

The Perception of Life
By Julia Yukari Minami

Traveling has a unique way of expanding our knowledge and introducing us to new things. You can meet new cultures and people, make good or bad memories, and primarily, it shows us how people can be so different according to the customs and traditions in which they were raised. At the beginning of the year, I went to Thailand, during a season when everything feels like it can change and be new. I experienced firsthand how traveling can change who we are. I'm Brazilian but grew up in Japan, so I have been exposed to Japanese traditions and habits.

When I was in Thailand, the first thing I noticed was the lack of stoplights on the roads and the frequent traffic jams. There were many beggars, although we usually don't see them in tourist areas; we know they're numerous in more disadvantaged areas. This made me think about how we can see beautiful sights and people sleeping in the streets simultaneously in the same country, most of them being elderly. Luckily, there are social programs and laws to help the homeless, including shelters, temporary housing, social services, and community-based initiatives. I couldn't do anything to help, but I couldn't help thinking about how unfair it is.

I saw many children working in tourist destinations, which means they were not studying as they should have been. In Japan, we never see children as young as eight working, and there were so many of them that I was shocked. This trip changed my perspective on life; of course, I was aware of these situations, but seeing them with my own eyes made a difference. It really made me reflect on how lucky I am: I have a place to live, I study, I can eat every meal, and I don't have to worry about dangers on the roads. When you have everything, you don't think about those who don't have the same privileges. Now I have a more realistic vision of life, and I'm grateful for all I have.

After that experience, I researched how I could help, not just in Thailand. One option was volunteer work, something I've always wanted to do, like teaching kids in Argentina. However, as a minor, I need to wait until I turn 20. For now, there are projects that young people like me can participate in, such as distributing food and clothing to the homeless. I want to make a difference; I want to help change the situation, and I hope that in this way, I can.