

Richard Gere Named President of This Year's Taormina Film Festival

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American Actor Richard Gere will be the honorary president of the 62nd Taormina Film Fest this year. The American *Gigolo* and *Pretty Woman* star will preside over the opening ceremonies along with U.S. Ambassador to Italy John Philip.

You may say this year's Taormina Film Fest in Taormina, Sicily, is right up Richard Gere's ally. With the combination of film, acting, and social activism, Richard Gere is the perfect person to lead the event.

The opening night of the event will be dedicated to eradicating homelessness, which Gere has been a strong proponent for in recent years.

Italy's Ministry of Social Policies will be launching their #HomelessZero campaign at the event, which aims to raise awareness and fighting marginalization. The event will also host 300 homeless people from Sicily to fill the Ancient theatre of Taormina.

Gere is a famous supporter of human rights around the world, including his public support for human rights in Tibet. He has also supported HIV/AIDS awareness and Survival International, an organization dedicated to protecting the rights and lands of tribal peoples around the world.



Gere has had his share of problems at award shows in the past. In 1993, Gere was banned as an Academy Award presenter after he denounced the Chinese government while in his capacity of being a presenter. Gere has publically called for the Chinese government to recognize Tibet as an independent sovereign state.

Gere will join the impressive list of past stars of international cinema who have hosted the event, including Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren, Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando, Audrey Hepburn, and Tom Cruise. Other stars expected to join Gere at this year's event are American actress Susan Sarandon and Italian director Marco Bellocchio.

Gere is no stranger to the Taormina Film Fest. Last year Gere and his family attended the festival and taught a master class on cinema. Gere was also awarded the Taormina Arte Award.

The annual film festival will be presenting more than 100 productions this year, including documentaries, short films, and previews. About 21 countries will be represented at the event, a list that spans the globe from China to Finland.

After being one of the centers of international cinema between the 50's-70's, the Taormina Film Fest has endured the test of time to remain one of the main film festivals of Italy and one of the most respected internationally. With an annual audience of around 5,000 people, the festival's notoriety grew from its distribution of the prestigious David di Donatello award from 1957-1980. The award is presented each year by The Italian Academy of Cinema, similar to the Academy Awards, and is presented for superb cinematic production and performances in Italian and foreign films.

The film festival is held at the historic Ancient theatre of Taormina, which is believed to date back to the Roman era. With the blend of the architectural history of the amphitheater and the continuing progression of the films and performances recognized and shown at the festival, the 62nd Taormina Film Fest is sure to be another memorable event.

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