

# Fire Island (film)

Fire Island is a 2022 American romantic comedy film directed by Andrew Ahn, and written by and starring Joel Kim Booster. The film co-stars Bowen Yang, Conrad Ricamora, James Scully, and Margaret Cho. Inspired by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the story follows a group of gay friends who go on vacation to Fire Island, only for things to become complicated by classism and romance.

Distributed and produced by <u>Searchlight Pictures</u>, the film was released on <u>Hulu</u> on June 3, 2022. The film received generally positive reviews.

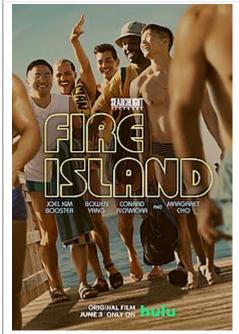
### **Plot**

Every year, Noah and his close friends Howie, Luke, Keegan, and Max embark on a weeklong vacation to <a href="Fire Island">Fire Island</a>, noted for its gay villages. The group takes the ferry from <a href="Sayville">Sayville</a>, New York on Long Island's <a href="South Shore">South Shore</a> to <a href="Fire Island Pines">Fire Island Pines</a>, and are reunited with their "house mother" Erin. Erin reveals that she has to sell her house, making this the last week they will spend together. The group meets Charlie, a doctor, and his wealthy friends, including Will, a lawyer, and Cooper. Howie and Charlie take interest in each other. Noah decides that his mission for the trip is for Howie to get laid. Charlie invites the group to his house, where the group gets drunk and causes a scene while Charlie and Howie get closer. Noah overhears Will criticizing the group's behavior.

The next day, Noah invites Charlie and his friends to dinner at Erin's. At the grocery store, Noah meets Dex and they flirt. Upon discovering that Will dislikes Dex, Noah invites Dex to dinner as well. Charlie, Cooper, and Will arrive for dinner, and Noah and Will discuss books, surprising Noah. Dex arrives, making Will uncomfortable. Dex claims that Will judges him for making content on OnlyFans.

Howie tells the group that he and Charlie kissed, making Noah more intent on making the two a match. The group attends the weekly underwear party in <u>Cherry Grove</u> and do an assortment of illicit drugs. Cooper implies to Noah that he wants Will for himself and accuses Noah's growing attraction to Will of being based on money.

#### Fire Island



Official release poster

Official release poster		
Directed by	Andrew Ahn	
Screenplay by	Joel Kim Booster	
Produced by	John Hodges Brooke Posch Tony	
	Hernandez	
Starring	Joel Kim Booster	
	Bowen Yang	
	Conrad Ricamora James Scully	
	Margaret Cho	
Cinematography	Felipe Vara de Rey	
Edited by	Brian A. Kates	
Music by	Jay Wadley	
Production company	Jax Media	

Noah meets up with Dex again. They head to the <u>dark room</u> to have sex, but Noah is distracted by Will and accidentally hits Dex in the nose. This causes a public confrontation between Cooper, Will, Dex, and Noah, during which Noah sees Charlie making out with someone that is not Howie. Noah gathers his intoxicated friends and Howie, who is distraught about Charlie. Noah walks back to the Pines with Will and they fight. Noah accuses Will of being uptight and judgmental, and Will tells Noah that Noah is pretentious even if he pretends not to be. At an afterparty in the

Distributed by	Searchlight Pictures <sup>[a]</sup>
Release date	June 3, 2022
Running time	105 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$10 million <sup>[1]</sup>

Pines, Howie and Noah fight. Howie wants to give up on searching for romance and tells Noah that their experiences are not the same just because they are both gay and Asian, citing issues of <u>body dysmorphia</u>.

Noah is woken up the next day by his friends delivering a letter from Will. Will apologizes for the impression he gave and explains that Dex hurt someone close to Will in the past. Charlie arrives to tell Howie that he has gotten back together with his ex-boyfriend, who has <u>Lyme disease</u>, and will be leaving the island sooner than expected.

Noah runs into Will at a <u>drag bar</u>. He shows Noah Dex's <u>Instagram</u> profile, on which he posts <u>thirst traps</u> with activism tags ("<u>Black Lives Matter</u>" and "<u>Stop Asian Hate</u>") to get attention. Noah and Will grow closer. Later, the group learn that Dex has posted a video of him and Luke having sex online without Luke's consent. Will helps Noah confront Dex by threatening legal action. Dex agrees to take down the video.

The next day, Howie tells Noah he is leaving because he cannot get over Charlie's rejection. Noah confronts Charlie, who acknowledges that he has feelings for Howie. Noah and his friends hijack a water taxi to catch up to Howie's. Charlie express his feelings to Howie, and they kiss. The group goes to watch the sunset. Noah and Will dance together and finally kiss, agreeing to give their relationship a try.

### **Cast**

- Joel Kim Booster as Noah, based on Elizabeth Bennet
- Bowen Yang as Howie, based on Jane Bennet and Charlotte Lucas
- Conrad Ricamora as Will, based on Fitzwilliam Darcy
- James Scully as Charlie, based on Charles Bingley
- Margaret Cho as Erin, based on Mr. Bennet
- Matt Rogers as Luke, based on Lydia Bennet
- Tomás Matos as Keegan, based on Kitty Bennet
- Torian Miller as Max, based on Mary Bennet
- Nick Adams as Cooper, based on both Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh
- Zane Phillips as Dex, based on George Wickham
- Michael Graceffa as Rhys, based on Anne de Bourgh
- Aidan Wharton as Braden
- Peter Smith as Moses, based on Mr Collins
- Bradley Gibson as Johnny

### **Production**

Streaming television network Quibi announced development of a comedy series titled *Trip* in September 2019, starring, created, and written by <u>Joel Kim Booster</u>. The project was given a series order on March 11, 2020, with <u>Jax Media</u> set to produce. Bowen Yang was cast in a lead role on April 15, 2020. Booster and Yang, who are both out gay Asian comedians and "life-changing" friends, were set to play fictionalized versions of themselves. Closet Monster filmmaker Stephen Dunn was attached to direct the series. Upon the shutdown of Quibi on December 1, 2020, the entire project was jeopardized.

<u>Searchlight Pictures</u> announced the purchase of Booster's script on June 30, 2021, to produce as a feature film re-titled *Fire Island*. <u>Spa Night</u> director <u>Andrew Ahn</u> replaced Dunn as director. The following month, <u>Margaret Cho</u> joined the cast of the film, as the only woman to be part of the film's cast. <u>Conrad Ricamora</u>, <u>James Scully</u>, <u>Matt Rogers</u>, Tomas Matos, Torian Miller, and <u>Nick Adams</u> were added to the film in August 2021, with <u>Zane Phillips</u>, Michael Graceffa, Aidan Wharton, Peter Smith, and Bradley Gibson joining the ensemble cast. <u>Principal photography</u> began August 12, 2021, and was scheduled to last through September 2021, with filming taking place in <u>Manhattan</u>, <u>Brooklyn</u>, and <u>Fire Island</u>, the locale of the film's title. <u>101</u> The final script incorporated humorous topics the filmmakers had long shared as friends.

### **Themes**

#### **Queer themes**

In *Fire Island*, <u>Joel Kim Booster</u> reimagines <u>Jane Austen</u>'s "<u>Pride and Prejudice</u>" through a queer lens, transporting the classic themes miscommunication and romance to the contemporary setting of <u>Fire Island</u>, <u>New York</u>. The adaptation introduces a group of gay men who frequent <u>Fire Island</u>, drawing parallels between <u>Joel Kim Booster</u> personal experiences and those depicted in Austen's novel. <u>[12]</u> Through its queer adaptation of a classic novel, *Fire Island* challenges conventional narratives of <u>romance</u> and <u>relationships</u>. Booster subverts traditional <u>gender roles</u> and <u>heteronormative</u> expectations, offering a fresh perspective on love, desire, and societal norms. <u>[13]</u> The film invites viewers to reconsider preconceived notions of romance and embrace diverse expressions of love and desire that are expressed through the movie and often overlooked in Austen's original writing. "<u>Fire Island</u>" serves as both a tribute to <u>Jane Austen</u>'s themes and a celebration of <u>queer identity</u> and community. <u>[14]</u>

#### **Class relations**

In the film, the characters navigate the intricacies of <u>social class</u> within the <u>queer community</u>, even in a space like <u>Fire Island</u>, where traditional <u>heterosexual</u> norms are absent. <u>Joel Kim Booster</u>, the <u>screenwriter</u>, draws parallels between Austen's exploration of class struggles and the dynamics observed within the queer community. He emphasizes how, in the absence of straight oppression, queer individuals can inadvertently recreate artificial <u>class systems</u> and <u>hierarchies</u>. <u>[15]</u> Booster highlights the magnification of these divisions in a space like <u>Fire Island</u>, where only gay people congregate.

Similar to Austen's novel, the forging of relationships across perceived class lines is also impacted by these biases, as Howie finds himself enamoured with Charlie, a charming doctor who is part of a group of affluent and judgmental individuals. Among Charlie's friends is Will, the Mr. Darcy to Noah's Lizzie for adaptation. As these social circles intertwine, tensions escalate with the characters being made to feel unwelcome in Charlie's upper-class circle, with Noah and Will exchanging both flirtations and sharp remarks.

The film portrays the ways in which queer individuals assess one another, drawing from their own experiences of discrimination and marginalization to perpetuate a hierarchical class system seen in a straight community as way to elevate their own social status within the community. [18]

#### **Race relations**

In addition to class dynamics,  $\underline{\mathit{Fire Island}}$  tackles issues of race within the queer community, particularly highlighting the experiences of  $\underline{\mathit{Asian American}}$  characters. The film features a predominantly  $\underline{\mathsf{POC}}$  cast, reflecting the diverse realities of queer individuals. Characters like  $\underline{\mathit{Bowen Yang's}}$  Howie represent the intersection of being queer and  $\underline{\mathit{Asian-American}}$ , adding layers to the narrative and offering representation to underrepresented communities within the LGBTQ+ umbrella. [19]

#### Fire Island as a setting

"Fire Island" serves as a poignant exploration of <u>queer spaces</u>, particularly focusing on the titular island as a haven for the LGBTQ+ community. The film celebrates Fire Island's significance as a historic queer hotspot, where individuals could socialize without fear of judgment or <u>persecution</u>. Throughout the narrative, there is a deliberate absence of straight characters, allowing <u>queer culture</u> to be glorified and celebrated authentically. This specificity highlights <u>Fire Island</u> as a place where queer individuals can exist free from the influence of <u>heteronormativity</u>, exploring the nuances of LGBTQ+ life without the need to cater to cis-het audiences. [21]

By centering on found family and friendship dynamics within the community, "Fire Island" offers a nuanced portrayal of the joys and complexities of LGBTQ+ life. The movie also changes the expectations of the typical retelling of Pride and Prejudice by concentrating more on the friendship and family elements present in the original writing, moving it away from a more traditional rom-com. By focusing on the relationship between Lizzie (Noah) and Jane (Howie) as well as their attachment to the family house they are losing, it sets the priorities of the movie to the core of the queer experience. The movie emphasizes the necessity of portraying how joyful and raunchy queer experiences while also acknowledging the potential for the community to experience internal conflicts and divisions.

## Release

The film was released June 3, 2022, on <u>Hulu</u> in the United States, <u>Star+</u> in <u>Latin America</u>, and later released on June 17 Disney+ via Star in other international territories. [9][24]

### Reception

### **Audience viewership**

According to <u>Whip Media</u>'s viewership tracking app <u>TV Time</u>, *Fire Island* was the eighth most anticipated film during the month of June  $2022.^{[25]}$  According to the streaming aggregator Reelgood, *Fire Island* was the sixth most streamed movie across all platforms during the week of June 11,  $2022.^{[26]}$ 

# **Critical reception**

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 94% of 112 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.4/10. The website's consensus reads: "Brought to life by a tremendously talented cast, the breezily entertaining *Fire Island* proves there are still fresh ways to update Austen." On <u>Metacritic</u>, the film has a weighted average score of 72 out of 100 based on reviews from 32 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews". [28]

Alex Abad-Santos of <u>Vox</u> applauded *Fire Island* for being a high-profile comedy movie that dares to focus on <u>gay men</u>'s sex lives without providing debauchery, and found the screenplay ambitious for its approach on social expectations, stereotypes, and racism. He also praised the film's take on friendship between <u>LGBT people</u>, while complimenting the chemistry between Joel Kim Booster and Bowen Yang's characters. David Fear of <u>Rolling Stone</u> found *Fire Island* to be a love letter to the LGBT community and <u>its culture</u>, writing, "This romantic comedy has its share of those archetypes. It also has gay lead characters, gay love interests, gay heroes, gay villains, and gay people of color galore. That doesn't excuse some of the clunkier, more brochure-friendly scenarios that Fire Island throws at them. But it does give you the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing everyone to this picture-perfect spot and inviting them to the party in the Pines, had been the means of uniting them."

Siddhant Adlakha of <u>IGN</u> rated the movie 9/10 and wrote: "Indie director Andrew Ahn creates a mainstream <u>queer</u> classic with the romcom *Fire Island*, his inventive modern adaptation of <u>Pride and Prejudice</u>. Following a group of gay friends on a wild vacation, it features some of the funniest and most tension-filled scenes in any movie this year. As complete as any piece of entertainment can be." Jude Dry of <u>IndieWire</u> gave the film an "A-" rating. Dry found Booster's screenplay amusing and stated that Andrew Ahn's direction "brings a cinematic touch that elevates the comedy."

Odie Henderson of <u>RogerEbert.com</u> rated the movie three out of four stars and called it an entertaining and heartfelt romantic comedy film. Henderson complimented Booster's screenplay for its humor and its approach on racial issues, and praised Ahn's approach to plot lines and characters conflicts. Henderson also singled out cinematographer Felipe Vara de Rey, saying he manages to provide a nostalgic feeling about the island of the same name. Sense Media rated the film three out of

five stars and complimented the movie for its depiction of positive messages and role models, as well as its diverse characters of different origins and sexualities. Green stated *Fire Island* manages to approach issues raised by heteronormativity and social expectations. [34]

#### Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
Artios Awards	March 7, 2024	Outstanding Achievement in Casting – Film, Non- Theatrical Release	Jessica Munks, Andrew Fem	Won	[35]
Dorian Awards	June 26, 2023	Best TV Movie or Miniseries	Fire Island	Won	[36]
GLAAD Media Awards	May 13, 2023	Outstanding Film – Streaming or TV	Fire Island	Won	[37] [38]
Gotham Awards	November 28, 2022	Ensemble Tribute	Nick Adams, Joel Kim Booster, Margaret Cho, Tomás Matos, Torian Miller, Zane Phillips, Conrad Ricamora, Matt Rogers, James Scully, and Bowen Yang	Won	[39]
Hollywood Critics Association TV Awards	January 8, 2024	Best Streaming Movie	Fire Island	Nominated	[40]
Independent Spirit Awards	March 4, 2023	Best First Screenplay	Joel Kim Booster	Nominated	[41]
Mill Valley Film Festival	October 15, 2022	10 Screenwriters to Watch	Joel Kim Booster	Won	[42]
Primetime Creative Arts Emmy Awards  January 6- 7, 2024	Outstanding Television Movie	Fire Island	Nominated	[43]	
	Outstanding Writing for a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie	Joel Kim Booster	Nominated		
Producers Guild of America Awards	February 25, 2023	Outstanding Producer of Streamed or Televised Motion Pictures	John Hodges and Brooke Posch	Nominated	[44] [45]

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a. Fire Island was originally to be distributed by <u>Quibi</u>. However, due the shutdown of <u>Quibi</u> on December 1, 2020, the entire project was jeopardized. In 2021, <u>Walt Disney Studios Motion</u> Pictures bought the distribution rights of the movie under Searchlight Pictures.

### **External links**

• Fire Island (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15218000/) at IMDb

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