castle in the Mirror*** (2022, 116 min), which concerns Kokoro, a bullied middle schooler, who isolates herself in her room until her room’s mirror transports her to a mysterious castle. Alongside six other children with similar struggles in life, she faces a challenge from a wolf-masked girl who asks them to find a hidden key in order to fulfil any wish. Recalling recent time-travel success story *Beyond The Infinite Two Minutes*, Takebayashi Ryo’s ***Mondays: See You ‘This’ Week!*** (2022, 82 min) finds the staff of a small but demanding advertising agency realise they’re stuck in a time-loop of the same monotonous week. Only the oblivious department head is unaware… and he holds the key to their freedom in this smart and comic satire of office life. Time-travel is also the basis of ***From the End of the World*** (2023, 135 min), the latest CGI extravaganza from Kiriya Kazuaki, the director behind such special effects epics as *Last Knights* and *Casshern*. The film finds depressed and lonely high school girl Hana engulfed in despair until one day when she’s approached by a special agent telling her she can save the world, leading to an adventure from ancient Japan’s Sengoku-era (late fifteenth- to sixteenth-century) to the ends of the earth. From the co-writer of J-horror masterpiece *Ring*, and acclaimed director in his own right, Nakamura Yoshihiro (*Fish Story, A Boy and His Samurai*) returns to the horror genre with ***The Inerasable*** (2016, 107 min). Taking as its inspiration the idea of Japan’s “stigmatised property”, rooms or buildings where a traumatic incident such as suicide or murder have taken place, the film follows a novelist specialising in ghost stories (Takeuchi Yuko, *Ring*) who receives a letter from a young student (Hashimoto Ai, *Confessions*) explaining that she often hears strange noises in her room. Together, the two of them investigate the horrifying truth behind the room and its past inhabitants in this highly-praised horror mystery.

This year’s film programme highlights contemporary women’s stories across a number of features, with sharply observed human drama ***Thousand and One Nights*** (Kubota Nao, 2022, 126 min) portraying the contrasting lives of two women left behind by their husbands’ disappearances, told through powerful performances by leading actresses Tanaka Yuko and Ono Machiko. Based on Toyoda Tetsuya’s hugely popular manga of the same name, and also concerning a disappearing husband, ***Undercurrent*** (Dir. Imaizumi Rikiya, 2023, 143 min) finds widower Kanae struggling to manage a bathhouse after her husband’s disappearance. Hiring an eccentric private detective (played by *Like Father, Like Son*’s Lily Franky) to locate the missing spouse, Kanae soon reveals hidden truths about herself. From Ogigami Naoko (*Rent-a-Cat*), one of Japan’s most prolific female directors, ***Ripples*** (2023, 120 min) looks at social issues from the burden of caregiving on women to ableism. In the film, Yoriko, who cares for a bedridden father-in-law, fills the void left by a departed husband and son by devoting herself to a new religious cult, but the peace she regains is disrupted by the return of her estranged family members, driving her to breaking point. ***YOKO*** (Kumakiri Kazuyoshi, 2022, 113 min) is the story of a 42-year-old recluse living in Tokyo. Having held a grudge against her father for 20 years, one day she is notified of his passing. Reluctantly, she embarks on a journey to Hirosaki in order to attend his funeral, but is accidentally stranded along the way. The film features a lead performance from international star Kikuchi Rinko (*Babel, Pacific Rim*) and has an ending theme from renowned *Drive My Car* composer Ishibashi Eiko and Jim O’Rourke. ***The Lump in My Heart*** (Dir. Matsumura Shingo, 2023, 92 min) depicts the bonds of a mother-daughter relationship. Working on an assignment about her first love, teenager Chinatsu recalls the bittersweet memories of her childhood crush while her single mother Akiko (Tokiwa Takako, *Hanagatami*) grows worried after discovering her daughter is to be retested for breast cancer. In ***Ice Cream Fever*** (Dir. Chihara Tetsuya, 2023, 104 min, Director present at select screenings) four women from different generations have their lives intertwined at an ice cream shop in Tokyo. The shop assistant, Natsumi, is captivated by the mysterious customer Saho, while Yu takes in her estranged niece who is searching for her missing father. This stylish directorial debut from a former advertising and fashion art director is packed with visually engaging shots and vibrant colour.

On a lighter note, those looking for quirky comedy and heart-warming coming-of-age tales are well served with a selection of titles including a trip into authentic 1980s Japanese culture in Kanazawa Tomoki’s directorial debut ***Sabakan*** (2022, 96 min). This bittersweet, nostalgic tale set during the summer of 1986 sees a young boy and his friend embark on an adventure to a nearby island, unaware that their childhood innocence is soon to be shattered. From director Okita Shuichi (*A Story of Yonosuke, The Woodsman and the Rain*), ***The Fish Tale***(2022, 139 min) is a similarly heartfelt coming-of-age tale which follows young Meebo (Non, *In This Corner of the World*), whose eccentric yet endearing passion for fish quite often leaves him out of touch with society. This humorously quirky story is based on the autobiography of Sakana-kun, a Japanese TV personality well-known for his extensive knowledge of fish! ***Hit Me Anyone One More Time!*** (2019, 127 min) is a comic satire from Japan’s leading comedy director Mitani Koki and tells the story of the widely-despised fictional Prime Minister of Japan, Kuroda Keisuke (Nakai Kiichi, *47 Ronin*) who, after waking up in a hospital, is unable to recall any details of his life thus far. Now filled with a desire to do good, can he balance the conspiracy and corruption of politics with his newfound sense of morality? A moving comedy which shines a light on a group of people who live on the fringes of society, ***Hoarder On The Border*** (Kayano Takayuki, 2022, 101 min) is presented in an omnibus-style format featuring multiple interconnected narratives revolving around Ritsuki, a man who takes on a new path with a specialised cleaning crew for ‘hoarder’ houses confronting not only cluttered spaces but also clients with diverse challenges and exploring the complexities in their lives.

Based on an autobiographical novel of the same name by popular columnist Takayama Makoto and directed by Matsunaga Daishi (*Pieta in the Toilet*), ***Egoist*** (2023, 120 min) is a touching and delicate LGBTQ+ drama about Kosuke who, after spending his adolescence in a rural village suppressing his feelings as a gay man, is now a confidant fashion editor living in Tokyo who falls for his young and attractive personal trainer, Ryuta. While Kosuke believes their love will endure, an unexpected twist of fate threatens their relationship when Ryuta fails to show up for a trip.

A retrospective title from one of Japan’s greatest filmmakers, Kinoshita Keisuke (*The Ballad of Narayama*, *Twenty-Four Eyes*), ***The Snow Flurry*** (1959, 78 min) follows Haruko (Kishi Keiko, *Early Spring*) attempts a double suicide with a son of the respectable Nagura family. Having survived and become an outcast, she has to raise their son, Suteo (Kawazu Yusuke, *Cruel Story of Youth*), alone. Grown-up Suteo develops feelings for his cousin (Kuga Yoshiko, *Good Morning*) from the Nagura family, but his forbidden love echoes his mother’s tragic past… This deeply moving melodrama skilfully critiques family traditions and societal barriers in a post-war village with its non-linear storytelling.

**The Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme 2024 takes place in cinemas around the UK from 2 February - 31 March 2024**

**For further information:** <https://www.jpf-film.org.uk/>

**Touring Programme Cities, Venues & Dates**

**London** - Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), 2 – 11 February

**Aberystwyth** - Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 3 – 29 February

**Belfast** - Queen’s Film Theatre, 3 February – 30 March

**Birmingham** - Midlands Arts Centre, 22 – 28 March

**Bristol -** Watershed, 3 - 28 February

**Cambridge** - Howard Theatre, Downing College, 3 February – 24 March (TBC)

**Cardiff** - CHAPTER, 16 February – 21 March

**Chester** - Storyhouse, 13 – 30 March

**Chichester** - Cinema at New Park, Chichester, 3 February – 11 March

**Colchester** - Firstsite, 3 February – 30 March

**Coventry** - Warwick Arts Centre, ​​2 February – 14 March

**Derby** - QUAD, 9 February – 17 March

**Dundee** - Dundee Contemporary Arts, 17 February – 16 March

**Exeter** - Exeter Phoenix, 1 – 27 March

**Edinburgh** - Cameo Picturehouse, 21 February – 27 March

**Inverness** - Eden Court, 12 February – 18 March

**Kendal -** Brewery Arts Cinema, 3 February - 23 March

**Lancaster** - The Dukes, 18 February – 12 March

**Leicester** - Phoenix, 2 – 30 March

**Lewes** - Depot, 3 – 14 March

**Liverpool** - Picturehouse @ FACT, 7 – 28 March

**Manchester** - HOME, 12 February – 6 March

**Newcastle** - Tyneside Cinema, 11 – 31 March

**Norwich** - Cinema City Picturehouse, 4 – 25 March

**Nottingham** - Broadway, 15 – 20 March

**Orkney** - The Phoenix Cinema, 28 February – 14 March

**Oxford** - The Ultimate Picture Palace, 6 – 27 March

**Plymouth** - Plymouth Arts Cinema, 1 – 28 March

**Sheffield** - Showroom Cinema, 4 – 27 February

**York** - City Screen Picturehouse, 29 February – 28 March

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<https://www.jpf-film.org.uk/>

**Notes to Editors**

**About The Japan Foundation:**

Established in 1972, the Japan Foundation promotes international cultural exchange between Japan and the rest of the world by organising projects as well as providing financial support through grant programmes in the fields of Arts and Culture, Japanese Language, and Japanese Studies. The Japan Foundation currently has its Head Office in Tokyo, with offices and centres in 25 countries outside of Japan. For more information on our activities, please visit https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/ (Head Office) or https://www.jpf.org.uk/ (London).

If you wish to subscribe to our monthly e-bulletin or receive news on events the Japan Foundation London is involved in, including future film screening programmes, please visit https://jpf.org.uk/registration/.