

Kirsten Kolb  
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Brazil-Winter Term

## **A Real Sense of Community**

One idea that really stuck out for me while studying abroad in Brazil over Winter Term 2006, was the real sense of community. Whether I saw it with my own eyes or felt it in a place, it was one thing that stayed constant throughout our adventures in Brazil. There were many examples of community and warmth in a variety of places and towns in which we traveled.

One of the first places where I noticed a real sense of community was at the Hippie Fair in Ipanema. The Hippie Fair is an open-air market that takes place at a neighborhood park very Sunday. Crafters, artists, and other vendors come to the park to sell their goods. Not only were there tourists and visitors to Brazil here, but there were also local Brazilians. There was a real sense of togetherness and the common bond that linked the locals to the tourists, was that we were all there for the same reason. It was also at the hippie fair that I noticed many generations shopping together. It was common to see a little girl, her mother, and her grandmother. This demonstrates that relationships and family is a strong value in the Brazilian culture. The locals were interested in talking to you and there was a feeling of everyone being at ease.

The visit and tour to the favelas was definitely very interesting and fascinating at the same time. It was clear that the people that live in the favelas throughout Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro, are very close-knit community that works together as if they are their own town. Even though there are many problems within the favelas including violence and drugs, the favelas have instilled plans in order to deal with such issues. For example, in the second favela we visited, the people have created a school for the children of the favela and some of the residents of that favela are teachers and mentors at the school. They provide much more than just an education, they create a safe atmosphere and fun place for the children to go. Clearly this demonstrates how the people of the favelas work together in order to live their lives. People who are born into family of favelas do not usually leave the favelas, even if they have the money to. The people have a real sense of pride for their community and what they have created.

While in the favela, it was noticed that our tour guides made an effort to say hi to certain people in the favelas. They acted like family and we realized how this demonstrates the high value of relationships in the Brazilian culture. In other countries this would be unheard of, but in Brazil it was very common for there to be a relationship between people of different levels of society and different social classes.

Another place that there was clearly a sense of community felt was at the Samba School. We went to the festivities of the favela, Manguiera. This was like nothing we had ever experienced before. It is difficult to describe everything that was happening all at

one time. It was nothing like we had expected, but in a positive way. We learned later that the people outside of the auditorium like building were residents of the favela, Manguiera. After acquainting ourselves with the atmosphere of the samba school we later took part in everything that was going on around us, from the dancing, to the singing, to the celebrating. The people inside on the floor of the samba school were mostly of the middle class or were tourists, although I did not see any other tourists besides our group. Everyone was very friendly and open to our group, which is somewhat surprising. I do not think that we, meaning U.S. citizens, would be as open and inviting to tourists or foreigners in a setting such as this one. The combination of the people outside to the locals inside and us created a warm and entertaining night for all. The different social classes all came together for one cause, which did not cease to amaze us.

While on the beach in Ipanema the idea of multi-generations spending time together. It was common for us to see three different generations of both males and females on the beach together. This is something that we are seeing less and less of here in the United States. It is apparent in Brazil that keeping ones' values and beliefs strong is very important to the people and the people actually live them in their everyday lives.

When we were in the Amazon we took a boat to one of the islands to meet some of the indigenous people and see what their lives were like. Although it was awkward at first, these feelings relaxed the longer we were there. During one of their ritual dances I noticed our tour guide, Marco, holding and playing with the children. This was a really neat sight to see. The children were completely comfortable around him and it was almost natural for him to be with them. Marco has created a truly unique relationship with these people that I'm sure will continue on for a very long time. I am glad that the indigenous people wanted to upon up their community to us and share their culture.

As one can see, the idea of community and living as a community is a common and shared belief/value in Brazil. This was seen in many areas including Ipanema, the favelas, and the Amazon.



