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Film Festival Showcases the Good, the Bad, and the Strange of Tourism

By DEBORAH DUNN

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Attention travel junkies: The Margaret Mead Film Festival, which opens today at New York's American Natural History Museum is showing four films devoted to the good, the bad, the poignant, and the very strange business of tourism around the world.

My friend Pegi Vail, an anthropologist at NYU and one of the most widely traveled people I know (we met on the beach in Dubai in 2008, and that was probably the least exotic trip of her trips in recent years), and her husband made one of the films featured: a fascinating and beautifully shot documentary called Gringo Trails about what happens to those faraway beaches, jungles, cultures after the crush of tourists arrive. It's playing at the American Natural History Museum on Saturday, October 19, and should be required viewing for all thoughtful travelers.

Three other standouts in the festival focus on tourism. The highly acclaimed, and very funny, Cannibal Tours, released in 1988, is about Western tourists meeting tribespeople in Papua New Guinea (director Dennis O'Rourke passed away earlier this year). Village at the End of the World is set in a small Inuit village in Greenland that's become a stomping ground for cruise passengers, and Framing the Other focuses on the implications of camera-toting tourists descending on the Mursi tribe in remote Ethiopia (this was also the topic of a Condé Nast Traveler article "Twilight of the Tribes").

If you don't happen to be in New York this weekend, keep on eye out for these films to pop up at a theater closer to home.

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