

CULTURE magazine

arts • travel • lifestyle • food • wine • community

Issue 118

Ancient Worlds
Relics of past civilisations

San Sebastian
Cinema and Glamour by the Seaside

The Road to Yunnan
An adventurer travels in search of good food

Wannabe Urban Farmers

The Indian Subcontinent through Chinese Eyes



San Sebastian Film Festival

Fantastic film and friendly locals at the San Sebastian Film Festival

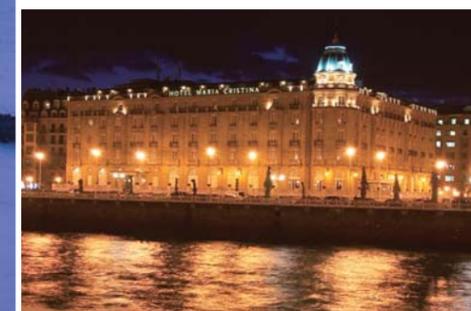
Text Tara Lee / Photos San Sebastian Tourism Board and San Sebastian Film Festival

The San Sebastian Film Festival hosts a week of cinema and glamour every year in the picturesque Donostia-San Sebastian, in the Basque Country of Spain. Locally known in Spanish as the Festival de San Sebastian or in Basque as the Donostia Zinemaldia, this important festival has hosted many international film premieres.

Located on the Bay of Biscay, "Sanse" as locals endearingly call it, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Spain. Although less than two hundred thousand inhabit the city, it hosts seventeen Michelin starred restaurants and was named as the European Capital of Culture 2016.

Founded in 1952, the annual film festival is one of the main contributors to San Sebastian's candidacy. The festival rivals those in Berlin, Toronto and Venice in its prominence and history. The winners of the festival selected by the panel of judges are bestowed the Golden Seashell, the symbol of the city inspired by its famous beach, La Concha, which is curved like a conch shell. One of the most well known urban beaches in Europe, La Concha stretches from the City Hall for over a kilometer. The tide fluctuations over the shallow substrate draw surfers as well as joggers from the Paseo Nuevo promenade that closely encircles the beach.

Despite its notoriety for the propensity for rain and overcast days, my first day in Sanse, to attend the San Sebastian Film Festival, gave me an impression of being in a tropical city. The parks were lined with palm trees, under which a street performer fashioned giant soap bubbles for the children. As I walked by, feigning indifference, a passerby on a nearby bench pointed at the bubbles and asked "¿Quieres probar?" – Would you like to try?



San Sebastian Film Festival

It's customary in Spain for locals to greet strangers. Their friendliness attracts the second highest number of tourists in Europe after France. I took up the stranger's offer. It took me three tries before I could make a bubble. The secret is to be gentle after dipping into the solution and let the wind blow the bubble out.

The walk from the bus station located at the far end of the city to the main venue for the festival in the old district took only half an hour, despite my digression to an ice-cream vendor en route. Helados have been a quintessential summertime snack in every Spanish city I have visited.

The festival's main venue, Kursaal Congress Centre and Auditorium, was designed by Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, whose motto for the construction was "two beached rocks" as a reference to the building's two large prismatic volumes that emerge from the platform.

I attended the first available screening, *Praia do Futuro*, a Brazilian-German drama directed by Karim Ainouz. The film begins with the lifeguard Donato and the first death on his patrol. The life altering drama connects Donato to a friend of the victim, Konrad. The tragedy sparks a search for identity and a sense of belonging in both men, Donato and Konrad, who, through the film, drift from the blazing Brazilian Beach to wintry Berlin.

It's customary in Spain for locals to greet strangers. Their friendliness attracts the second highest number of tourists in Europe after France



San Sebastian Film Festival



October-November 2014



By the time the film finished, dusk had fallen. The audience sauntered out to nearby café-bars and onto the famed seashell shaped La Concha

accept both genders. Generally the masculine article el precedes the word.

The feminine version, la mar, on the other hand, is considered to be a more respectful and poetic choice of word. In daily speech, la mar carries a connotation of closeness, used by sailors or those who work near the sea. Earnest Hemingway wrote in his *Old Man and the Sea*, la mar is "...what people call her when they love her".

The melancholy film concludes with the reunion of Donato with his younger brother, Ayrton.

By the time the film finished, dusk had fallen. The audience sauntered out to nearby café-bars and onto the famed seashell shaped La Concha.

As I walked on the expanse of fine white sand, I reflected on *Praia do Futuro's* closing scene, featuring Konrad, Donato and the younger Ayrton motorcycling on a highway next to a vast, muddy shore. The conflicting imagery of water as a medium of internal struggle followed by the offer of redemption in *Praia do Futuro* reminded me of the duality of the Spanish word for ocean, mar.

I dug my feet into the sand. The tide had come in, pushing the sunbathers closer to the bay. I heard a distant babble from the crowd walking towards the theatre where the red carpet event of the evening would commence.

Set in a picturesque town in northern Spain, the handsome beaches and charming residents added a touch of their own to the dazzling week of cinema, making my first day there more memorable than the glimpse I caught of a French actor on the red carpet.

A Spanish noun can be grouped in two categories, feminine or masculine, depending on its end syllable. As in any language, exceptions to the rule exist. 'Ambiguous nouns', such as mar,

I learned later that *Praia do Futuro* earned the second Sebastiane Latino award and was particularly praised for its captivating cinematography. I wholeheartedly agreed with the decision. ■