

# Riya Patel

19 hours. All alone. Just me, myself and I.

It was my first time flying alone internationally and my mom was a nervous wreck.

“Be very careful! Keep ALL your belonging with you at all times. Keep track of your flights and don’t fall asleep at the airport!” she went on and on.

I on the other hand, a new 18 year old, was ecstatic. It my first adventure as an adult. But soon all that courageous confidence faded away into nervousness when I reached the airport and it hit me,

‘Wow I am really going away to a whole different country, by myself for 3 ½ weeks, that’s wild,’ I thought to myself.

“I was scared to fly alone at first. But once I did it, I actually loved it. It was nice to be alone and have this freedom and just chill by yourself.”

When I landed after my 19 hour long journey, my aunt was there to pick me up and I spent my first week just bonding with her, my uncle and cousins. It was a really loving and wholesome time, and so great to connect with family whom I hadn’t really been in touch with.

That following week, I was able to check something off my bucket list. I had been preparing for this moment for months back home, collecting donations and publicizing the organization I was going to volunteer for. It was finally time, and I was extremely excited for this opportunity. I was going to be spending the next week teaching kids at an underprivileged school called, Samvedana, located in the outskirts of the city, Ahmedabad.

This trip was life changing,

“I came back feeling really appreciative of my schooling system after seeing how it is over there and seeing how the kids learn, it’s so different. I taught the kids over there and the teachers really told me to do whatever I wanted to do, and one time they were even like just pull up some Youtube videos and show them like ABC songs, which would never happen here. It’s the last case scenario for a teacher to pull up



a fun video for us to watch but over their it was a real learning thing for them. Like that was actually a curriculum of a sort. So it made feel really happy that I live here where my schooling system is so nice.”

Throughout all four years of high school, volunteering and giving back to the community has been a huge part of my life. I tend to get so wrapped up in myself and my responsibilities during the school year, that I lose touch with doing what I love. I get caught up in my issues and thinking the world revolves around me, that I forget I’m actually so lucky and should be more grateful. So to be able to travel to a country that is filled with poverty on almost every street corner, and just put myself aside to help make a little difference in the life of others, it was gratifying moment for me. I may not have impacted the world in an astonishing way, but it warmed my heart to know I might’ve made a small difference in some kids lives.

With the donation money I had collected here, I was able to buy uniforms for all the preschool kids at the school and buy class sets of textbooks for grades 1-3. To see their precious smiles when they received their gifts was unforgettable. Not only did I teach the kids, but they taught me too. I personally grew as a person, spending time one on one with the students, teaching them, and creating meaningful bonds.

