

Stuttgart July 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,
dear colleagues,

please draw attention to the 23rd Stuttgart Indian Film Festival, which will be showcasing the latest in Indian cinema in Stuttgart, Germany, from 23rd to 26th July. The programme for Europe's largest Indian film festival in Stuttgart features 70 recent feature films, short films and documentaries. This year's festival will focus on South Indian 'Mollywood' cinema. Please send proof of your publication (link, PDF, etc.) to jahn@filmbuerobw.de. Many thanks for your editorial support.

Kind regards
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Filmbüro Baden-Württemberg e. V.

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Stuttgart Indian Film Festival, 23rd to th 26 July 2026

Adrenaline-fuelled cinema from Mollywood

STUTT GART, GERMANY – It is not the industry giant Bollywood, but the more flamboyant, louder and socially critical South Indian Mollywood cinema that will set the tone at the 23rd Stuttgart Indian Film Festival from 23rd to 26th July. Audiences can look forward to a colourful programme featuring spectacular scenes, clever twists, human depths, political undertones, breathtaking landscapes, vivid imagery and melancholic moments from the world of Malayalam cinema. Globalisation, identity and tradition provide the raw material for the adrenaline-fuelled cinema made in Mollywood.

In the Mollywood cosmos – headquartered in Kerala (Kochi) – audiences can expect the first Malayalam superheroine, a celebrated superstar as a clumsy boxer, a hot newcomer as a rock singer and a hunted, mysterious dog breeder.

Quality and diversity despite a streamlined programme

The 23rd Stuttgart Indian Film Festival will this time run for just under four days from 23rd to 26th July. The more compact programme is an adjustment to the reduced funding from the City of Stuttgart. Despite the scaled-down format, the programme's quality and diversity remain intact: more than 70 socio-political feature films, high-calibre debuts, defiant visions and intense documentary portraits of a multi-ethnic nation that thrives on contrasts and guarantees a culture clash. LGBTQ+ stories are also featured in the programme. Audiences will encounter an elephant whisperer, India's last executioner and many people who open the door to a strange world. For the first time, there were pre-festival warm-ups organised in collaboration with partners such as the Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg. There is great anticipation for Europe's largest Indian film festival in the heart of Baden-Württemberg's capital.

A visually stunning thriller to open the festival

The 23rd Stuttgart Indian Film Festival kicks off on Thursday 23rd July in Stuttgart's city centre cinemas with Dinjith Ayyathan's visually stunning thriller 'Eko From the Infinite Chronicles of Kuriachan', which tells the nerve-wracking story of the search for a mysterious dog breeder in central Kerala. On the morning of the opening day, a special screening for school groups will feature the coming-of-age drama 'Bad Girl' by director Varsha Bharath, which portrays a rebellious teenager from a privileged background.

More Feature Film Recommendations

People seen through the eyes of animals

With Rajesh Madhavan's debut film 'Pennum Porattum – Girl and the Fools' Parade', the festival presents a truly original, absurd Malayalam comedy featuring 100 newcomers from Mollywood, in which people are seen through the eyes of animals. In this 'parade of fools', the mongrel dog Suttu – voiced by the well-known actor Tovino Thomas – offers insights into his turbulent doggy life, his environment dominated by chaos and scandalous rumours, and the eccentric people around him. *(25th July, 1 pm, Cinema)*

Supergirl saves the Good

In Dominiv Arun's ambitious VFX fantasy film 'Lokah – Chapter 1: Chandra', Kalyani Priyadarshan takes to the screen as Malayalam cinema's first female superhero. Modern action meets Indian mythology. A mysterious immortal young woman, named after the moon goddess, ticks like a European vampire and moves to the high-tech metropolis of Bengaluru to declare war on evil – in the form of an organ trafficking ring and a corrupt policeman. *(25th July, 8 pm, EM2)*

Slice-of-life drama in Goa

In the experimental, poetic slice-of-life drama 'Iktsuarpok – The Weight of Longing', director Omkar Bhatkar observes siblings Christopher and Christine as they come to terms with their mother's death in wintry Goa, in the home of their unloved aunt. *(26th July, 11 am, EM2)*

Survival thriller in the jungle

Emcy Joseph's Malayalam survival thriller 'Meesha – Moustache' is set deep in the jungle. The intense, gripping atmosphere, the impressive cinematography in the forest and the performances by Kathir and Shine Tom Chacko make this story of male egos, betrayal and caste mentality an absolute must-see in the programme of the Stuttgart Indian Film Festival. *(26th July, 3 pm, Cinema)*

Fistfights for a place at college

With Khalid Rahman's humorous action-boxing drama 'Alappuzha Gymkhana', the festival brings one of the highest-grossing Malayalam blockbusters to the big screen in Stuttgart. Rising star Naslen K. Gafoor shines in the lead role. His gang fails their final exams and hopes to get into college anyway via sports bonus points. They try their hand at boxing and provide plenty of laughs in the cinema. *(25th July, 3 pm, Cinema)*

Family film: Three unlikely dreamers

This family coming-of-age film celebrates childhood resilience: In his heart-warming Hindi drama 'Pukam Pukai – To Fetch a Pail of Water', filmmaker Abhay Punjabi presents three unlikely young dreamers in the scorching heat of Delhi (age rating: 6 years). The film is narrated live in German by Stuttgart actress Juliane Bacher. *(26th July, 3 pm, Cinema)*

Reunion at the Nevermind Bar

At the 'Nevermind' bar, a mother is reunited with her long-lost illegitimate son after many years. Bengali actress Chaiti Ghoshal makes her directorial debut, portraying the triumph of human bonds with leading star Rituparna Sengupta and acclaimed rising star Amartya Ray. *(25th July 8 pm, Cinema)*

A rebel's moral dilemma

'Kangbo Aloti – The Lost Path', the first feature film ever shot in the indigenous Karbi language, directed by the nationally acclaimed filmmaker Khanjan Kishore Nath, is a gripping drama exploring moral dilemmas and ideologies in a region torn by unrest. A young rebel seeking to recruit new fighters encounters a peace-loving village teacher. *(24th July, 6 pm, Cinema)*

Mental breakdown, sweet revenge and more

Further feature film recommendations: The independent drama 'The Audition' by Manas Shashidharan Jacob focuses on the mental breakdown of an unsuccessful artist. The offbeat comedy 'Sheness' by Manuraj Dubey explores the female psyche and relishes depicting the revenge of a tormented politician's wife on her campaign-obsessed husband. The satirical tragicomedy 'The Great Shamsuddin Family' by director Anusha Rizvi is set over a single chaotic day in a flat in Delhi. A writer has to meet a deadline, but a visit from her eccentric family sabotages everything. *(25th July, 6 pm, Cinema)*

In the running for the film awards

The feature films nominated for the German Star of India award: 'Bad Girl' by Varsha Bharath, 'Kangbo Aloti – The Lost Path' by Khanjan Kishore Nath, 'The Audition' by Manas Shashidharan Jacob, 'The Great Shamsuddin Family' by Anusha Rizvi, 'Nevermind' by Chaiti Ghoshal and 'Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra' by Dominic Arun.

A gem in the programme: powerful documentaries

Powerful documentaries in the festival programme explore social upheavals, endangered traditions and the realities of life for marginalised people in India. The films tell the stories of

extraordinary individuals, cultural heritage and social conflicts – often from a perspective that is rarely seen in mainstream cinema.

Senior women are changing the world

The focus is on Haider Khan's acclaimed documentary 'Saath Paar Zindagi – Life Beyond 60'. In it, the director creates a striking cinematic tribute to five remarkable women of advanced age. All the protagonists have been awarded the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian honours.

Among those portrayed are the transgender folk dancer Manjamma Jogati, who broke through patriarchal structures in the cultural sector, and Parbati Barua, who is considered India's first female elephant trainer. The activist Hirbai Ibrahim Lobi, who campaigns for education and women's rights within the Siddi community, is also given considerable attention. Also featured are Sudevi Mataji, originally from Germany, who runs a huge sanctuary for sick and abandoned cows in Radhak, northern India, and Chutni Mahato, who protects women from ritual witch hunts. The film impressively demonstrates that courage, drive and social change are not a question of age. (*Friday 24th July, 12 noon, Cinema, European Premiere*)

The acclaimed director Haider Khan has further documentaries in the programme: 'Tears Beneath the Laughing Sky' sheds light on the extreme social inequalities in India. (*Friday 24th July, 2 pm, Cinema, World Premiere*)

His stirring documentary 'Divine Beasts in Bondage' follows Indian working elephants through a harrowing daily existence caught between religious veneration and brutal exploitation for tourism and heavy labour (*Friday 24th July, 4 pm, Cinema, World Premiere*).

Stuttgart yoga teacher on exploitation on tea plantations

Stuttgart-based yoga teacher, musician and filmmaker Shammi Singh, together with Daniel Kiwitt, presents the documentary 'Lives for Leaves – Tea Production in Assam'. The documentary looks behind the idyllic façade of global tea consumption and highlights the harsh working conditions on the plantations of Assam, the world's largest tea-growing region. Low wages, a lack of social security and physically gruelling piecework characterise the daily lives of the predominantly female tea pickers (*Friday 24th July, 4 pm, Cinema, World Premiere*).

An almost forgotten art of puppetry

Manohara Varma documents an almost forgotten art form in 'Nokkuvidya Pavakali – The Survival Story of a Folk Art'. The focus is on Renjini K. S., the last known master of this traditional art of puppetry from Kerala. The tiny wooden puppets are balanced on a thin rod resting solely on the upper lip – an extremely physically demanding performance used to tell stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (*Sunday 26th July, 11 am, Cinema*).

Further documentary recommendations

Venkateswari's Journey to Revive Coir Shop

S. N. Aravind's independent documentary offers a quiet yet poignant glimpse into the struggle for survival of a traditional coir trader in the historic market district of Chalai Bazar in Thiruvananthapuram (*Friday 24th July, 12 noon, Cinema, European Premiere*).

Waiting at the Edge of the Gallows

Swapnil Ware presents a controversial portrait of Pawan Kumar, considered India's last official executioner. The media-savvy protagonist defends his craft vigorously and regards the work as a family tradition to be passed on to the next generation (*Friday 24th July, 2 pm, Cinema, German Premiere*).

Ek Tha Phayalwaan – Once, a Wrestler

Ajayraj P.'s documentary about an ageing former wrestler is both humorous and deeply moving (*Friday 24th July, 2 pm, Cinema, German Premiere*).

Anaadhi Ananthaha

In Sanskrit, the title literally means: without beginning, without end, or infinite. Filmmaker Niyantha dedicates his profound, philosophical film to the concept of eternity, the cycles of life, and the timeless knowledge rooted in ancient traditions (*Sunday 26th July, 11 am, Cinema, German Premiere*).

Give It a Shot

Vaishali Sinha's film tackles a rarely discussed topic. The director documents the global scientific race to develop a reversible contraceptive for men (*Friday 24th July, 8 pm, EM2, International Premiere*).

Woman on Fire

The multi-award-winning Marathi documentary by Girish R. Jambhalikar focuses on women in India who are fighting back against oppression and social barriers (*Saturday 25th July, 11 am, EM2, International Premiere*).

Even the Fire Knows

Dipanjali Khakhary's film portrays Tumpa, one of the few women in India who works as a cremation attendant (*Saturday 25th July, 11 am, EM2, German Premiere*).

Echoes on the Walls – The Art and Artists of India

Nilesh Arun Kunjir explores street art across the nation (*Saturday 25th July, 1 pm, EM2, World Premiere*).

You in This City, This City Inside You

Amartya Ray takes a poetic and introspective look at the lives of migrant workers in Mumbai (*Saturday 25th July, 11 am, EM2, German Premiere*).

Kunemechi – A Home Carved in Ancestry

Anagha Acharekar explores craftsmanship, family heritage and the significance of home (*Sunday 26th July, 11 am, Cinema*).

A Story of Rain (Goshta Pavsachi)

Acharekar's second film depicts the arrival of the monsoon in the coastal region of Konkan and follows rice farmers whose daily lives are shaped by hard labour in the fields, traditional songs and a deep respect for nature (*Sunday 26th July, 11 am, Cinema*).

The Music Shop – Symphony of the City

Bijoy Chowdhury's black-and-white documentary is a declaration of love for music and Kolkata. At its heart is a small music shop where traditional Indian instruments are made and repaired. The shop becomes a haven for musicians amidst the hectic noise of the big city (*Sunday 26th July, 5 pm, EM2, European Premiere*).

Ek Akhiri Sair – One Last Ride

Kamil Saif's film takes a melancholic look at the impending disappearance of Kolkata's legendary yellow Ambassador taxis. The migrant Nisar loses his livelihood due to new legal regulations – and with him, a piece of urban culture disappears (*Sunday 26th July, 5 pm, EM2, European Premiere*).

Never Say Goodbye – A Calcutta Jewish Journey

Jayashri Mukherjee explores the now almost vanished community of Baghdadi Jews in Kolkata. The documentary follows historian Jael Silliman, who, as a city guide, preserves Kolkata's Jewish heritage and keeps alive the memory of a once-significant community (*Sunday 26th July, 5 pm, EM2, International Premiere*).

Bride of Aravan

Lesley Branagan and Yatra Srinivasan follow the transgender protagonist Bhavadharini during the Koovagam festival in southern India. For a short time, trans women there assume a

divine status as part of a religious ritual – a stark contrast to the discrimination and exclusion that define their everyday lives (*Saturday 25th July, 11 am, EM2*).

In the running for the film awards

The nominated documentaries are ‘Waiting at the Edge of Gallows’ by Swapnil Ware, ‘Give it a Shot’ by Vaishali Sinha, ‘Even the Fire Knows’ by Dipanjali Khakhlary, ‘Echoes on the Walls’ by Nilesh Arun Kunjir, and ‘Of Forests and Footprints’ by Shreya Samvatsar. ‘The Music Shop – Symphony of the City’ by Bijoy Chowdhury, ‘Ek Akhiri Sair – One Last Ride’ by Kamil Saif, ‘Jilipibalar Bondhura – Friends of Jilipibala’ by Debalina Majumder.

Short Film Programme: A Mosaic of Contrasts

The IFFS short film programme presents an impressive range of contemporary Indian cinema – from intimate LGBTQ+ stories and socially critical dramas to poetic reflections on loss, identity and fashion. Many of the films focus on marginalised perspectives and link personal stories to wider social and political issues.

In the running for the film awards

The nominated short films are ‘Tumba’ by Parag Sawant, ‘Kathputliyaan – Unstrung’ by Hreeshabh Bhadrawal, ‘Alyad Palyad – From Here to Beyond’ by Unmesh Jadhav, ‘Jasmine That Blooms in Autumn’ by Chandradeep Das, ‘Velicham – The Luminous Path’ by Sisira S Naath, ‘Aam Gaachher Bashinda – Once Upon a Mango Tree’ by Sambhi Dattachaudhuri, ‘Where April Begins’ by Aheli Dutta and ‘Detective Meter Down’ by Devansh Agarwal.

Queer cinema from India

The latest authentic LGBTQIA+ short films and documentaries from across India will once again take centre stage at the Indian Film Festival. This year’s queer highlights impressively demonstrate how Indian filmmakers are breaking taboos and giving a voice to the oppressed. The award-winning, openly gay director Onir is regarded as one of the most important pioneers of queer cinema in India. As early as 2005, he set a milestone in the portrayal of homosexuality and HIV with ‘My Brother... Nikhil’. With his new short film ‘Tumhari Khushboo – Your Fragrance’ (*Short Film Block 2, Friday 24th July, EM2*), he ventures into a rare, highly sensitive cinematic intersection: the intersection of queerness and disability. Set against the bustling backdrop of Mumbai, the film follows Sunil, a visually impaired masseur, and Kamran, a sports instructor who enters his life as a client. A profound intimacy develops between the two men, one that manages entirely without visual stimuli. Their connection is defined purely through touch, scent and sound. Onir, who has also featured regularly in the Stuttgart festival’s programme in recent years, prioritises uncompromising authenticity. Whilst the well-known actor Barun Sobti plays the sports instructor, Sunil is portrayed by the actor and musician Shashi Bhushan, who is visually impaired in real life. The film challenges common prejudices and shows that desire, sexual self-determination and emotional vulnerability are universal.

The second film recommendation is ‘Jasmine – That Blooms in Autumn’ by Chandradeep Das (*Short Film Block 3, Friday 24th July, 6 pm, EM2*). Love in old age is rare in cinema anyway – lesbian love in the twilight years in conservative India borders on being an invisible topic. Director Chandradeep Das, who hails from a renowned Indian film dynasty, breaks this silence with a masterful, 15-minute work. In a visibly dilapidated care home in Kolkata (Calcutta), sparks fly between the two residents, Meera and Indira. Surrounded by society’s rigid moral walls and the ever-present patriarchy, they must keep their affection a secret. They secretly exchange letters and small gifts. Yet as their love blossoms, so too do the quiet fears of discovery and social ostracism. The film is a gentle, visually poetic tale of quiet rebellion and the enduring dignity of emotion. It proves that queer resistance is not a question of age and often lies in the smallest, everyday gestures.

The third recommendation is ‘Bride of Aravan’ by Lesley Branagan and Yatra Srinivassan (*Doc Block 5, Saturday 25th July, 11 am, EM2*). This 48-minute ethnographic documentary offers a fascinating insight into the intertwining of centuries-old religious tradition and modern trans identity in southern India. The camera follows the famous Koovagam Festival in the state of Tamil Nadu. Once a year, thousands of hijras (the traditional third gender in India) and gender-nonconforming people flock there to ritually appear as brides of the god Aravan and re-enact an ancient Indian myth.

At the heart of the film is the trans activist Bhavadharini. The film captures the stark contrast: whilst the women experience spiritual veneration and ecstatic freedom at the festival, harsh discrimination and social exclusion await them in everyday life outside the temple walls.

Australian anthropologist and filmmaker Lesley Branagan worked closely with the local trans community for many years. The script was developed in direct consultation with the women portrayed, lending the film a rare, non-voyeuristic depth.

In addition to purely queer subject matter, the festival focuses on other progressive, socio-political themes:

‘Saath Paar Zindagi – Life Beyond 60’ by the renowned documentary filmmaker Haider Khan screens on *Friday 24th July in the Documentary Block 1, 12 noon, Cinema*. This multi-award-winning documentary pays tribute to five remarkable women of advanced age. Among those profiled is the famous trans activist and folk dancer Manjamma Jogati, who was the first trans woman to be honoured with the prestigious Padma Shri award. She has dedicated her life to the ritual folk dance Jogathi Nritya from the state of Karnataka. A powerful work about courage and social change.

‘Jilipibalar Bondhura – Friends of Jilipibala’ by queer director Debalina Majumder will be screened in *Short Film Block 5 on Sunday 26th July at 1 pm at the Cinema*. Funded as a Berlinale Talents project, the film followed the micro-ecosystem surrounding a historic tamarind tree in Kolkata over a period of twelve years. Through the eyes of a child and the local wildlife, the film documents nature’s struggle for survival against urban destruction – a subtle parallel to the processes of social displacement in India’s major cities.

Pure culture: Why the original version matters

A distinctive hallmark of the Stuttgart Indian Film Festival is its deliberate rejection of Western viewing habits. The films are screened almost exclusively in their original versions (e.g. in Hindi, Malayalam or Bengali) with English subtitles. In an age of globalised, uniform streaming fare, the festival thus preserves the linguistic and cultural authenticity of the subcontinent. Anyone looking for cinema that goes beyond glittering Bollywood clichés to tackle burning political issues, move audiences deeply and break new ground in form should mark the July dates in red on their calendar.

Our partners include the Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg, the Lindenmuseum Stuttgart, the Forum der Kulturen/Festival der Kulturen, the Theater am Faden, Stuttgart Marketing, the State Agency for Political Education, Reisebüro Ahret, Durga Bari Stuttgart, Stuttgart Pride (CSD), Stuttgart City Centre Cinemas, VVS, Engagement Global (the 'Engagiert die Welt gestalten' funding programme), the German-Indian lifestyle and film magazine 'Ishq' and oh, boy.

The festival is funded by the City of Stuttgart and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts.

The organiser is the non-profit cultural association Filmbüro Baden-Württemberg.

The full programme is available at www.indisches-filmfestival.de