

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2007

## Walking and Talking in Medellin



### TAKE A WALK WITH ME THROUGH MEDELLIN

It was an incredible and wonderful experience for me to be able to walk around the beautiful city of Medellin without fear. Equipped with a camera in hand and all the time in the world I set out to explore the city. As I walked about, I was surprised by the amount of new construction and development going up around the city. More importantly, I was happy to see that it was not confined to one specific area. During my walk, I was able to meet many warm and inviting people of Medellin, known as Paisas (pie-suhz.) The transformation of Medellin is obvious to a first time visitor.

Now, I may not have the answers as to who gets the credit for transforming Medellin, but the fact is that all the locals I spoke to support the Mayor of Medellin, Sergio Fajardo, and his efforts in transforming Medellin into one of the greatest cities, not just in Colombia, but in all of Central and South America. Sergio Fajardo studied at The University of Wisconsin in the United States. And he is a man with a vision not only for Medellin today, but for the future generations to come.

Medellin Mayor, Fajardo, has been busy building libraries, public parks, shopping centers, roads, new homes, as well as promoting entrepreneurial programs to help the local economy by giving everyone an opportunity to succeed and contribute to the change. The mayor has also implemented many social programs which have been made available to many in the lower-class barrios. These programs offer hope to those who have been neglected in the past. And in return it has help to keep many young men of the streets, giving them back their sense of pride, not just in themselves, but in their community, their great city of Medellin and their country of Colombia.

I've always believe, if you give someone a reason to live, they will always choose the good life over life on the street and as usually the case, an early death.

The locals I met on the streets, from various barrios, around Medellin treated me kindly, with open arms and a smile. They were all as curious about me as I was of them. They opened their homes to me and made me feel like family. They shared theirr personal stories with me about their lives, hopes and dreams. They all told me to go back to America and let everyone know that the Paisas do not promote violence, that they want to live without fear, they want to be able to walk the streets of their own neighborhoods without risk of being victims for those that choose to commit crimes. They are tired of the violence and want to live in peace.

They also made it a point to mention that they wish no harm to come to any Americans visiting their beautiful city of Medellin. The past has haunted them for so long that it seemed they would never escape the period when violence was a daily occurrence. But now things have changed in Medellin, a magical and miraculous transformation has swept across the city, reaching as far as the hilltop shantytowns where residents never thought hope was something they could experience in Medellin.

The Paisas I spoke to on the streets and up in the hilltop barrios would not stop raving about Mayor Fajardos and his aggressive campaign toward ending the decades of neglect in the poorer barrios. Fajardos made them many promises for change. He not only kept his promises, but offered many locals something that they needed for so long... HOPE! After witnessing many urban and social programs in affect, the locals took it upon themselves to contribute to the transformation. They said, "Mayor Fajardos kept his word. Now, we must do our part to show the people of Medellin, that we appreciate the changes. We are all Paisas, in this together."

The most amazing thing I witnessed was how curious the children I met on the streets where. They are not shy to say the least. They always approached me with big smiles on their faces, eager to share their stories of growing up in Medellin. They were too young to witness the violent past, good thing because they were all full of hope. I held many impromptu English lessons on the streets as the children pleaded with me to teach them English. "Juan, Tu, twrEE, Fo...." the kids would repeat.

Say what you will, but if you haven't been to Medellin, then you do not know the magic and beauty that this city possesses. The city, the culture, the weather, the energy and the Paisas will all capture your heart after just one day in this wonderful city in Colombia known as Medellin.

**I'M GOING BACK!!**

Hope you enjoy the pictures of my journey through the city of Medellin... from fear to hope!

POSTED BY MEDELLIN TRAVELER AT 8:34 AM