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Morocco on the Big Screen

The Moroccan Film Festival debuts in New York

While Morocco has long been a favorite of Hollywood location scouts—the gorgeous scenes from the girls’ trip to Abu Dabhi in this year’s *Sex and the City 2* were actually filmed there—it isn’t very well-known in America for its native film industry. Richard Alleman, the co-chair of this week’s **Moroccan Film Festival**, aims to change all that.

“This is the first time there’s ever been a Moroccan Film Festival in America,” says Alleman, also a journalist and author of *New York: The Movie Lover’s Guide*. “When people think of Morocco and the movies, they think of movies that have been shot there rather than indigenous films that Moroccans produced and directed.”

The festival, produced in cooperation with the nonprofit High Atlas Foundation, which works to advance community development in rural Morocco, takes place October 29 and 30 at Tribeca Cinemas. The Foundation hosts a fundraiser every year that Alleman works to organize, and after volunteering in Morocco with the Peace Corps, he was inspired to bring Moroccan culture to America.

“I suggested that we do something a little different this year and show a couple Moroccan films,” he says. “The idea grew from showing a couple films in one night to a full festival.”

A dozen full-length feature films and eight shorts—seven of which were created by Moroccan film students—will be shown at the festival, all of them directed by native Moroccans. Films will explore themes important to the country, such as the conflict between tradition and modernity, the growing power of women and the attraction young Moroccans have to American and European culture. Most are premieres.

The festival’s opening film, *Burned Hearts*, which follows a successful Moroccan architect as he returns home to Paris to take care of his dying uncle, is the third effort by director Ahmed El Maanouni. Martin Scorsese recently picked up and restored El Maanouni’s 1980s documentary *Trances* for his **World Cinema Foundation**—yet another example of how the country’s filmmakers are making their mark.

“A lot of people don’t realize that Morocco has this small but very vital film industry,” Alleman says. “I hope it shows people a view of an Islamic country that is very different from the stereotypes that many of us tend to hold—it really shows the reality of the country, a whole country’s culture.”

