

SLUM TOURISM: VISITORS SUPPORTING LOCAL CRIMINALS?



Brazilian 'favelas' have been a popular attraction for tourists coming to the country for some time. Critics point out the negative effects of slum tours on the lives of local people.

Slum tourism or the concept of visiting less developed places to observe people living in poverty has been growing in popularity for some time but movies like *City of God*, *Tropa de Elite* and most recently the *Slumdog Millionaire* have managed to lure even more tourists to world's shanty towns.

This branch of tourism is, however, quite controversial for many. Is it just voyeurism of rich foreigners, who enjoy a thrilling trip to the places where the drug lords rule to tell about that experience their rich friends? Or is it a noble act, which allows the poor of these places to earn some money and to get out from their isolation? It also could be regarded as a way of educating others that not everything that happens in slums has to be wrong.

In Rio de Janeiro, tour agents organizing slum tours concentrate on 'favelas'. These are racially mixed shanty towns often run by drug lords. Favelas are seen as hotbeds of crime. Shootouts with the police are not an unusual thing here. Probably the best known is Rocinha, which is the largest favela in Brazil. It is actually a neighborhood with better infrastructure than a usual shanty town. Drug traffickers who run the place are expected to earn \$5 million in monthly sales of drugs.

Critics point out that the local authorities working on the development of the local infrastructure had to have the implicit support of the drug cartel. Similarly, tour agents organizing the slum tours are also most likely to have a deal with the drug lords to ensure the wealthy tourists' safety. **According to the critics of the whole concept of slum tourism, travelers thus might even support the power of the criminals who run the place by visiting the favelas.**

What lures tourists to the slums? Rocinha is said to have the best view of Rio but it is probably not the reason why people come here. The popularity of slum tours suggests that people are often attracted to others' misery. It is true that there is e.g. a school largely financed by a tour company

that organizes trips to the favelas but is it really the kind of help the local people need?

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