

Desert Island Films

Whilst self-isolating, an Edinburgh U3A Film Appreciation Group asked each member for the eight films they would choose to have if stranded on a desert island...

There were simple “Rules”:

1. mini-series (i.e. the follow-ups and sequels) do not count – *Shrek* and *Shrek 2* would count as two choices
2. made-for-TV films or television are out. These has to be a proper, cinema-shown film
3. include one sentence reminding people of the basic plot or premise, and an additional sentence about why it has been included

Below are the films they chose. If two people selected a film, both descriptions are given.

Title	Year	Summary	Evaluation
<i>Airplane</i>	1980	A spoof of the airport disaster movies	Saw it as a student with friend who had great sense of humour; so silly, great fun
<i>All About My Mother</i>	1999	Young Esteban wants to become a writer and also to discover the identity of his second mother, a trans woman, carefully concealed by his mother Manuela.	Almodovar understands and seems to like and champion the most disrespected in society – women those who are different with iconic style and grippingly
<i>Apocalypse Now</i>	1979	Starring Martin Sheen and Marlon Brando, a nightmare journey through a jungle during war time with the goal of killing one of your own side	I was working in the USA, and heard all about this film in the summer it was being released, but nothing could live up to me going to the premier run in Hollywood and seeing the massive complexity and structure of this masterpiece
<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	1944	Newlywed man turns up to see family when he discovers a dead body and his eccentric aunts are stranger than he thought.	I guess I appreciate eccentricity and the crazy plot
<i>As Good as it Gets</i>	1997	Romantic comedy about a misanthropic and obsessive-compulsive novelist and a single mother who meet in the diner in New York where she works as a waitress.	Oscar-winning performances by Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt with great dialogue and a real sense of place.
<i>Assault on Precinct 13</i>	1976	Written, directed, scored and edited by John Carpenter A group of individuals trapped in a police station are attacked by a horde of street gang members	It might be the most exciting, edge of the seat, film I've ever seen.
<i>Beaches</i>	1988	The story of two friends, struggling actress Cee Cee Bloom and the conventional Bertie White, following them through their life as young girls until their mid-to-late 30s	It reflects the true meaning of friendship and it has the capacity to make me cry
<i>Being There</i>	1979	A simpleminded, sheltered gardener becomes an unlikely trusted advisor to a powerful businessman and an insider in Washington politics.	Wonderful acting but also a complete satire on our 'civilised' society
<i>Big Fish</i>	2003	Inventive story, about a father that on his deathbed seems to re-invent his entire life, much to the frustration of his son	A wonderful fantasy, truly inventive throughout, with superb acting; criminally under-rated!
<i>Birdman</i>	2014	A film about a film star converting his career to the stage whilst also divorcing, having problems with his daughter, going bankrupt and going mad	I was not aware of the most famous part of this film (the “single shot”) when watching it, but saw only the great story and apparently effortless performances from Michael Keaton and Edward Norton

Title	Year	Summary	Evaluation
<i>Bridge of Spies</i>	2015	Based on a true story and set during the Cold War, an American lawyer is asked to defend an arrested Soviet spy in court and is then recruited by the CIA to negotiate the exchange of the spy for a US Air Force pilot held captive by the Soviets.	Great drama that captures the look and feel of the period really well, directed by Stephen Spielberg, co-written by the Coen brothers and with an Oscar-winning performance by the superb Mark Rylance (and a surprisingly good performance by Tom Hanks).
<i>Brief Encounter</i>	1945	Two strangers meet up in a railway station café, become emotionally involved but return to their respective lives before too much disruption occurs	Quite a sensitive film; I love the emotion portrayed
<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i>	1969	Paul Newman and Robert Redford in a stylish, anachronistic western romp about two outlaws and their long pursuit by law authorities	I learnt half of my humour from this film, and everything I would want to know about writing film scores is in here as well
<i>Casablanca</i>	1942	An American expatriate struggles to decide whether or not he should help his former lover and her fugitive husband escapes French Morocco	Ingrid Bergman is my favourite actress and it's a great love story
		During WW2 a nightclub owner in Casablanca agrees to help his former lover and her husband	First saw in a compound in Saudi; a mixture of love and war
<i>Doctor Zhivago</i>	1965	The life of a Russian physician and poet who, although married to another, falls in love with a political activist's wife and experiences hardship during WWI	Epic sweeping adventure from the novel by Boris Pasternak
<i>Downton Abbey</i>	2019	A historical drama film set in 1927 depicting a visit by the king and queen to the Crawley family's country house in the Yorkshire countryside	I love the TV series and couldn't believe my luck being back in the company of all the same actors in a period soap which felt just like relaxing in a lovely long warm bath
<i>Eraserhead</i>	1977	David Lynch's first film is an hallucinatory drama, examining male paranoia – a surreal nightmare	I loved its weirdness; may not have aged well
<i>Fargo</i>	1996	Set in Minnesota, it is a crime story with an engrossing, unpredictable plot that combines black humour and violence and an eclectic cast of characters.	Coen Brothers classic with an Oscar-winning performance by Frances McDormand.
		Car salesman with money problems hires two thugs to kidnap his wife with the intention that his father in law will pay the ransom money. It goes horribly wrong, Frances McDormand (again), plays Marge chief of police; very pregnant , but determined to get the bad guys.	Marge is fantastic and the story line chilling; love it!
<i>Funny Girl</i>	1968	Vibrant and beautiful young Fanny Brice starts out as a bit player on the New York City vaudeville stage, but works her way up to stardom on Broadway	I love this film; it is funny and witty, and with Streisand singing to the music makes it just great
<i>Goodfellas</i>	1990	Young Henry Hill, with his friends Jimmy and Tommy, begins the climb from being a petty criminal to a gangster on the mean streets of New York	Classic Scorsese mobster film, engaging from the very first scene
<i>Hidden (aka Caché)</i>	2005	A married couple is terrorized by a series of surveillance videotapes left on their front porch	Absolutely fascinating plot which can never be guessed, and creepy-threatening atmosphere built very cleverly; wonderful
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	1943	A servant in the house of Wuthering Heights tells a traveller the tale of lovers Cathy (Merle Oberon) and Heathcliff (Sir Lawrence Olivier).	Enthralled by it one Christmas Eve, as a child, staying at relations

Title	Year	Summary	Evaluation
<i>Jungle Book</i>	1967	A child grows up in the jungle looked after by animals	One of the first films I saw at the cinema with my parents - can't watch it without singing and feeling happy
<i>Life of Brian</i>	1979	Ordinary man mistaken for as Messiah is pursued by crowd who refuse to believe him and want a leader	Iconic and very funny about Christianity and the Labour Movement which makes me chuckle at the same punchlines every time
<i>Love Actually</i>	2003	The ups and downs of relationships in the week leading up to Christmas	Hugh Grant, Colin Firth, Alan Rickmansworth, Bill Nighy and Emma Thompson all in one film – what's not to like?
<i>Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</i>	1955	War correspondent (William Holden) falls in love with widowed Dr Han Suyin (Jennifer Jones) in Hong Kong and China during Chinese civil war, encountering prejudice from her relatives and society at that time.	Sad and romantic
		Romance set in Hong Kong, with the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War and racism as main themes	
<i>Madam X</i>	1966	An ill-fated woman is blackmailed by her mother-in-law into leaving her politician husband; 20 years later she finds herself on trial for murder	Lana Turner plays one of the best roles of her career in this stunning and emotional adaptation of Alexandre Bisson's classic play
<i>Magic</i>	1978	A psychological thriller about a ventriloquist who splits his identity with his dummy	The first time I came across Anthony Hopkins and the first time I came across such a clever, gripping thriller
<i>Moulin Rouge</i>	2001	English writer travels to Paris to join Bohemian revolution and falls in love with courtesan	Mixture of musical and romance; I like Ewan McGregor and Nicole Kidman
<i>Oh! What a Lovely War</i>	1969	The translation of a musical stage play, with an absolute Who's Who of British actors, about the causes of the First World War, and its effect on the people	Oh, oh, oh what a risk they took, and yet produced a truly great British film, with a heart-rending final shot
<i>Once Upon a Time in the West</i>	1968	An outrageous mystery during the birth of capitalism in the USA, presented with great actors (Henry Fonda, Jason Robards and Claudia Cardinale) and an even better score from Ennio Morricone	I just do not get tired of this, even knowing the plot and dialogue, due to it being a self-contained advanced lecture in How to Make a Film
<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>	1975	A prisoner fakes insanity and is moved to ward for the mentally unstable.	Watched at pictures when training to be a psychiatric nurse, so was extremely meaningful, poignant and relevant.
<i>Paddington</i>	2017	Live-action animated comedy film based on the Paddington Bear character created by Michael Bond, who is now settled in London, and his adventures as he does a series of odd jobs to earn money to buy a present for his aunt's 100th birthday.	An entertaining, heart-warming film with a cast of great British actors that is a showcase of British eccentricity at its best – what's not to like?
<i>Priscilla Queen of the Desert</i>	1994	Two Drag Queens and a Transgender are booked to present a drag show in Alice Springs, Australia's outback. Interesting journey in 'Priscilla', their tour bus!	It never fails to cheer me; a few serious episodes.
<i>Psycho</i>	1960	A woman who steals money is murdered in a hotel shower by a man who is obsessed by his dead mother	The first really scary film I saw in London and it is a masterpiece in dramatic tension!
<i>Raging Bull</i>	1981	Adapted from Jake LaMotta's autobiography, a middleweight boxer ascends through the ranks to achieve his first shot at a boxing title	A film about the human condition by Scorsese and with arguably Robert de Nero's finest performance

Title	Year	Summary	Evaluation
<i>Random Harvest</i>	1942	Amnesiac WWI veteran flees an asylum, meets and marries the beautiful Paula then has an accident and regains his memory	Uplifting story and a favourite film
<i>Rocketman</i>	2019	Young Reginald Dwight changes his name to Elton John and collaborates with singer-songwriter Bernie Taupin to become one of the most iconic figures in pop history.	Loved the music and set-piece dance routines, which I thought were a cross between Busby Berkeley and Ken Russell
<i>Singing in the Rain</i>	1952	Fantastic musical, Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds based on Hollywood film history, moving from silent to talking pictures	Superb dance routines, music and comedy Wonderful
<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	1959	Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis play two struggling musicians who witness the St Valentines Day Massacre, and join an all-girls band (with Marilyn Monroe) to avoid being caught by the gangsters.	Great film, very funny; never fails to cheer me up
<i>Sound of Music</i>	1965	A musical based on the moving true story of the Von Trapp family singers and the young nun who came into their lives, set in Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938	I love everything about this film - the Rodgers and Hammerstein music, performances of all the actors including the children, beautiful scenery, the singing, the dancing – and I have special memories of being taken on more than one occasion as a child to see it in a cinema in Newcastle which was able to show it in the spectacular wide screen format in which it was filmed (unlike the cropped version that is shown on TV)
<i>Sunset Boulevard</i>	1950	Interesting device: story related by struggling screenwriter (William Holden) who was shot dead by totally deranged, ageing silent screen movie star (Gloria Swanson) who wants to return to film-making in the new era of talking pictures	It is quite a strong and powerful movie; no laughs in this one
<i>Sunshine on Leith</i>	2013	Davy and Ally have to relearn how to live in Edinburgh after serving in Afghanistan	Set in Edinburgh, with Proclaimers songs; how could you not be charmed by this film?
<i>The Anniversary</i>	1968	On the celebration of the anniversary of Mrs Taggart, her three dominated sons come to her house for the party	Very funny black comedy, although a little sick
<i>The Birds</i>	1963	A wealthy San Francisco socialite pursues a potential boyfriend to a small Northern California town that slowly takes a turn for the bizarre when birds of all kinds suddenly begin to attack people.	Who else could create a creepy film that makes every crowd of birds perched on a line threatening to me even now?
		An American horror thriller about a series of sudden attacks by birds on the people of Bodega Bay	The first film which gripped me from start to finish and absolutely terrified me.
<i>The Deer Hunter</i>	1978	During US-Vietnam war, three friends join the army to fight in Vietnam, and are captured.	Powerful, harrowing and horrible in parts
<i>The Diving Bell and the Butterfly</i>	2004	True story of <i>Elle</i> editor who suffers stroke, left in a paralysed body, and can only communicate with his left eye	Fascinating, moving and sad. Watched it on a ship.
<i>The Go-Between</i>	1971	At the birth of the 20th Century, a minor affair in an upper-class county estate has minor but not-forgotten consequences, with Julia Christie and Dominic Guard	This appeals to the romantic and confused in me, with the central protagonist understanding tragically little of what is going on, but sensitive to everything about it
<i>The Godfather Part II</i>	1974	Michael, Vito Corleone's son, attempts to expand his family's crime empire.	Superbly written storylines and amazing performances by the principal actors. Gripping

Title	Year	Summary	Evaluation
<i>The King and I</i>	1956	A musical film about the King of Siam who hires an English teacher to teach his children.	One of the earliest films I saw at the cinema with my mother and the first time I can remember crying uncontrollably in a film
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	1965	An aspiring nun is sent as a governess to seven motherless children.	First film I remember seeing.....granny took me to the pictures when I was 6 or 7
<i>The Third Man</i>	1949	A writer of pulp Westerns arrives penniless as a guest of his childhood chum Harry Lime (Orson Welles), only to find him dead. He gets involved in complicated murky journey to find out why	Classic, suspenseful atmospheric and could watch many times
<i>The Year of Living Dangerously</i>	1983	Set in Indonesia in 1965, it is the story of a young, Australian radio reporter and a community of expats, journalists and embassy people who find themselves thrown together against the backdrop of the overthrow of President Sukarno.	Masterful direction by Peter Weir and soundtrack by Maurice Jarre create an atmosphere heady with danger, to say nothing of the almost tangible chemistry between the characters played by Mel Gibson and Sigourney Weaver, make this an unforgettable film.
<i>Thelma and Louise</i>	1991	Two best friends set out on an adventure, but it soon turns around to a terrifying escape from being hunted by the police, as these two girls escape from the crimes they committed	Again, for me a story of friendship, fun and companionship which has a terrible twist
<i>Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri</i>	2017	Frances McDormand plays grieving mother railing against local police chief for his failure to find her daughters murderer.	Gritty, beautiful acting and self-awareness that results.
		A mother rents three billboards to draw attention to the unsolved rape and murder of her daughter	A very unusual film which manages to be gripping, poignant, grim, tragic and funny all in one film
<i>Titanic</i>	1997	An unsinkable ship sinks while some people try to save themselves and some people try to help others	I remember watching the original film on TV with my mum and loved the glamorous remake of the film with the added love story between Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, never knowing why didn't she move up and let Jack share the door?
<i>Vice</i>	2018	The sordid story of the corrupt USA conservative politician Dick Cheney, with Christian Bale	This played to everything I like in a film: a gripping story, well-acted, funny, politically-targeted and self-referential
<i>West Side Story</i>	1961	Romeo and Juliet updated to 1950's New York with music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim	Great story, good performances, wonderful music and dance make this a classic
<i>Witness</i>	1985	Set in an Amish community in Pennsylvania, it is part love story, part thriller as it tells the story of a young Amish boy, the sole witness to a murder, his widowed mother, the detective investigating the case and the clash of cultures within modern-day America.	The combination of direction by Peter Weir, soundtrack by Maurice Jarre and great performances by Harrison Ford and Kelly McGillis make for a moving, memorable drama.

Alphabetical Order

Title	Year
<i>Airplane</i>	1980
<i>All About My Mother</i>	1999
<i>The Anniversary</i>	1968
<i>Apocalypse Now</i>	1979
<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	1944
<i>As Good as it Gets</i>	1997
<i>Assault on Precinct 13</i>	1976
<i>Beaches</i>	1988
<i>Being There</i>	1979
<i>Big Fish</i>	2003
<i>Birdman</i>	2014
<i>The Birds</i>	1963
<i>Bridge of Spies</i>	2015
<i>Brief Encounter</i>	1945
<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i>	1969
<i>Casablanca</i>	1942
<i>The Deer Hunter</i>	1978
<i>The Diving Bell and the Butterfly</i>	2004
<i>Doctor Zhivago</i>	1965
<i>Downton Abbey</i>	2019
<i>Eraserhead</i>	1977
<i>Fargo</i>	1996
<i>Funny Girl</i>	1968
<i>The Go-Between</i>	1971
<i>The Godfather Part II</i>	1974
<i>Goodfellas</i>	1990
<i>Hidden (aka Caché)</i>	2005
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	1943
<i>Jungle Book</i>	1967
<i>The King and I</i>	1956
<i>Life of Brian</i>	1979
<i>Love Actually</i>	2003
<i>Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</i>	1955
<i>Madam X</i>	1966
<i>Magic</i>	1978
<i>Moulin Rouge</i>	2001
<i>Once Upon a Time in the West</i>	1968
<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>	1975
<i>Paddington</i>	2017
<i>Priscilla Queen of the Desert</i>	1994
<i>Psycho</i>	1960
<i>Raging Bull</i>	1981
<i>Random Harvest</i>	1942

Title	Year
<i>Rocketman</i>	2019
<i>Singing in the Rain</i>	1952
<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	1959
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	1965
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	1965
<i>Sunset Boulevard</i>	1950
<i>Sunshine on Leith</i>	2013
<i>Thelma and Louise</i>	1991
<i>The Third Man</i>	1949
<i>Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri</i>	2017
<i>Titanic</i>	1997
<i>Vice</i>	2018
<i>West Side Story</i>	1961
<i>Witness</i>	1985
<i>The Year of Living Dangerously</i>	1983
<i>The Sound of Music</i>	1965

Chronological Order

	Year	Title
1940s	1942	<i>Casablanca</i>
	1942	<i>Casablanca</i>
	1942	<i>Random Harvest</i>
	1943	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
	1944	<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>
	1945	<i>Brief Encounter</i>
	1949	<i>The Third Man</i>
	1950s	1950
1952		<i>Singing in the Rain</i>
1955		<i>Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</i>
1955		<i>Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</i>
1956		<i>The King and I</i>
1959		<i>Some Like it Hot</i>
1960s	1960	<i>Psycho</i>
	1961	<i>West Side Story</i>
	1963	<i>The Birds</i>
	1963	<i>The Birds</i>
	1965	<i>Doctor Zhivago</i>
	1965	<i>Sound of Music</i>
	1965	<i>The Sound of Music</i>
	1966	<i>Madam X</i>
	1967	<i>Jungle Book</i>
	1968	<i>Funny Girl</i>
	1968	<i>Once Upon a Time in the West</i>
	1968	<i>The Anniversary</i>
	1969	<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i>
	1969	<i>Oh! What a Lovely War</i>

	Year	Title
1970s	1971	<i>The Go-Between</i>
	1974	<i>The Godfather Part II</i>
	1975	<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>
	1976	<i>Assault on Precinct 13</i>
	1977	<i>Eraserhead</i>
	1978	<i>Magic</i>
	1978	<i>The Deer Hunter</i>
	1979	<i>Apocalypse Now</i>
	1979	<i>Being There</i>
	1979	<i>Life of Brian</i>
1980s	1980	<i>Airplane</i>
	1981	<i>Raging Bull</i>
	1983	<i>The Year of Living Dangerously</i>
	1985	<i>Witness</i>
	1988	<i>Beaches</i>
1990s	1990	<i>Goodfellas</i>
	1991	<i>Thelma and Louise</i>
	1994	<i>Priscilla Queen of the Desert</i>
	1996	<i>Fargo</i>
	1996	<i>Fargo</i>
	1997	<i>As Good as it Gets</i>
	1997	<i>Titanic</i>
	1999	<i>All About My Mother</i>
2000s	2001	<i>Moulin Rouge</i>
	2003	<i>Big Fish</i>
	2003	<i>Love Actually</i>
	2004	<i>The Diving Bell and the Butterfly</i>
	2005	<i>Hidden (aka Caché)</i>
2010s	2013	<i>Sunshine on Leith</i>
	2014	<i>Birdman</i>
	2015	<i>Bridge of Spies</i>
	2017	<i>Paddington</i>
	2017	<i>Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri</i>
	2017	<i>Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri</i>
	2018	<i>Vice</i>
	2019	<i>Downton Abbey</i>
	2019	<i>Rocketman</i>