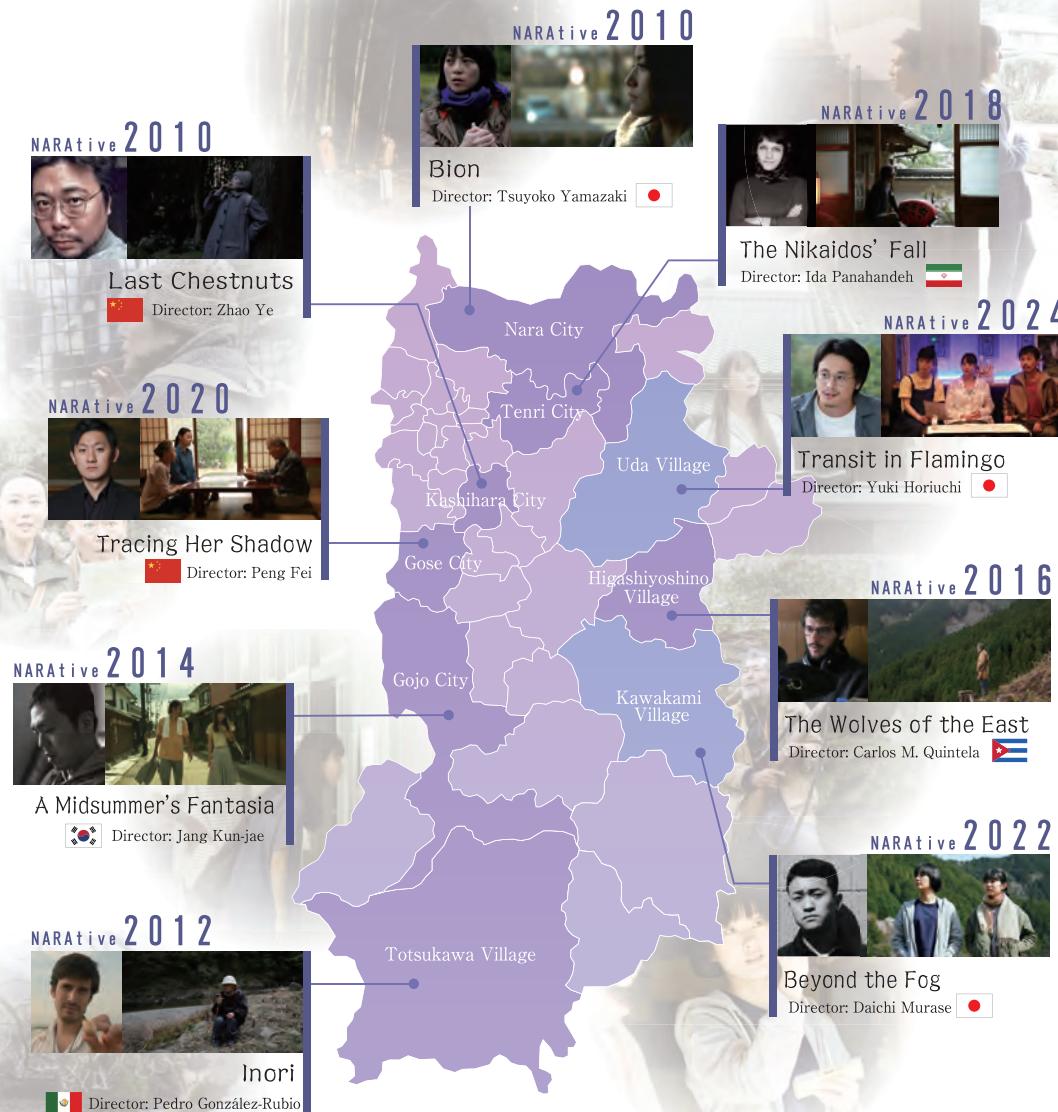


Film Production Projects Passed Down Over Time

Seeds Sown in Nara by Young Directors from Around the World

Since NARAtive's inception in 2010, over a decade has passed. What began as a small-scale initiative has, by 2025, expanded to include nine municipalities, and its reach continues to grow.

Films set in Kawakami Village in 2022 and Uda City in 2024 were both premiered at the Nara International Film Festival.



NARAtive

Film Production Project for a Regional Revitalization

Where Do We, as Japanese, Stand Today?

What does happiness, or true well-being, mean?

Japan faces challenges such as population decline, economic stagnation, and a growing sense of despair about the future, especially in rural areas. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find uplifting news. What lies at the root of these challenges? Since the rapid economic growth of past decades, Japan has become materially wealthier. Many people moved to cities in search of happiness. But what have we gained there, and how can we pass it on to the next generation?

As a filmmaker, I have learned that creating films is never easy, especially in Japan, and even less so in rural areas. However, by immersing myself in rural communities and involving countless people, I've discovered something extraordinary.

Those who participate in filmmaking begin to shine. Smiles gradually emerge, proof that their hearts are being fulfilled. Creating films in rural areas requires engaging the people who live there. It involves connecting filmmakers, actors, and locals—people who might never have met otherwise. Through these interactions, they come to understand one another and themselves. This creates a circle of connection. Perhaps happiness stems from the bonds we form with others.

If these connections are what Japan and its regions are currently lacking, then the solution is clear. I want to bring happiness to Japan and its regions. Every region has its own unique appeal, and there are always people ready to discover and share that appeal. When people and films come together, communities are enriched. A completed film becomes a cultural treasure for the region, something to be shared and passed down for generations.

This vision took root in my hometown of Nara. Through "NARATIVE", I have begun creating films in various parts of Nara, inspired by the radiant lives of the people who live there.

Naomi Kawase

Executive Director,
Nara International Film Festival

Nara x Narrative = NARATIVE

NARATIVE Planting Seeds for Regional Futures Through Film

Appointing film directors with international potential

Bringing out the best of the region



NARATIVE films are born from the inspiration directors draw from filming locations and the people living there.

Through the eyes of emerging filmmakers poised for global success, these films offer perspectives that evoke both nostalgia for a distant past and fresh discoveries we had never noticed before.

Residents Participating as Volunteers and Extras



Revitalizing Communities by Involving Locals

Because nearly every aspect of production—from conceptualization to filming—is deeply rooted in the local community, the presence of local volunteers is essential. While initial hesitation is common, many find themselves "involved before they even realize it." People who first observe from a distance often end up at the heart of the action by the time filming concludes, thriving within the circle they've joined.

Precious Moments Woven into Stories:



Films as Community Treasures

Once, a beautiful river flowed here. Once, people lived humble, fulfilling lives, working earnestly with strength and sincerity. These stories never fade, no matter how much time passes. Through film, they are revived, retold, and preserved as enduring treasures of the community.

The "Wind" and "Soil" Cycle NARATIVE Creates

A Catalyst for "Fudo" Formation

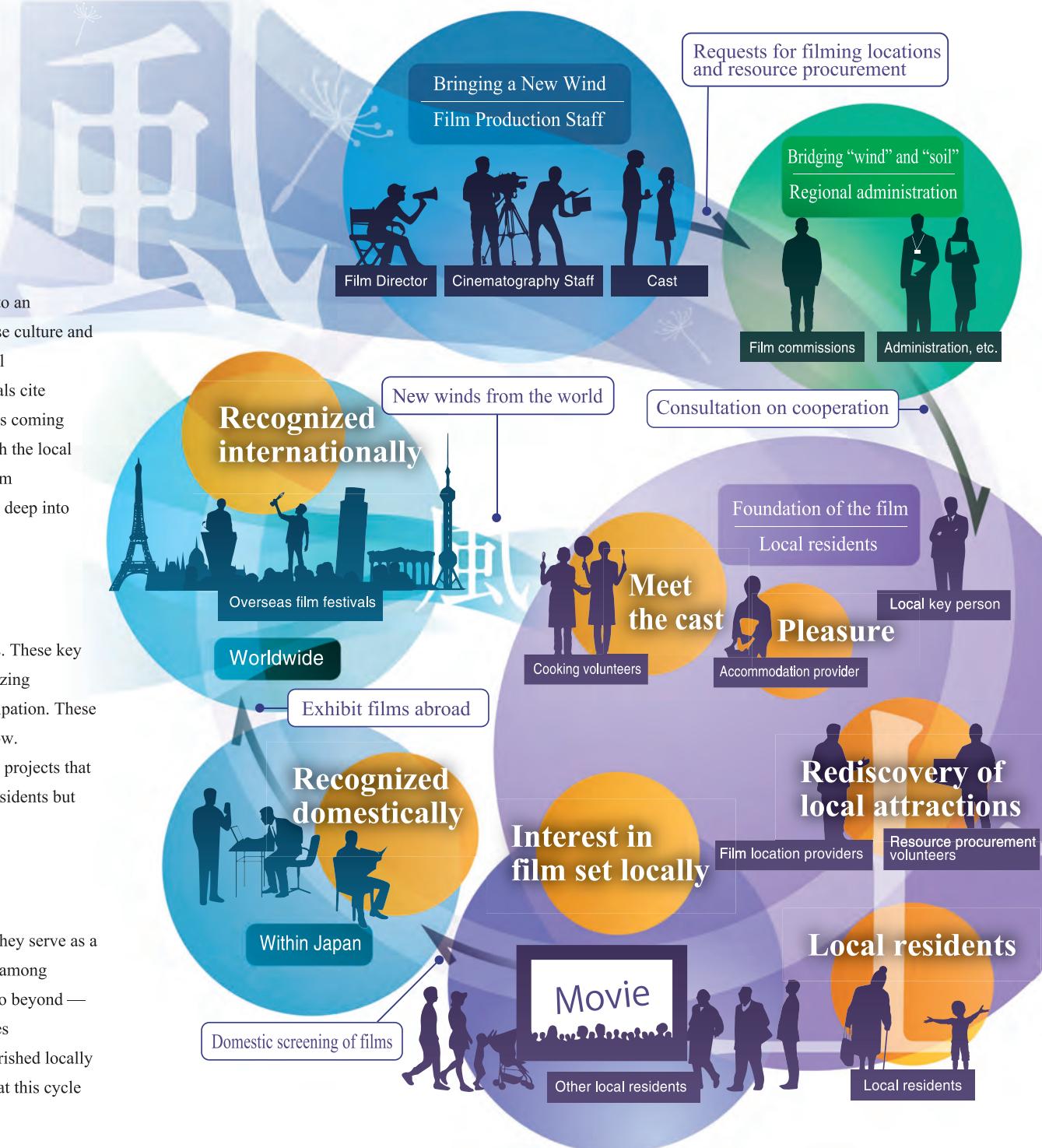
In Japanese, "fudo" refers not only to a land's climate and geographical features but also to an environment that shapes human culture and spirituality. Nara, as the birthplace of Japanese culture and surrounded by mountains, has long fostered a distinct spirituality in its people. Some local representatives see NARATIVE as a catalyst for shaping this "fudo". Some regional officials cite NARATIVE as one of the triggers for the formation of such a "climate". Filmmaking crews coming from outside the region act as the "wind," scattering the "seeds" of film. By engaging with the local "soil" — the residents — the seeds stir awareness, fostering new perspectives. Stories from participants often highlight these transformative experiences. It seems NARATIVE reaches deep into people's hearts, stimulating the creation of new "fudo".

"Key Persons" as Bridges

How communities respond to external "wind" depends on the presence of key individuals. These key persons take on diverse roles, from arranging filming locations and negotiations to organizing volunteers. Their efforts inspire others to step forward and help, creating ripples of participation. These interconnected circles gradually cultivate fertile ground where the "seeds" of film can grow. Participants often realize that the process of making a film is filled with countless smaller projects that enrich the community. Key persons not only serve as bridges between filmmakers and residents but also play a vital role in preparing the soil for growth.

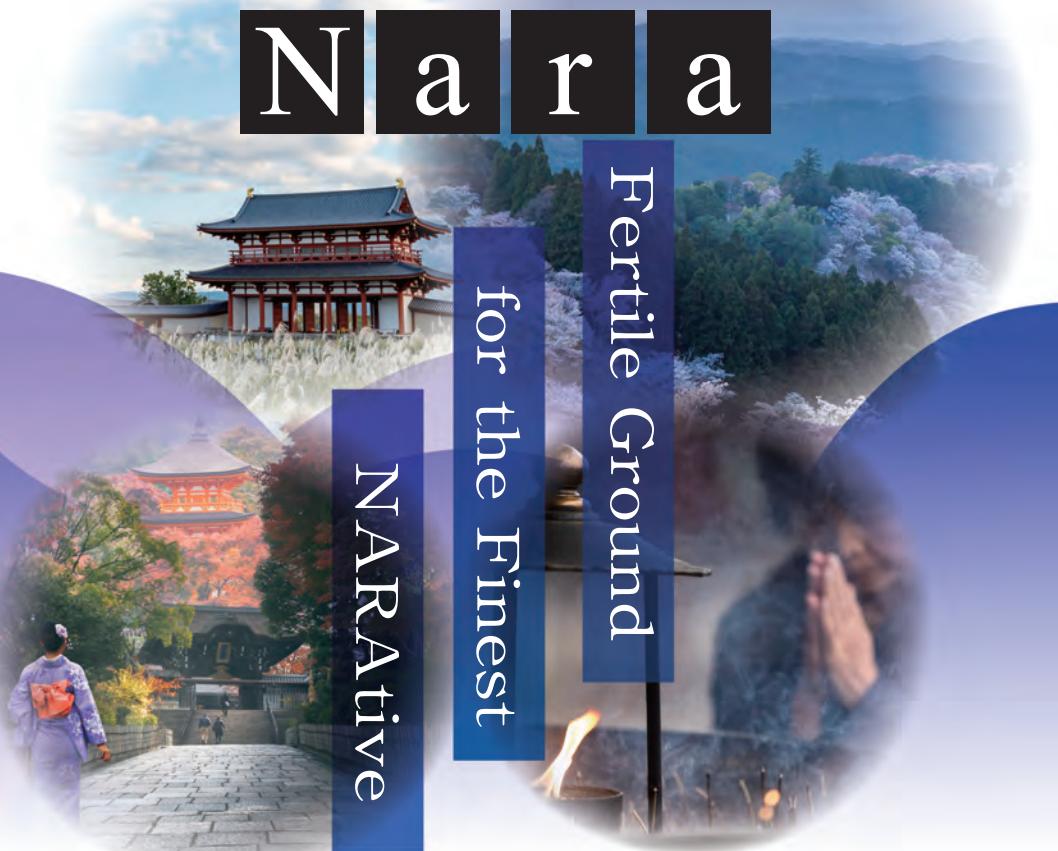
Nurturing the Seeds

Even after completion, NARATIVE films continue to be nurtured within the community. They serve as a springboard for local revitalization through events or inspire new networks and activities among residents. These "seeds" sprout in many forms, reaching not just within the region but also beyond — sometimes crossing oceans and finding audiences abroad. The NARATIVE project enriches communities, planting seeds in fertile soil that is carefully cultivated. These films are cherished locally and, through international exposure, welcome fresh winds from the world. The hope is that this cycle of global and local exchange will continue to flourish.



The Birthplace of Japanese History

As the heart of the Yamato Kingdom during the early Kofun period, Nara played a central role in Japan's formative years. It introduced Japan's first capital city system at Fujiwara-kyo, and saw the flourishing of Tenpyo culture in the Heijo-kyo capital. Nara has always been deeply intertwined with the dawn of Japanese civilization.



A Legacy of Cultural Heritage

As the setting of countless historical events, Nara boasts a wealth of cultural and historical assets, including World Heritage sites, Japan Heritage landmarks, and traditional events. Efforts to preserve and pass down these treasures to future generations are actively pursued.

Preserved Nature

Nara is home to abundant natural beauty, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site Kasugayama Primeval Forest. Many ancient woodlands remain untouched, preserved in their natural state. The southern Yoshino Mountain region features stunning valleys shaped by rivers such as the Yoshino and Totsukawa. Landmarks like the cascading Fudo Nanaju-no Taki Waterfall and Mitara Gorge create distinct and picturesque natural landscapes.

Fertile Ground for the Finest

Culturally Minded People

Nara's residents widely uphold a deep respect for traditional culture and customs, a love of nature, and a spirit of harmony or "wa". Their strong sense of pride in their homeland and high cultural awareness make them stewards of Nara's rich heritage.

2010 / 60 minutes / Distributor: Nara International Film Festival / Director & Screenwriter: Tsuyoko Yamazaki / Producer: Naomi Kawase / Cast: Akiko Monou, Tousa Komizu, Lily

Bian

A quiet tale of lives entwined by fate

Shiho, 28, lives with the trauma of being separated from her mother at a young age. After many years, she seeks a reunion but finds her mother just as unresponsive to her feelings as before. Shortly thereafter, news arrives that her mother has been in a car accident. Shiho, unwillingly thrust into the role of her mother's guarantor, is overwhelmed by this unexpected burden. Amidst the gloom, Shiho finds solace in a weekly cooking class—a haven for her heart. But then, an unforeseen message arrives, shaking her once again...

Tawara District: A Stage Once Again

The decision to set the first NARATIVE project in Nara's Tawara district came about three years after Naomi Kawase's "The Mourning Forest (Mogari-no Mori)", which was also filmed in this area and won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. Thanks to this prior experience, the residents of Tawara had a degree of familiarity with film production. Many willingly participated as extras or volunteered to support the project.

The Comfort of Human Connection

During filming, there were moments of harsh words and challenges. Yet, at the end of each day, everyone would gather to share meals. This simple act fostered a profound sense of unity. One member of the catering team reflected, "Through participating in film production, I discovered the comfort of connecting with others and a newfound richness in my heart."

The Rewards of "Pleasant Inconvenience"

For the hosting community, accommodating the production crew involved meeting various demands and handling unexpected changes. Despite their preparedness from past experiences, things rarely went according to plan. Yet, when all was said and done, the process left a refreshing sense of fulfillment. Residents felt that something meaningful had been left in their hearts. Volunteers often described it as a "pleasant inconvenience." The locations that provided comfort to the protagonist in the film continued to be places of connection even after filming, with film personnel revisiting them. This ongoing bond between the community and the filmmakers could be seen as one of the many fruits of this "pleasant inconvenience."

Yoshinaga Nakao,
Representative of the Tawara Film Commission
In charge of negotiating the filming in the region



Izumi Adachi,
Gallery Fabrieli in charge of cooking meals of the crew



"I believe that when people live with a sense of aspiration, culture is born. While the activities of the Tawara Film Commission are just one small piece of that, I feel we've added a touch of cultural richness to our lives and the lives of those in our community."

"I opened my home, which also appeared in the film, and prepared dinner for the staff. As we gathered around the table, sharing freshly made meals, I could see everyone's faces soften. It was then I realized that this, too, is part of the magic of filmmaking. It was a truly wonderful experience."

The film could only be realized thanks to the stunning natural beauty of the Tawara district, the warmth of its people, and the steadfast cooperation and support of everyone involved. I am deeply grateful for the kindness shown by those who constantly watched over us. Memories of filming remain vivid: the astonishment of tasting apples baked in a wood-burning stove at one location, the comforting warmth of delicious catered meals prepared for us on bitterly cold days, and the moments when my body and soul found solace. These experiences, coupled with encouragement during moments of hardship, became a source of strength. Such a journey was only possible because of the community-centered nature of this project. With NARATIVE, we were able to convey and express elements uniquely suited to this approach, capturing the raw, vibrant essence of life in every frame.

Director/Screenwriter:
Tsuyoko Yamazaki

Nationality: Japanese





The Last Glimpse of a Village's Beauty

In September 2011, a few months after filming concluded, Totukawa Village was struck by torrential rains from a typhoon. The storm caused landslides and destroyed bridges, isolating the Kannogawa district. While restoration efforts have since been made, the river area has permanently changed, now frequented by construction machinery. Inori became the final film to capture the pristine beauty of Totukawa Village before the disaster.

A Record of Traditions and Life

Located more than an hour's drive along mountain roads from neighboring Gojo City, Totukawa Village served as the setting for the third NARATIVE film. The movie beautifully depicted the simple, resilient lives of its people. During the disaster that cut off mountain roads with landslides, the villagers themselves worked to restore access. The film also documented traditions like Bon dances and shrine visits, recreating these customs alongside scenes from the local school once attended by children, including the sound of a now-unused school bell. It stands as a precious record of Totukawa Village's heritage.

Achievement at the Locarno Film Festival

The film, which captures the innate strength and humility of the Japanese people as they live in harmony with harsh natural surroundings, won the Best Emerging Director Award at the 65th Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland. This recognition brought hope to those affected by the disaster and celebrated the beauty of Totukawa Village and the lives of its people on a global stage.

Mr & Mrs. Nakaminami, Minshuku Yamamoto Provided accommodation for the director



Although his stay was short, Pedro truly loved Totukawa Village. The filming brought renewed energy to the village. We look forward to seeing Pedro's continued success.

Akinari Kamiya, Totukawa Village Office Location Coordinator



The film presented a perspective of the familiar scenery that was different from what we usually see—beautiful and fresh. I'm glad that these stunning visuals will be preserved for future generations.

Narumi Sawatari Extra and Poster Model



They spent hours filming what seemed like ordinary things to us. It made me realize how challenging filmmaking is. It was a rare and valuable experience.

A documentary about the resilience of village life

Set in the secluded mountain village of Kannogawa in Totukawa Village, Nara Prefecture, "Inori" portrays the lives of its few remaining inhabitants. As the younger generations leave for the cities, the once-bustling village becomes quiet, its sparse population carrying on a life closely tied to nature. Their way of life reflects the cyclical nature of "life" and prompts a quiet inquiry into the concept of "progress" as defined by human aspirations.

Director:
Pedro González-Rubio

Nationality: Mexico

"NARATIVE" has been one of the most unforgettable experiences of my directing career. I am filled with gratitude for the people of Kannogawa district and Totukawa Village. The local community came together in unity to welcome and support the filming. One moment I vividly recall was during a shoot at the small shrine in Ushino, Kannogawa. Rain delayed the filming, yet the villagers still came to participate. In the rain and mist, they waited patiently, smiling and holding offerings of sweets, without canceling the prepared dance ritual. The scene captured during this moment featured villagers walking through the rain and mist, ascending the stairs from the cemetery to the village's sole shrine, honoring their ancestors. The climactic moment, filled with song and dance, left a deep impression on everyone, as joy permeated the hearts of all involved.

2012

Totsukawa Village

Inori

2012 / 72 minutes / Production & Distribution: Nara International Film Festival / Director & Cinematographer & Editor: Pedro González-Rubio / Producer: Naomi Kawase / Co-Producer: Shunji Dodo / Cast: Sakae Fukui, Shigerumi Kotani, Tetsuo Yanase, Ryo Ikeo, Noriko Ikeo

2010 / 60 minutes / Distributor: Nara International Film Festival / Director & Screenwriter & Editor: Zhao Ye / Producer: Naomi Kawase / Cast: Kaori Momoi

2010

Kashihara City

NARATIVE is a very unique project. It brings directors from around the world to create films, offering perspectives that might otherwise remain unseen. How do these directors view Nara through their eyes? This is something I find incredibly fascinating. I had the great fortune of being one of the first participants in NARATIVE, and what struck me most is how deeply this project allows one to experience Nara. Without this opportunity, I would never have been able to immerse myself so fully in understanding the people and the way of life here. There are countless unforgettable moments in filmmaking, but one that stands out vividly is when local women painstakingly recreated fallen leaves for a chestnut tree by hand. The effort and dedication were nothing short of astounding and deeply moving! I sincerely hope NARATIVE continues for years to come.

Director and Screenwriter:
Zhao Ye

Nationality: China



Last Chestnuts



The love of a mother retracing her son's footsteps

One day, a mother who was supposed to be living in a hospital in Tokyo arrives in Kashihara City, Nara Prefecture. Her reason for leaving Tokyo was to search for her missing son. Guided by photographs left in his digital camera, she retraces his footsteps one by one. Along the way, she encounters the kindness of her son's friends, the grandeur of Nara's natural landscapes, and her son's deep affection for her. Set in Kashihara City, Nara, this is a heartfelt story of love between a mother and her son.

Highlighting Precious History

Kashihara City is known as the site of Fujiwara-kyo, Japan's first planned capital with a grid-like street system. The protagonist first arrives at the remains of Fujiwara-kyo, a location featured in the film's opening scene. By choosing Kashihara as the setting for the second NARATIVE film, attention was drawn to the city's valuable historical and cultural assets, which subsequently led to increased interest in the area as a filming location for TV and other movies.

A Film Made Possible by Residents of Kashihara City

Most of the cast consisted of local residents living in Kashihara City. Many of the filming locations were suggested by the residents themselves, who knew the area intimately. A city official noted that the film's completion would not have been possible without their invaluable support.

Leveraging Film for Regional Revitalization

To revitalize the local economy, which had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the city organized events centered around the film. Local restaurants hosted the events, offering menus inspired by the film, and weekend screenings were held to show past NARATIVE films in their entirety. Despite lasting over a month, the events were well-attended and highly praised. The city official remarked that using film as a tool is both "cost-effective and easy to organize." They plan to continue utilizing private-sector campaigns to arrange screening tours and explore even more opportunities.

Takahiro Yamazaki, Kashihara City Office Responsible for preparing the filming location



I struggled to find locations that matched the director's vision, but local residents suggested unexpected places and provided invaluable support. The director incorporated iconic locations like Fujiwara-kyo into the film.

A former child extra in the film



When I heard that The Last Chestnuts would be screened at a 2021 event, I decided to watch it. Seeing the film again more than 10 years later was deeply moving. I think I watched it back then, but now I can see it from a different perspective. It's amazing that the film preserves our hometown in such a beautiful way.



2014

Gojo City

"A Midsummer's Fantasia" is a film starring actual residents of Gojo. By hearing their experiences and stories, and capturing the spaces they have inhabited, we were able to infuse the film with irreplaceable vitality, creating the atmosphere at its core. This experience also sparked my interest in stepping away from the centralized perspectives of urban life to explore alternative ways of thinking and working. I still remember the devoted and heartfelt support of the local people, the meals thoughtfully prepared by volunteers, the encounters during walks, and the shops I visited.

2014 / 96 minutes / Distributor: "A Midsummer's Fantasia" Project 2014-2015 / Director: Jang Kun-jae / Producer: Naomi Kawase / Cast: Kim Sae-byuk, Ryo Iwase, Lim Hyung-koon, Suen Kan



A Midsummer's Fantasia

An endearing tale of love and the infinite possibilities of cinema

Taehoon, a film director from Korea, travels to Gojo City, Nara Prefecture, for a script-hunting trip. Accompanied by Mijeong, an assistant who speaks Japanese, and guided by Takeda from the city's tourism department, they explore the town for inspiration. The film unfolds as a modest romance intertwined with an endless ode to the magic of cinema.

Director and Screenwriter:
Jang Kun-jae

Nationality: South Korea



A strong network of local residents

A defining feature of NARATIVE films is the "involvement of local communities," and this was strongly supported by the residents' networks in Gojo. "The connections among the community were truly invaluable," shared the staff responsible for preparing meals, noting how quickly residents adjusted meal counts or handled equipment shortages. This flexibility stems from the pride of having their town as the stage for the film. The strengthened bonds among residents forged during the filmmaking process are likely to remain a vital pillar for future endeavors.

A Hit Film in South Korea

Actress Kim Sae-byuk, who starred in the movie, has become one of the most prominent figures in South Korea's independent film scene, contributing to the popularity of "A Midsummer's Fantasia." In Korea, the film is becoming a summer classic. Meanwhile, Gojo City has seen a rise in tourists from Korea, with many visiting the film's locations, brochures in hand, boosting the local economy and generating widespread attention.

Rediscovering local charm

The film prominently features persimmons, a specialty of Nishiyoshino Village in Gojo City. Persimmons appear in several key scenes, such as when the protagonist first meets a young persimmon farmer and receives persimmons as a gift. The farmer's experiences play a pivotal role when he advises the protagonist, who is struggling with life choices. The film has led some locals to rediscover the value of their regional products. "I hope the movie inspires locals to realize the charm of their own town," said one volunteer staff member.

Members of the Gojo District Women's Rehabilitation Support Association Meal Preparers



Yoshitsugu Kubo
Shop owner at a filming location



We were happy to see how the director treasured Gojo's unique character, from its history and traditions to its warm dialect. Participating in the filmmaking gave us a different kind of attachment to the film. This experience has become a personal treasure, and we hope to pass this valuable opportunity on to the next generation.

My grandchild, who was an elementary school student at the time, also appeared in the film, which brings back fond memories. For those involved, it must be a cherished experience as well. Preserving such moments on film is an invaluable way to record lives and stories.



The village's first film stage

Higashiyoshino Village served as the backdrop for its first-ever movie, focusing on the theme of the Japanese wolf's last refuge. The film not only showcased the village to Japan and the world but also achieved NARATIVE's goal of fostering community bonds. The local government and residents worked tirelessly to support the production by arranging extras and securing filming locations. The hunters' association trained actors in hunting techniques and provided hunting dogs, while the Sumire-kai group prepared lunches featuring local ingredients. Villagers even assisted in arranging accommodations for the crew. This collaborative effort laid the groundwork for future filmmaking in the village.

Revitalizing the village and rediscovering local pride

At a local screening, all 300 seats were filled. The event brought the community together, with families and acquaintances of the extras sharing stories about the actors and filming. Drone footage, uncommon at the time, was used to capture breathtaking aerial shots of the village. Many residents were struck by the beauty of their home from above, leading them to reevaluate its value. The desire to preserve this scenery for future generations began to take root among many villagers.

A cultural treasure: "The Wolves of the East"

In addition to being screened at the Nara International Film Festival, the movie was shown in theaters across Japan, including Shinjuku and Yurakucho in Tokyo. The existence of "The Wolves of the East" continues to provide opportunities for the village to share its story with both Japan and the world. "The significance of creating this film is immeasurable," remarked a village representative.

Minoru Mizumoto,
Mayor of
Higashiyoshino
Village Person
actively involved in
the film's bid



Yasuharu Tsuji
A member of the
Hunters' Association
which gave
instructions on
hunting and providing hunting dogs



Members of the
Sumire-kai Group
Meal preparation
team



The fact that the film was submitted to a film festival is invaluable for the village. The production of this movie is a tremendous asset for us.

Seeing our familiar scenery through the screen made it look completely different. It was breathtaking. The thank-you letter I received from an actor is a treasure I'll cherish for life.



Director and Screenwriter:
Carlos M. Quintela

Nationality: Cuba

Five years after the deeply cultural experience of filming this movie, the predominant feeling I have is gratitude. The friends I left behind in Yoshino, who believed in me, are the ones I wish to embrace again when I return. From the sweet yet bittersweet experience, "The Wolves of the East" was born—a Cuban film wrapped in a narrative spanning over a thousand years of history. Japan granted me the perspective of my ancestors. Underneath it all was a subconscious curiosity to see Cuba from afar. What would I perceive when observing another island nation from the other side of the world? The nature of Higashiyoshino, its people, the film crew, and the liberated wolves allowed me to dream. Sending a big hug from Madrid.

The Wolves of the East

A relentless drama rooted in the history of Higashiyoshino Village

For over 100 years, no one has seen a Japanese wolf in the forests of Higashiyoshino Village. Despite this, Akira, an elderly local hunter, firmly believes in their existence. As the head of the hunters' association, Akira disregards the opposition of others and uses the association's budget to search for the elusive wolf. Consumed by his obsession, he ventures deep into the forest...

2016

Higashiyoshino
Village



A film showcasing the charm of Gose

This NARATIVE film, set in Gose City, seamlessly combines the goals of promoting tourism and creating a creative cinematic work. Director Peng Fei found inspiration in many of his experiences during location scouting and incorporated them into the film. For instance, he noticed an anime playing on the TV in a local bathhouse and took interest in a sake-tasting event at a brewery. Scenes feature various aspects of Gose that residents take pride in, such as Goshō-machi, the Katsuragi area, the Kamotsuwa Shrine festival, and the region's specialty, Goshō persimmons. The film became a beautiful harmony of the director's vision and Gose City's unique appeal.

Beyond simply attracting film production

City officials looked to the experience of "The Nikaidos' Fall" in Tenri as inspiration for this project. They saw NARATIVE as more than a traditional film production—it was an opportunity to create something with a deeper purpose. To facilitate the process, they formed an executive committee and invited volunteers to participate. Their efforts paid off, with 400 extras braving the cold in January, wearing only traditional happi coats, and local residents responding immediately to mechanical issues during filming. This level of cooperation reflected the shared enthusiasm for the project.

Gose's townscape shared nationwide

This film, which highlights the warm connections between Japan and China, was released nationwide, introducing Gose's charming townscape to audiences across Japan. In recent years, there has been an increase in younger people relocating to the area, and there is hope that the film will help sustain this trend. For the children who witnessed the filming process up close, this experience will surely remain a valuable memory.

Minori Maeda,
Takamadera-
Hashimotoin Temple
who provided
filming locations



I was deeply impressed by the intensity of the actors preparing for their roles before filming. My grandchildren watched the filming, and I believe they absorbed something important from the experience.

Masayoshi
Takeda,
production volunteer



Being part of NARATIVE allowed me to showcase Gose's appeal to younger generations and help them integrate into the community. I believe these connections will continue to grow in the future.

Kazuyo Ueda,
Japanese language
class instructor



I feel that the film conveys the great generosity of Chinese individuals who cared for Japanese children. That heartfelt sentiment flows through the story.



Director and Screenwriter:
Peng Fei

Nationality: China



"Tracing Her Shadow" is an incredibly important film for me. Working with everyone involved in its creation taught me so much and allowed me to build deep friendships. During my time in Nara, I connected with local residents, the film crew, Japanese war orphans left behind in China, and people with roots in both Japan and China. They shared their stories with me and provided feedback on my script, which was invaluable. I have many beautiful memories of Gose City. I drew inspiration from its folk songs and cherished the encounters I had with the mayor, the proprietress of the tofu shop, and other wonderful individuals. I was also deeply supported and inspired by the residents who participated in sake-tasting events, festivals, and scenes from the film. I sincerely hope to have the opportunity to shoot in Nara again!



A journey of three individuals connected by bonds that transcend language

The story begins with an elderly Chinese woman visiting Xiaoze, a young woman living in Japan whom she considers her granddaughter. Her purpose is to search for Lihua, her adopted daughter and a Chinese returnee whom she raised as her own but has lost contact with in recent years. The elderly woman and Xiaoze are joined by Kazuo, a retired police officer they meet by chance, and together, the three embark on a journey to find Lihua.

2020
Gose City

2018 / 106 minutes / Produced by LDH JAPAN, Emperor Film Production Company Limited, Nara International Film Festival / Distributor: HIGH BROW CINEMA / Asia Distribution (Outside Japan): Emperor Motion Pictures / Director: Ida Panahandeh / Executive Producer: Naomi Kawase / Cast: Masaya Kato, Shizuka Ishibashi, Keita Machida, Yoji Tanaka, Kazuko Shirakawa, Hana Hizuki, Kayo Ise



A tale of legacy from a renowned family, portrayed by an international director

Tatsuya and his mother, Haru, are distressed over the potential end of their family lineage after the death of Tatsuya's only son. Tatsuya, left alone after his wife's departure, faces Haru's demands to marry someone he does not love. Meanwhile, Tatsuya secretly wishes for his daughter, Yuko, to take a husband and continue the Nikaido family name. The family's struggle over succession begins to create deep rifts in their relationships.

The power of the land moved the director

The director's request was to experience the authentic Tenri, not the tourist destinations found in guidebooks. With this in mind, the city's representatives invited the director and the production team to immerse themselves in local life. They attended community gatherings, shared meals with residents, and visited places like vegetable shops and barbershops, gaining insight into the everyday lives of the people. These experiences profoundly influenced the screenplay, which underwent a complete transformation from its original concept. The unique atmosphere of Tenri—the scent of its land, the character of its buildings, and the warmth of its people—deeply moved the director.

Filmmaking as a catalyst for community building

The goal of the project was not simply for outsiders to highlight the charm of the region through an external perspective. Instead, the collaborative process of making the film created a lasting legacy. This unity and teamwork became a source of "local pride," as explained by one of the city's representatives. Participating in the filmmaking process also transformed residents' perceptions of their town. Their newfound appreciation for their community serves as a strong foundation for future development initiatives.

A spark for local revitalization

In the Nagataki district, where the movie was filmed, the area's lush, natural beauty has gained renewed attention. Local volunteers are now actively engaged in conservation efforts. Additionally, the mansion used for filming has been repurposed as a shared residence for families with children, a development welcomed by the community.

Members who
provided meals for
the crew



Being involved in a film is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We hope those involved in the future approach it with excitement and anticipation for the finished product.

Chieko Nishida,
dance school
instructor who
provided lodging for
cast members



When I heard a film was being shot in Tenri, I wanted to be involved. Children and senior students from my school participated as extras, thrilled by the chance to feel as if they were actors.

Misuzu
Nakao,
lender of a car



I got to connect with so many people and realized how filmmaking is about building relationships. It's wonderful that the process doesn't end with just shooting the film. I'd love to see more films made in Tenri's beautiful, nature-rich surroundings."



Nearly four years have passed since my first visit to Japan, and the experience feels like a short, vivid, and unforgettable dream. I still vividly recall the smiles and bright eyes of the people of Tenri and Nara, the small cars, and the rows of old houses. These images will live in my heart for the rest of my life, just like "One Hundred Famous Views of Edo" by Hiroshige. I remember kites flying from an old house on the outskirts of Tenri, reminiscent of Hiroshige's famous kite painting. I incorporated the kite into the screenplay as a symbol of childhood, the past, joy, and love. This is just one small example of how your lives inspired me and how my imagination was stirred by your simple yet rich way of living.

Director and Screenwriter:
Ida Panahandeh

Nationality: Iran





The warm bonds formed through film production

During the filmmaking process, local residents formed meaningful connections with the cast and crew by offering meals, providing vacant houses as filming locations, and extending various forms of support. These interactions fostered a deep bond between the community and the filmmakers. The experience instilled a sense of pride in the residents, knowing that a film was being made in their town. Beyond the film itself, these relationships led to the formation of a warm and lasting community. Even after the film's completion, these connections remain strong, with residents continuing to enjoy new interactions sparked by the project.

An abandoned house becomes a community symbol

The vacant house used for filming used to stand along a once-bustling highway but had remained unused for years. However, after watching the film, many people expressed a desire to visit the location, bringing renewed attention to it as a "symbol of the community." The film also highlighted the issue of abandoned houses, sparking discussions on potential future solutions.

A story woven through connections

The people of Uda warmly and sometimes playfully watch over the three protagonists on their journey, offering a heartfelt sense of community. Many viewers were likely captivated by this unique regional bond that propels the story forward. Additionally, Uda's vast skies and lush green mountains play a vital supporting role, adding to the film's charm.



Tamio Tanaka,
the owner of Yatakiya
Inn Providing a filming
location (vacant house)



Junichi Fukuda
Providing meals for
the crew



Masahiro
Fujimoto,
Uda City Policy
Promotion Division
Bridging the
community and the filmmakers

"I offered my cooperation in the hope that it could help revitalize the town. I was also impressed by the production team's enthusiasm for embracing the charm of the area."

"Although I took on the task of cooking lightly at first, I wanted to serve dishes using local vegetables, so I put my heart into it."

"With my years of experience in local government, I was able to leverage my connections to bring people together. I was truly happy to help unite the community for this project."

2022 / 67 minutes / Produced by Nara International Film Festival / Supported by: Nara Prefecture, Kawakami Village, Nara City / Director: Daichi Murase / Executive Producers: Naomi Kawase / Script: Daichi Murase / Cast: Shuri Miyake, Masaki Miura, Shinzo Hotta, Asami Mizukawa

Beyond the Fog



Change comes to the family of Ihika, a 12-year-old girl born into a family running an inn for generations.

In a quiet village nestled among the mountains in the southeastern part of Nara Prefecture, there is a community that once bustled with mountain climbers and tourists visiting its shops and inns. This is where 12-year-old Ihika was born into a family running a traditional inn for generations. Though her parents have been separated for several years, her mother, Saki, continues to run the inn with her father-in-law, Shige. One day, Shige suddenly disappears which leads the inn's future in jeopardy. Amid this crisis, a time of transformation begins for Ihika's family.

For me, there is still so much I don't understand about films. However, one thing I feel is that movies transcend time. Everything that is born will eventually decay and be forgotten. This is inevitable and unchangeable. Yet, by documenting moments as photos or films, films can transcend time, however slightly, and carry these moments into the future. The abandoned houses and the "Asahikan" inn that has witnessed the transformation of the old village road leading into the dam—all these were things I saw in Kawakami Village, and I wanted to preserve them as a record, as a form of a film. Capturing the time that flows through Kawakami Village, its past, present, and future, has become an unforgettable experience that will shape my life. I am deeply grateful to NARAtive and the people of Kawakami Village for giving me this opportunity.

Director and Screenwriter:
Daichi Murase
Nationality: Japanese



A special day where three timelines intersect by chance

2024 / 98 minutes / Planned & Produced by Nara International Film Festival / Supported by: Nara Prefecture, Uda City / Director: Yuki Horiuchi / Executive Producers: Naomi Kawase, Jia Zhangke / Cast: Rio Yamashita, Gaku Hosokawa, Kirara Inori, Masaki Miura, Ryuzo Tanaka, Kotone Furukawa (voice)



Transit in Flamingo

Director:
Yuki Horiuchi

Nationality: Japanese

When we first arrived in Uda, we were filled with both excitement and uncertainty about the kind of story we could create. Over the course of three months, during which we frequently visited and stayed in Uda, we met many people, stayed in their homes, and listened to their stories about the land and their lives. It was an incredibly rich and valuable experience, allowing us to truly feel the warmth of the people and the open, welcoming nature of this place. As a result, we created a film about three individuals—someone like myself, an outsider, someone who has lived in Uda all their life, and someone who recently moved there—who meet by chance and embark on a journey together. Because the cast, crew, and local supporters spent time together, gradually understanding one another, the film naturally captures those moments of connection, like a celebratory gathering of people coming together.

2024
Uda City



Kaoru Harumasu, joined the filmmaking as an extra

Q: How did you feel when it was decided that a movie would be filmed in Kawakami Village?

A: I'd heard of films being shot in nearby towns and villages in Nara Pref., so I was thrilled that they finally chose Kawakami Village.

Q: Do you have any memorable episodes from the filming?

A: Everything was new to me, so I practiced my lines with my wife to avoid causing trouble for others.

Q: What advice would you give to people in other communities chosen as filming locations?

A: If your town is chosen as a filming location, I encourage you to get involved. The film crew is a group of professionals—actors, supporting cast, and crew—each thoroughly dedicated to their role. Watching them come together to create a single movie was incredibly inspiring. I learned a lot. It also gave me a chance to reflect on how daily life in our village might look to outsiders.

Q: Would you like to have this experience again?

A: If the opportunity arises, it would be wonderful.



Shinji Tsuji
Owner of "Asahikan" (the crew's accommodation) who prepared meals for the film crew

Q: How did you feel when it was decided that a movie would be filmed in Kawakami Village?

A: I was delighted that my hometown would be the setting for a movie.

Q: Do you have any memorable episodes from the filming?

A: Preparing meals for the crew was challenging, but hearing them say, "Thank you" or "It was delicious" made it all worthwhile.

Q: Did the involvement of local residents in the filmmaking process bring any changes to the community?

A: The opportunity to participate as extras brought villagers together who had never spoken before, creating new bonds that lasted even after filming ended. I think the movie helped residents rediscover the charms of their village and foster a sense of pride in their hometown. The festival scene, where many extras mingled, created an unprecedented sense of unity and excitement, moving me deeply.

Q: Who do you hope will watch this movie?

A: I'd love for people from Kawakami Village, as well as those unfamiliar with it, to see the film.

NARAtive arrived in Kawakami Village



The moment when the best stories leave a mark on people's hearts

NARATIVE films are produced in odd-numbered years and premiere at the Nara International Film Festival in even-numbered years. It's a moment when the seeds sown in local communities begin to sprout and bloom. For directors, cast members, production staff, residents who acted as bridges, and government officials, walking the red carpet is a long-awaited event. They carry with them the irreplaceable experiences gained over the past year—memories that remain unshaken regardless of the film's reception. Presenting the "flowers" that have bloomed on the prestigious stage of a film festival brings unparalleled fulfillment to those involved in the filmmaking process.



NARATIVE film director selected



NARATIVE film production



NARATIVE film released

The directors of NARATIVE films are selected from among the winners of various competition categories at the Nara International Film Festival. These directors immerse themselves in Nara's regions, crafting their scripts and undertaking location scouting, filming, and production over the course of a year. The finished films premiere at the next Nara International Film Festival. Currently, the NARATIVE Filming Locations Network Council, comprising seven cities and villages, continues its mission to revitalize local areas, foster cultural development, and enhance the overall branding of Nara Prefecture.



The Nara International Film Festival Ambassador
Masatoshi Nagase,
Actor

NARATIVE as a guiding light for a radiant future

The Nara International Film Festival, held in the historically rich land of Nara, shines a spotlight on the future of filmmakers, the local history of Nara, and Japan as a whole. Its mission is to connect these elements to the world while looking ahead to the future. This is no small feat. My involvement in the festival and NARATIVE projects has made me realize that these endeavors are supported by the warmth and cooperation of the local community. For us, filming locations are irreplaceable collaborators. Without the support of the people and places that host us, films could not come to life. I believe the establishment of the NARATIVE Filming Locations Network Council marks a milestone toward an even brighter future.



Special Advisor of the Nara International Film Festival
Masaya Kato,
Actor

The evolution of NARATIVE

The world has changed significantly in recent years. Now, more than ever, people need what I call "nourishment for the soul." Whether through music, painting, or theater, art serves as a necessary nourishment for the human spirit. The Nara International Film Festival shares these essential forms of art with the world, from the ancient city of Nara. In 2018, I appeared in "The Nikaido Fall," a NARATIVE production. Through this film, I rediscovered the importance of human connections, the warmth of people, and the charm of Tenri City. I also felt the joy of creating a movie together with a team. The establishment of the NARATIVE Filming Locations Network Council has transformed NARATIVE's activities from isolated points into a connected web. I believe this marks a significant step forward in its evolution, and I look forward to its future endeavors.

Film Production as a Catalyst for Regional Revitalization

Bringing attention and vitality to local communities

NARATIVE films are created through close collaboration between residents, production staff, and local governments. While this process requires significant community understanding and contributions from numerous volunteers, it also demands considerable effort to establish a welcoming framework. Despite these challenges, positive feedback has been received from the municipalities where filming took place. The benefits are significant: ongoing relationships with the cast after filming, increased attention as a potential filming location, and a rise in international tourism.

Creating films with community involvement has highlighted the lifestyles and cultures nurtured in these areas, fostering pride and affection among residents for their hometowns. Moreover, partnerships with international production teams and connections formed through the Nara International Film Festival have created new global ties, increased regional engagement, and spurred revitalization efforts.

A treasured asset for local communities

"Residents who participated reflected: "We never paid much attention to the natural surroundings and our daily lives. But through the fresh perspective of directors from outside the region, we discovered their true beauty." "By contributing as volunteer staff, we collaborated toward a shared goal, forming numerous new networks in the process." Many residents expressed a desire to participate again, likely due to the sense of fulfillment and emotional enrichment they gained after overcoming challenges. Realizing the value of their communities and themselves is the true essence of this project and what transforms it into an enduring asset for the region.

The Future of NARATIVE Riding a New and Mighty Wind



The Establishment of the NARATIVE Filming Locations Network Council

Uniting cities and towns as filming locations

The film production project "NARATIVE", spearheaded by the nonprofit Nara International Film Festival organization, began in 2010. In 2021, seven cities and towns that had served as filming locations came together to form the NARATIVE Filming Locations Network Council. This collaboration enables broader initiatives such as mutual exchange and the promotion of local attractions. It fosters residents' attachment to their regions while facilitating communication with visitors from other areas, thereby boosting regional engagement and revitalization. The activities have continued to this day, with the number of participating regions increasing, and nine works have been produced so far. The council hopes that Nara's rich nature and culture will continue to be passed on, and that eventually this initiative will spread throughout the whole prefecture, communicating "Nara, a special place" to the rest of the world.

