

Reality Check

By

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For tourists and residents who are sick of the typical tour of the nation's capital, it might be time to take a Reality Tour. Founded three years ago by Joan Heckscher, the director of the Community Action International Alliance (CAIA), the four-hour tours take participants away from the Mall and the national museums into low-income areas of the city. The tours are led and organized by local activists from organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation and the Anacostia Watershed Society, and focus on environmental racism and toxic dumping.

"Tourists" begin with a visit to the Anacostia River's Children's Island, which currently serves as a site for illegal dumping, and which local activists hope to turn into a recreation area for residents. Along the way, speakers address social and environmental problems around which local activists are organizing. "The goal of this tour is to help people connect with ways they can get involved to work for a positive change," says Heckscher.

So if you're sick of the monuments, it may be time to get real.