

Night at the Museum

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Museums have been pooling from film in both literal and figurative ways. Galleries are peppered with screens and video installations, film segments and screening areas, but they are also generating "blockbuster" shows and featuring trailer-like advertisements for their exhibitions on television and in cinemas.

[The American Museum of Natural History \(AMNH\)](#) is no exception, with the added plus of hosting a the largest ethnographic and documentary film festival in the United States once a year, the [Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival](#). Despite its long and intricate relationship with film, in the last few months, the museum has been greatly transformed by film. Since *A Night at the Museum*, a film based on a book by Milan Trenc, directed by Shawn Levy, and with Ben Stiller playing the main character, was screened around the world, visitors come to the museum looking for the film's many characters: Attila the Hun, Jedediah, Sacajawea, the Easter Island talking head, and Dexter the monkey, among others. In their quest to merge fiction and reality at the museum, visitors are unavoidably disappointed: not only was the film not filmed in the museum in New York, but it was actually done in a building based on the AMNH constructed as a sound stage in Vancouver, Canada. External shots of the actual AMNH were used throughout the film to make it appear that the story takes place inside the Central Park museum.

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Rather than working to correct the misunderstanding, and sport its identity as an institution with an educational and scientific mission, the AMNH has been more than happy to take on its role in the film as a marketing strategy. The IMDB website states that visitors to the AMNH increased 20% after the film's opening, a statistic that clearly did not go unnoticed by the museum's public relations team. These days, the museum has very literally let the museum display and characters constructed by the movie inside its walls, using large cutouts of the film to lure visitors to its giftshop, selling AMNH certified "Night at the Museum" badges, and offering "night at the museum" sleepovers during which, for a huge sum of money, children can spend an actual night in one of the museum's halls, using flashlights and going on expeditions with wild buffalo and a blue whale, waiting for Teddy Roosevelt to come to life.

Sleepover Link: <http://www.amnh.org/kids/sleepovers/>