

Teaching Tourism in the Slums

For the last 18 years, Rejane Reis, the owner of Exotic Tours, has been changing the image that the world has about favelas, showing a side of Rio de Janeiro that few people have experienced.

One of the first tours offered by Exotic Tours was through the shantytown of Rocinha, the largest favela in Latin America. While going through the alleys, several children followed Rejane asking for money. Instead of giving the children money, she decided to teach them tourism, enabling them to become part of a profession where they could become more self-sufficient.

Rejane Reis started a small project, creating a Tourism Workshop in the community, so she was able to take tourists guided by the local people into the shantytown, showing the favela through the eyes of people. This also helped support the poor by giving the young adults an opportunity to work. Once a week the students have basic training, where they learn how to work as guides and also learn information about the place in which they live.

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The boys and girls are between 14 and 25 years old and are trained by two teachers at the Tourism Workshop. They are taught English, Spanish and a working knowledge of the attractions that are part of the tourists' circuits; places they probably had never seen, like Corcovado, Sugar Loaf. By having knowledge of other attractions in their own city, they are encouraged to find a better life in tourism outside the favela.

The Tourism Workshop teaches 32 students that live in favelas (Rocinha has a population of 150,000 people). Besides assisting the students with their financial problems, Rejane Reis had the courage to change the face of kids who have been born into circumstances fraught with social problems.

In addition to this commitment, she continues her work as a guide in Rio and is always proud to see her students become professional guides, both in and out of their community. When they enter Rejane's school they are very shy, and may not even know how to speak. More importantly, they gain confidence in themselves; this is something money can't buy.



By Rejane Reis

<http://www.favelatourismworkshop.com>

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