



Santa Monica Travel and Tourism

By Jackie Alvarez

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The global film industry has made Santa Monica the home of its largest annual conference for 26 years

American Film Market set to return to Santa Monica from November 2 - 9, 2016

ON NOVEMBER 2, SANTA MONICA welcomes attendees of the American Film Market (AFM), as it has every year for over a quarter century. AFM is the independent movie industry's largest market and conference. Each fall, more than 8,000 producers, distributors, sales agents, financiers and other film professionals from around the globe convene for eight days of screenings, deal-making, panels, networking and parties. The event brings an estimated \$20 million dollars in spending to the Santa Monica economy during the pre-holiday "shoulder season," when tourism is typically slower than the rest of the year.

Longtime Santa Monica resident Tim Kittleson served as executive director of AFM for 18 years and oversaw the market's relocation to the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel in 1991, after a decade in various Los Angeles and Beverly Hills locations.

"I was attending a convention of associations in Boston," says Kittleson. "On the trade-show floor there was a Santa Monica booth. I introduced myself and they told me, 'You know, they're building a new hotel called the Loews. Why don't you move your market there?'"

At the time, Kittleson says, the idea of locating a major convention in Santa Monica required a considerable leap of faith. But representatives from both Santa Monica Travel & Tourism (then known as the Santa Monica Convention & Visitors Bureau) and the Loews Hotel were persistent, according to Kittleson. "They kept on the full-court press." And because the hotel was still under construction, the developers were able to accommodate a number of the AFM's requirements, including extra phone lines and outlets in the rooms, which serve as temporary sales offices during the market.

"AFM was exactly the type of business the hotel and the city wanted to attract because it's extremely low impact," says Kittleson. "It's a group of affluent, well-behaved people who don't stay up late or trash the place. And most of them don't drive because AFM offers them shuttle transportation."

Initially created in 1981 as an alternative to the Cannes Film Market, which runs concurrently with the famed festival in the South of France each May, AFM was the

exclusive domain of buyers and sellers of distribution rights to English-language films.

Over the next 15 years, the market expanded gradually while remaining focused on international distribution. Then in 1997, registration was opened to other film professionals, including producers, directors, screenwriters, talent agents, festival directors and film commissioners. "The industry changed, and the AFM changed with it," says Kittleson. "That's made the market larger and more profitable." Today, more than \$1 billion in business is transacted and over 2,000 finished films and projects in various stages of development and production are presented during the weeklong event.

To accommodate AFM's expansion, the event has spread beyond the Loews to include the JW Marriott Santa Monica Le Merigot and the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, as well as several local multiplexes, which host hundreds of screenings.

"AFM's 8,000 participants, traveling from more than 80 countries, always look forward to their annual trip to Santa Monica," said Jonathan Wolf, current managing director of AFM. "Santa Monica has been our home by the beach for 26 years and every year it gets better. This year we're looking forward to adding the new theatres and transportation to further enhance the AFM experience."

Over the years other cities have courted the International Film & Television Alliance (IFTA), the trade association that organizes AFM, in hopes it might relocate the event — and the sizable tourism revenue it generates. The market is currently committed to stay in Santa Monica, and Santa Monica Travel & Tourism (SMTT) hopes it will remain far longer.

"This annual event provides an economic boost during a typically off-peak season," says SMTT CEO Misti Kerns. "With the support of the city and local businesses, we are dedicated to providing a high-quality experience for AFM attendees for many years to come."

To learn more about SMTT and how you can be a tourist in your own back yard, visit www.santamonica.com