

*Our Journey to the
Azores*

*Terceira & Gão Miguel
02.05.26 - 15.05.26*

The Preparation

The idea for this journey was born in September 2025. As it was clear that this will be the final year of Jona, Amancai, Nara and Adele in our homeschooling project, Escola da Esperança, we knew this is the year for the project we call "traveling school".

'The "traveling school" constitutes an important element of our school because many learning subjects can be experienced for real, on-site and thus be more easily internalized. Shorter and longer journeys in Portugal and other countries bring us into contact with the people and culture, allow us to learn geography, to research history on-site, to explore living spaces and biodiversity, as well as - for older children - to recognize political contexts. Additionally, traveling offers character-building opportunities: dealing with new impressions, finding one's way in new situations, being away with a group. This often leads to developmental leaps which were not previously foreseeable.' (from the Escola da Esperança website)

We had conversations with the children about what they are interested in and want to learn. Quite quickly, the Portuguese islands of the Açores were named, combining their interest to learn about the ocean, marine animals and their protection as well as learning about volcanoes, thermic energy, discovering nature in a different climate zone, and learning about nature conservation. We all loved the idea of staying in Portugal and yet getting to know such a different aspect of this country we live in.

From that point on the preparation really started to get going and the group began to research and learn about the Açores, about its flora, fauna, history and climate. We reached out to friends who have been or live on the islands, seeking suggestions and support. We were invited by our dear friend Andrea to stay at his place on Terceira, which became a special homebase for us. Friends of friends heard about the plan of the children and invited us to stay at their retreat centre on São Miguel called "The Laughing Orchard", which was another great place to call home during our time there. With these key pieces, our itinerary started to form. The children made phone calls with different organizations and companies on the islands to gather all the information we needed to plan our journey.

We had classes with our friend Sam, a Marine Biologist and experienced diving instructor in the Açores, to learn about the ocean and its inhabitants. With our friend Johannes, an enthusiastic geologist, we learned about the islands and especially the volcanoes.



In the process of the preparation for this journey we also learned about the issue of CO₂-emissions and its connection to our daily life and what we can do to take on more responsibility for the environmental impact of our choices. We debated about this issue in regard to this journey and decided to organize a tree planting work session, calling together friends and family to help. By the end of the day, around 400 young trees were planted. A big and essential part of the preparation for the journey was the fundraising. We started with estimating how much money the entire journey will cost for all together and gathered ideas of what we could do. The children wrote letters to tell their families and friends about their idea for this journey and asked them if they want to support. We invited our close community and friends in the neighborhood to a café, serving them lots of nice things to eat and drink, and the children gave a presentation about their journey.

We hosted a candle light dinner where we transformed the classroom into a very chic restaurant, and served a three-course menu to thirty people. It was a magical and intimate evening.

For the children it was a time of big learning of how to ask for support as well as going through challenges and making an effort to reach their goal.

With the super generous support of all of you we successfully completed the fundraising some weeks before the journey.

From that point on the preparation became very practical: What do we bring? What not to bring? What are our community guidelines of how we want to be with each other when travelling? How can we help each other when we are grumpy, hungry, homesick, etc.? How do we want to be with issues like screentime and sugarconsumption during our time away from our normal habits at home?

And after those seven months of preparation and with loads of excitement and gratitude, we were finally ready for the journey to start.



Day 1

Our journey began with a circle of parents, siblings, and friends who came together to send us off with their blessings and goodbyes. With a prayer for guidance and protection, we set off on a drive through the beautiful Alentejo landscape on our way to Lisbon Airport.

With nothing but the vast Atlantic below us, we flew to Terceira. Seeing the volcanic rocky coast of the small island for the first time drew excitement from our breath. The group was delighted to finally arrive on the islands, this unique expression of land, climate and culture of our home country, Portugal.

With help from the sweet woman at the car rental, and with smooth travels, we soon found ourselves nestling into the home of our dear friend Andrea, who generously offered us his house close to Angra do Heroismo. At the roots of the large plantain tree in the backyard, we gathered for a moment to say hello to the land. Each of us took some time in silence to greet the island and all the beings who live here, stating our presence and expressing our gratitude that we can be here. After the excitement of exploring our beautiful homebase and admiring the stunning view of steep Monte Brasil in the distance, we settled down to check in as a group with some of the most important questions: Who sleeps where and next to whom? And, how late can we stay up?!

To celebrate our first evening on Terceira, we went to the closest piece of coastline for a walk where we admired the unique volcanic formations in the rock and collected ocean trash that got washed up during the last storms. Already our journey began with stimulating conversations about the beauty of nature and the consequences of our consumption habits as humans.

At night before bed we opened our common journal and collected pieces of gratitude. We would review the day together and each of us would speak about what we are thankful for. This covered everything from the kind pilots the children met to the fuel we've used to get here to the beauty of the islands. Additionally, we also wrote down our personal and collective Learnings of the Day. Both, cultivating gratitude and distilling our insights, became regular rituals that were woven in every night, from our first night in Terceira to the end of our two-week journey.

"I am thankful for this beautiful ocean."

"I am grateful for being able to do this journey"

"I am thankful to Andrea for inviting us to his home."



Day 2

Our first breakfast on Terceira was bustling with excitement for the day to come. We decided to head off for a day hike. Being with island weather one never knows what kind of weather will come, despite the forecast, so it became another daily ritual to always have our bags packed with a rain jacket.

"Walking up Monte Brasil was a highlight for me. The higher we went up we could see more and more of the island and see how pretty it was. The island was big and small at the same time. It was nice to see how the birds were taking the wind to fly up without needing so much energy. The view from the top was really pretty. I could see the close by volcano, Pico Santa Barbara, and some others in the distance in the center of the island. The island is so lush, green and rich in vegetation. It was nice to see the open ocean, with the two islands in the distance (São Jorge and Pico)."
-Amancai

On the way up, we tried to recall all of the details of the prince of the seas and the golden haired princess in the old story about Monte Brasil called Lenda de Angra do Heroísmo that our history teacher Marilia taught us.

"Thank you for my feet, for getting me all the way up the mountain."



Day 3

On Monday we got up very early to go out on the ocean. After a short briefing of the captain and the marine biologist who were on board with us, we took off to the open ocean. Before we had looked up on the map that direction south of Terceira there is an open ocean all the way until Antarctica.

"We were jumping up and down on the waves. I loved this experience to be with Nara, Amancai, and Benjamin at the front of the boat. We drove around for a while, looking for whales. At some point we saw a plume of a whale and we caught a very small part of the body. Later we found out that it was two fin whales. We continued on to a different place in search of other species. Then, in the flat ocean, not far from us, a blue whale came up to breathe very close to us. I really loved that part. It was so fast, and it was amazing to see the world's largest animal. People believe that it is the animal with the largest mass that has ever lived. What I learned is that the blue whale can weigh up to 200 tons, while the largest dinosaur only weighed up to 80 tons. As we continued looking for more species, we also saw a big pod of common dolphins. They were jumping around our boat, and diving under. They seemed very curious and weren't afraid of the boat or us." - Jona

"I loved it! I was very happy that I was sitting at the back with Rabea, because I would have definitely gotten sea sick if I was at the front like the others. Just seeing them going up and down already made me a bit sick. Seeing the blue whale was really cool. I'm so happy we saw it. Seeing whales was the thing I was most looking forward to on this trip. Just before it appeared, I was thinking that I would love to see a blue whale. I'm also happy that we saw fin whales as well. Later on we talked with the whale spotter, who said he saw three other blue whales out there." - Adele

After this exciting morning we went home to rest. The kids cooked lunch and the adults cleaned up afterwards, everybody rested a bit and did science classes with Benjamin. We packed a picnic for dinner and went to the west side of the island for sunset. We made it a habit to always bring trash bags and whenever we were at the coast we collected marine trash, finding everything from plastic bottles & bags to clothes, flip-flops and remains of the fishing industry.

"Thank you for the blue whale and the fin whales we saw."

"Thank you for the nice people we met."



Day 4

At the harbor in Angra do Heroísmo we met Ricardo and Sarah, our wonderful and caring scuba diving instructors. Ricardo is a marine biologist and he showed us all kinds of fish and ocean creatures we might encounter while diving, and also informed us about the invasive seaweed species that we would see and described the history of the old ship wreck.

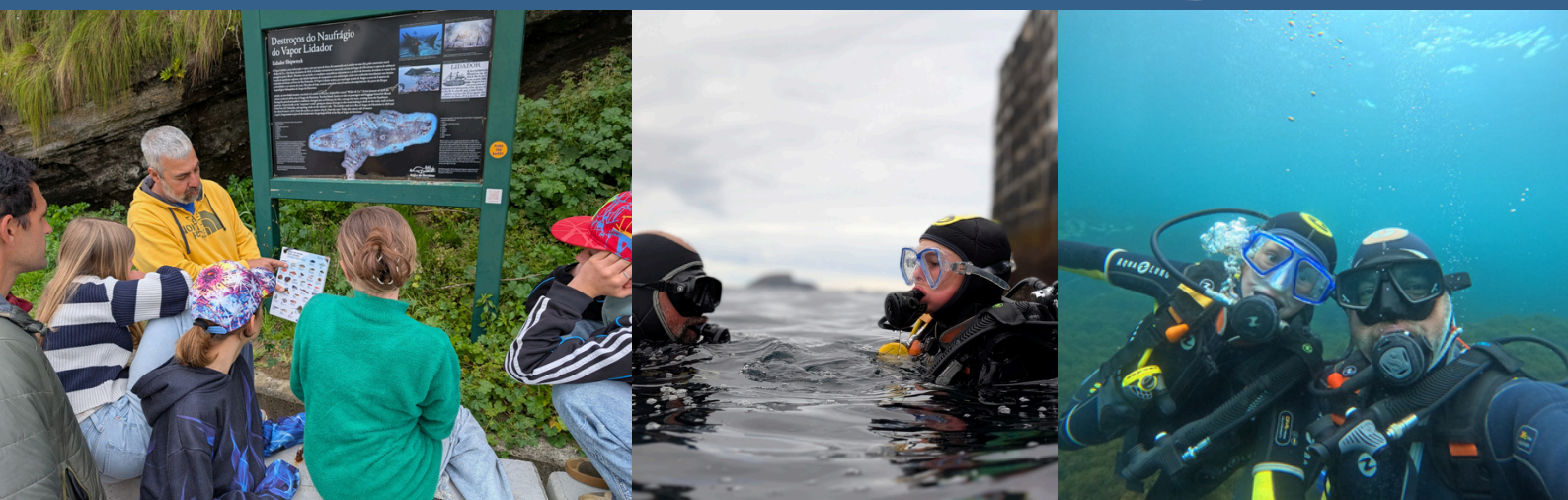
"We met Ricardo and Sarah, our diving teachers. They took time to explain to us how to dive and the hand signals to communicate underwater. We all put on our wetsuits and jumped into the water where they helped us get into the rest of the diving gear. We dove under water and it was like: Boom! I saw so much life under water. It was an incredible experience. I really loved it. Our plan was to go to an old ship wreck at 10 meters depth. As soon as we arrived there, it was a magical experience, to see the ship and all the fish and other creatures living there. I would love to do it again. This was the most magical experience I've had on this journey." - Jona

"It was amazing. We could see a completely new world. We could breathe underwater. It was beautiful. One could see so many colors - purple, pink, yellow, green, red... It totally changed my relationship to the ocean. Normally I would look at the ocean and see a big blue blanket that I couldn't see through. But once I was under that water, I could see that it was so full of life, and for me it's even more important to protect it. Now I know how beautiful it is down there, and if we put rubbish in there, this beauty disappears, because instead of fish you see plastic bottles, instead of plants you see candy wrappers. Our scuba diving guides were amazing, and very nice. They made it an even more spectacular experience because they were so kind and took care of me, and they also let us swim freely and if I ever needed it, their hand was always there to take. I would have been lost alone. In the end, together our group saw around 30 different species of ocean animals." - Nara

"Thank you Ricardo and Sarah, for showing us the underwater world."

"Thank you for the animals, for letting us see you."

"Thank you for being able to watch you learn something new today, to see the amazement in your eyes when you came out of the water."



Day 5

Our time learning from Ricardo continued the next day when we met him in the morning, this time on the other side of the island at Praia do Vitória. After jumping into our wetsuits we sat in their small boat going again out towards the open ocean which was very calm today. On our way out we met a sea turtle. We were looking for a pod of dolphins that would give us signs that they are curious and open to be in our presence. We hoped to jump in the water and snorkel when they would be around us. Having spoken about it quite a bit, we knew that it might happen or not, depending primarily on the dolphins' openness to us. We were coming as guests to their home and wanted to move with care and respect. We indeed found a beautiful pod of dolphins, but they didn't show interest. We were all happy to be with Ricardo who clearly showed his respect towards the animals. More important than swimming with dolphins was to be in respectful relation to these wild animals in their natural habitat.

"The dolphins gave a very clear sign that they don't want to be near us, as they had a small baby and they were hunting for food. I was happy that the dolphins weren't forced to swim with us. It was still worth going out. The only problem was that me and Adele were feeling quite seasick and we were all getting cold. Luckily Ricardo brought hot tea and cookies and we felt much better. So we found out that life is better with cookies! And having a tea time while being in a boat on the ocean is hilarious and fun."
-Nara

"I learned today that nothing is guaranteed in the wilderness, we cannot control it which i think is wonderful." -Jona

"Thank you for the dolphins showing us clearly what they didn't want."

"Thank you for our guides being so sensitive and respectful towards the animals."



After our time on the ocean, we came home for some lunch and rest. When our batteries were recharged we jumped into the car again and headed inland, seeking a particular place where one can enter the Earth. When we came to what looks like a regular stone house, unless we already knew about it, we wouldn't have expected this to be the entrance way into an old basalt lava tunnel called Gruta do Natal (Christmas Cave). Though researchers have a difficult time identifying the exact age, it's thought to be no older than 12,000 years. Along the way, we came to an area that looks like a church altar and the name of this place made more sense- referring to the yearly Christmas mass where many people come underground to celebrate and pray.

"I really like this place. It was crazy to see how the lava formed these tunnels underground. From the surface you couldn't see anything from this amazing tunnel system. -Nara"

"This was fun and I'm very happy I had a helmet on, because I hit my head many times on the rocks above our heads. I would have liked to have gone further into the dark tunnel at the end, but it was closed for people to enter. - Adele"

**"Thank you for feeling so safe under the earth."
"Thank you for the beauty of nature."**



Day 6

After all the exciting adventures of the first days, it was clear that everybody needed a bit of a break. We slept in, had a late breakfast and took time to ourselves, read, listened to music or do crafts. As this was also supposed to be a rainy day, we planned to visit two museums in Angra do Heroismo.

"We went to two cool museums. One was an historic museum about Angra de Heroismo. There was an exhibition of old coins, clothes, carriages along with photos and some facts. There were also models of boats that they used to have. There were old binoculars, maps, and furniture. They also had some weapons, like swords and rifles. We learned a lot about the importance of Angra and the Azores in the past centuries.

We saw many things we had learned about in our history classes.

The other museum was a scientific one, a museum for kids, where we could try out doing science experiments. For example, an experiment with temperature and colors, and one with explaining electricity with magnets and spirals. It was fun to try out these things." - Nara

We finished this day with some school work and an evening of playing games, many rounds of our favorite game on this journey called *Pirate Poker*, a dice game, being goofy and laughing together...

"Thank you for the rain which we could see from the coziness from inside."

"Thank you for learning many new things in the museums today."

"Thank you for the rest and alone time."



Day 7

During breakfast we spoke again about the stunning experience of seeing a blue whale. This conversation led to a science class where we learned more about the blue whales, their lives and behaviors as well as some surprising facts, for example: The poo of blue whales is pink-orange, their tongue weighs as much as an elephant and their heart beat can be heard in the distance of 3 km.

We invited Ricardo, the marine biologist and diving instructor, and his family for lunch that day as our time with him has been so special. He is one of these people that have such an affectionate love for what they do, in his case his love for the ocean was super inspiring and by the end of this afternoon full of talks, laughs, games and good food with him and his family, we really felt we made new friends.

For the late afternoon we went to the north side of the island and encountered a rough ocean amongst rough rocks in stormy weather. We used one of the sunny moments in between the rain for a picnic and decided, despite the weather, to hike up Pico do Gaucho, a small volcano crater. As usual with volcanoes, the way up is very steep and so is the way down. But this beautiful landscape with its lush, green vegetation and the experience of being inside the crater was totally worth the struggle.

"Thank you for making new friends."

"Thank you for the health of our bodies that we could do such a hike."

"Thank you for Adele's sense of humor."



Day 8

We visited a sweet spot on the island just down the road from where we were staying, a local, family-run banana plantation. The kind nephew of the founder of the place took us on an educational tour. He showed us the variety of species they grow there, including different types of bananas, coffee, papaya and other fruits, and how they manage their agriculture. He also showed us how they process their own coffee, which they offer in their delightful café. This place offered one particular member of our group a dream to come true: Jona could finally pick his favorite fruit directly from its tree - a Banana!

In the late afternoon, sneaking in just before they close the entrance gates, we entered into a timeless and exquisite place unlike any of us had ever been before. We learned from one of the caretakers who happened to be a local school teacher, that this volcanic vent is of a rare kind, as most such formations collapse after they are formed.

Because we were the last ones to enter, we had the privilege to be in this place just with ourselves, to take in all the beauty, from the laguna below to the green-framed window to the heavens above.

"This was a magical experience. It felt like Jurassic to me, because of all the plants and that dinosaurs could jump out at any time. One of the most interesting things about it to me was that they only found it recently because some cows went missing. In the search for the missing cows they found this place." - Jona

"It was impressive how big that place was. Two thousand years ago we stood where there was probably lots of magma. It was crazy to see that big hole that went up to the surface where all these tropical plants are growing there. Where sunlight didn't hit there were no plants, but only rock and it was still pretty. The small lake inside was very beautiful." - Amancai

"I love it! It was amazing how there was once an eruption and this big, amazing cave with these high ceilings was created." - Adele



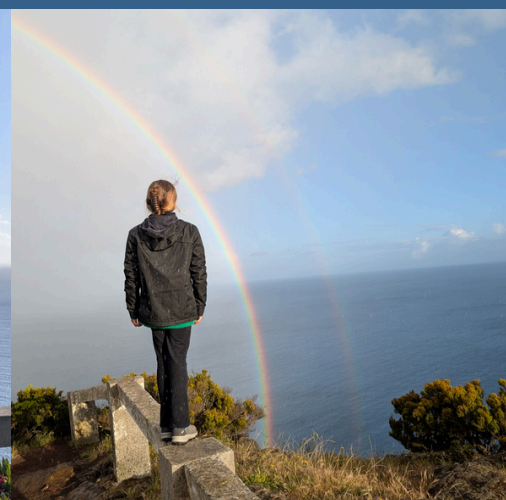
To top off this wonderful day, our last full one on the island of Terceira, we decided to go back to the place where we started exploring the island, Monte Brasil. This time, we came to the place high up where the whale spotters come with their binoculars, like the one we met after our whale watching trip. We even found the exact chair he told us he likes to sit on while searching for whales. We spent a long time up there, reflecting on all we experienced and learned on the journey thus far, and talked about the kind and generous people we had come to know on Terceira. The magic of the weather was with us, with sweeps of rain coming by at exactly the right distance to create some spectacular arcing rainbows. With our hearts filled with gratitude, we made a small offering and prayer to say goodbye to this beautiful and abundant island.

**"Thank you that such beautiful places exist on Earth."
"Thank you for the conversations we had with each other today."**

Day 9

After a thorough clean of the house and packing up our things, we began our travels to the island of São Miguel. It was another smooth travel day, with many talks, jokes, farts, and dice games along the way. Being a larger island, it took much longer to get from the airport to our new homebase, the Laughing Orchard. We were again blessed with the generosity of others who kindly offered us their home. We met our host, Aya, who is the caretaker of the place. She tended to our needs throughout the time we were there. Furnas is a stunning place, with bubbling, hot springs and vapor clouds surrounded by steep volcanic walls. It was exciting to know we will be staying for a week in an active volcano. The only downside for some of the group was the constant smell of cooked, some might say slightly rotten, eggs. By the time we arrived and got settled, we had just enough time for making some dinner before heading to a hot spring close by where we enjoyed soaking in the miraculous and healing waters pouring directly from the Earth and into human-made pools.

***"Thank you for the warm welcome of Aya."
"Thank you for the lush vegetation."
"Thank you for the joy in the hot springs."***



Day 10

On our first full day in Furnas, we met Paula, a passionate microbiologist, to learn about the thermic activity, hot springs, fumeroles and geysers that were located two minutes from the Laughing Orchard. She also taught us a lot about more than twenty different mineral water springs that pop out around Furnas. She explained to us the different compositions, temperatures, and characteristics of each unique spring, some of them just meters apart, and we tasted quite a few different waters. Despite the pouring rain we learned a lot. Lunch with Paula was something special, as each component was cooked with the thermal energy coming from the earth and hot springs. It was truly remarkable. Paula is an artist, combining her passion for science and care for traditional ways to help prove and preserve old recipes and remedies that originated and developed on the islands over centuries. For instance, she was responsible for the preservation of a local tea remedy that nearly died out, due to her efforts of collecting the stories of the elders in the local communities and then did the scientific research that confirmed the benefits of the traditional remedies.

"For me it was very surprising that we were living these days in a volcano that was still active, yet dormant. Paula knew so many things about the hot springs and the geysers that one could use for cooking. She brought us to the mineral water sources to try the different waters. It was very impressive for me that many of them had sparkling water coming right out of the mountain. I liked learning about the trees around the springs, some have their roots hanging in the air and are able to collect the water vapor that contains the minerals which the tree needs to grow. It was cool that people use the hot springs to cook. I liked trying the typical foods of the Azores that Paula cooked with us in the geyser, but I didn't really like the taste the water gave the food." - Amancai

"It was really cool and interesting because I never really learned about geothermal activity. Paula was really friendly and she really loved what she was doing. She explained the things super well and I think she enjoyed being with us. It was interesting to taste all the different waters. Some of the water springs had cold sparkling waters coming out, some with a lot of iron and sulfur. Some were warm and tasted like cooked sparkling water. One had the temperature of tea, which I really liked. There was one that was really hot, with 90 degrees.



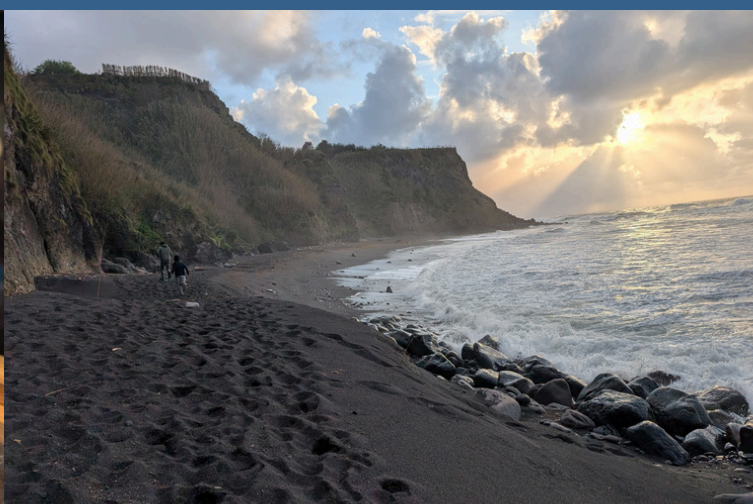
We cooked root veggies, eggs, cabbage and greens directly in the hot spring in a cotton bag which Paula tied to a rope and threw into the hot water of the geyser. The greens and cabbage took three minutes to cook, the bag with the potatoes and eggs took 7 minutes. While the vegetables were cooking it was pouring rain.

Afterwards we went to her tea house to eat lunch. The house used to be one of the bath houses and still had two bathtubs made of marmore in the floor. Because of the thermal activity of the surrounding soil the house was really warm and cozy. We prepared together an amazing meal with everything being cooked with the geothermal energy. Besides the vegetables we cooked together, there was a root from here called taro, which is an old food here on the island that saved many people from starving. There was also a bread made with taro, and a banana-pineapple-mango chutney and cheeses which were made with water from the hot springs that have microorganisms in them. She also gave us eggs that were cooked for two days in 60 degrees hot spring water. The egg yoke was hard and the white was slimy. I really liked it with the potatoes! She made us a special local green tea with water from a source right next to the tea house that has a lot of iron-2 and iron-3 which makes the usual green tea turn purple. It was crazy. It tasted a little bit like purple cabbage." - Nara

As we were told before, the weather on this island is unforeseeable, so after all the rain we still happened to have a sunset-picnic for dinner at Praia da Viola, a beach that has black sand. As on many of our evenings, we used this time at the ocean to reflect on the day we had, have conversations, wind down together and as usual also collect some trash...

"Thank you for Paula and for learning so many new things."

"Thank you for tasting things I've never tasted before."



Day 11

As we were hosted so generously at the "Laughing Orchard", we asked our hosts if there is something we can do to give back. In the end we decided to work a morning on their land. This is where we met Marta, who manages the agroforestry gardens on the property. She taught us about the importance of certain species that can be used for helping to build up soil and support other plants to thrive. We tended to a number of trees, dropping their branches to the ground so they can decompose and build up the soil, as well as cleaning around a number of species who were recently planted. We worked with a few other volunteers who were also staying at the Laughing Orchard. They all mentioned how they wished they could have had a school experience like this, were impressed by the maturity the kids carried, and were touched by the quality of contact between the "teachers" and "students". Over a big lunch together, Marta inspired us with her stories about how she helped to protect different parts of the island's natural health and heritage, and what it means to do this kind of work alone versus with the strength of collected effort.

"It was a sunny day. Marta is a very inspiring woman. It's amazing what she does on this island. She does a lot of agroforestry. This year, in a demonstration she led, she saved 69 ancient trees. There was supposed to be a road built through the forest and they wanted to cut them down." -Nara

"We were giving the bushes a haircut so they have power to grow and the plants underneath get light and to help build soil. It was really nice to work with Marta. I really like her spirit. She is really into saving forests in the past, helping people to open their eyes to see what trees actually are, and not just toilets to use or paper to write on, but they are actually living beings and let us live here by producing oxygen. We worked in a nice way to help the land by helping Marta in order to give back for being here in this wonderful place that we received as a big gift." -Amancai



In the afternoon we took off for a beautiful waterfall hike. We spent a few hours walking along lush green trails and enjoyed a lovely picnic at our final destination. Along the way, we stopped by an old water mill that was covered with impressive green moss, as if the walls were covered in carpets. There we began to talk about our journey soon ending, and started the process of collecting impressions in order to share our stories and learnings of this journey.

Coming home at exactly the right moment we met Marta and our garden working companions from the morning who just happened to be heading off to a hot spring down the road that is right next to the river. We joined them for a wonderful evening soak in the hot water.

"Another big highlight for me was the hot springs. Nice, relaxing, and fun. I especially liked that we could talk about what we did during the day and relaxed at the same time. My favorite one was the local hot spring in Furmas, with the river just next to it. We did "salmoning", which means letting oneself float down the cold river and then swim back up the current to the hot spring pool." -Nara

"I am thankful for the wonderful company we had today."

"I am grateful for the work we did on the land together."

"I am thankful for the beautiful hike to the waterfall."



Day 12

We started this day with meeting Andreas, also known as "The Trash Traveller", a biologist who Rabea knew from social media. He already walked the whole coastline of Portugal mainland collecting trash and doing educational activities with children and adults about ocean trash and microplastic. Now he is walking the entire coastline of the Açores Islands and we were lucky to meet him on one of his last days on São Miguel. He is using social media and art to raise awareness and document his experiences and all the great people and organisations he meets along the way that work to care for the protection of the ocean.

"I really liked the Trash travellers. He was really cool. What he's doing is not just collecting trash but teaching people about the importance of understanding trash more. He did a microtrash activity with us where within of an half a square meter area of the beach one has to find all the microtrash pieces in the sand. It was kind of impossible to find all of them. We laid out a picture of a whale of all the pieces. While he walks the coast he invents fun songs about trash in the ocean. He brings tough information in funny songs, and that's what makes him very special. He wants to make a documentary in Portuguese about what the ocean gives and does to all of us. He asked each of us to say a sentence or word to be part of the film." -Nara

"Meeting the trash traveler was super inspiring, I learned a lot of new things and I found him to be a really funny and cool guy. An inspiring person who can teach us a lot of things. I was inspired because he was directly friendly, as if he had known us for a long time and him walking the whole Portuguese coast and knowing so much about microplastics inspired me." -Jona

"I really liked his passion and energy to clean up the beaches, and seeing that he really has his eyes open and that he is trying to open the eyes of many other people to see that trash is actually a problem in our daily life. I also liked his ukulele, that he glued pieces of trash onto as decoration and how it looks now. I liked his songs, they were quite funny. Singing in a positive energy that trash is a problem. For me being filmed, I felt I could really say what I thought and felt from my heart." -Amancai



After this morning we moved on to the eastern side of the island for a special adventure: to cross a 1,5 km long tunnel that is used for hydrological infrastructure and that is totally dark, crossing through the mountain wall of a crater. Standing at the entrance, one could only see a very small dot of light on the other side. Benjamin and the four children all dared to walk through, coming out on the other side at the shore of the beautiful crater lakes of Sete Cidades.

"The experience in the tunnel was exciting. I felt super safe, even when I was with no light, and only seeing this small dot of light 1.5 kilometers away, nothing but darkness, in silence sometimes. I really enjoyed it." -Jona

Since we were already on the very east side of the island we also still went in the evening to the natural pools of Ferraria. It is one of the few places on earth where water from hot springs flows directly into the ocean, allowing for the special experience of sitting in warm water while being moved by the waves of the Atlantic ocean. The children spent a long time moving between sitting in the warmer parts chatting with people they just met and swimming a bit further out into the ocean playing with the waves coming in.

"I liked these hot springs, they could have been a bit warmer, but it was great how the ocean waves came in. It was fun to get moved by the waves, bumping around into people. It was fun to be there with the people. I loved it." - Jona

"Thank you for this day."

"Thank you for the interesting talks we had today."

"Thank you for the excitement I had in the tunnel."



Day 13

This was our final day on São Miguel. We began to pack some of our things in preparation for tomorrow's travels. We took most of the morning to dive deeper into harvesting stories and insights of our journey as part of the documentation process. While writing down all the impressions we've had, it became even more clear just how rich and positively impactful this journey had been.

Coming quite far already, we decided to take a lunch break. Filling a cotton bag with pasta and closing it with some rope, we headed back to the hot spring where Paula, our microbiologist friend, cooked with us at the beginning of our time on São Miguel. This time we wanted to do it all by ourselves. Our meal turned out quite well, though some of us weren't a fan of the slight flavor of sulfur that infused our pasta bowties.

In the afternoon we traveled to Vila Franca do Campo where we met our snorkeling guide, Dominic, and boat captain, Marco, who kindly took us to snorkel around the beautiful island just off the coast.

"The water was super cold, when I jumped in my body was in shock. But then I looked down and saw again this wonderful underwater world, impressive rock formations, different colors and so many fish. I could dive down to take a closer look, be with the fish and I felt so free in the water like this."-Jona

Our guides took us out for a longer boat ride. Bouncing up and down on the ocean waves, we took in our last few moments on the open water. But then came a most spectacular site. We found ourselves in the middle of a massive bottlenose dolphin pod, swimming all around us. Curious, looking, jumping, playing, dozens moved around us. It was hard sometimes to know in which direction to look as they were everywhere.

"Thank you for the dolphins."

"Thank you for knowing my boundaries when the water was too cold for me."



Day 14 & Day 15

On our last day of this journey, we finished packing and then started cleaning the entire house.

"I liked cleaning the house. I put on my earphones, listened to music, and swept the whole house." -Jona

"Usually I thought cleaning toilets is fun and signed up for it, but then when I actually had to clean the inside I found it not so fun anymore." - Amancai

In our final moments in Furnas we once more went to the springs to take some sparkling mineral water back home for our families and friends to try. We visited Paula and Aya to say our goodbyes and give them little gifts to say thank you. Before going on this journey we had prepared a few gifts for people we would meet on the way.

"I liked how thankful people were for us coming to them again, to give them a goodbye gift, like Paula for example." -Jona

"It doesn't have to be something big, but I liked to see how happy people were when we took time to prepare something nice for them, a handwritten card, some tea or olive oil to say thank you." - Nara

We had a final moment to say goodbye to the island at a spot overlooking the ocean. Filled with all the experiences and learnings of the last two weeks, we started our journey back to mainland Portugal. After another day of very smooth travels, we arrived late in the evening in Nara and Rabea's home to spend one last night together, play another latenight round of pirate poker, and read the last 3 chapters of Gansta Granny, the book that we had read together every evening of the journey.

In the morning we packed up one last time and went to Tamera where we were welcomed back by our families and friends.

"I really liked to see my family and friends again, to come back to this familiar place, the landscape I know, etc. It was really nice to be in a room with everyone, our parents prepared really yummy food and we could tell them many stories and show them pictures of our journey. It was great to be welcomed back like this." -Jona



Our Reflection

"Overall the journey was amazing. I learned a lot about the Azores, marine biology, the animals, thermic energies and so much more. I really like it here, it's so beautiful. The vegetation is super abundant here, the volcanoes are steep, the ocean is deep and the rocks and cliffs are rough volcanic stone - it's very different from where we live. It is incredible that on such small pieces of land in the middle of the Atlantic ocean there is so much diversity of nature and life - it blows my mind!" -Nara

"It was a year ago that we started to think about this journey and now it's already over. It was a lot of work for such a short time, but it was definitely worth it, because we experienced so many cool things that I've never done before. I'm grateful that we could experience all these special things, like scuba diving, seeing whales. I think we worked well as a group. Sometimes it was a bit hard for me to be with the group so much, but it worked out. I learned that I like to be with people, but sometimes I just need to be alone." -Adele

"Time passed super fast. I felt we were a nice group. We were laughing and having a lot of fun, and when we had our fights I felt Benjamin and Rabea could help and listen well to what we needed. I'm grateful for the opportunity to do this incredible journey. I'm grateful for all the nice people we met on the journey and for the people who offered us their homes to stay in." -Jona

"I think we all worked quite well, and I think we also traveled really nicely together. Sometimes I got annoyed by the others and I realized I should just take a little more alone time. It was a challenge that I learned to deal with. I take with me a lot of learnings, many different ones, and also some learnings for myself personally. I'm very grateful for everyone who supported us to make this very special journey possible."
-Amancai

"I am impressed with the group during this time. I feel everyone made a lot of effort to make it a good experience for everybody and to take care of each other's needs. There was a lot of care and support whenever one had a harder time and we managed to solve conflicts in a solidaric way.



I also enjoyed the humor and joy we had together, there was a lot of music, singing, dancing, laughing and playing.

My highlights were watching the children grow and learn through new experiences, like one example is when they came out of the water after scuba diving. I could see in their eyes the amazement about the new world they just discovered. Again and again we were in overwhelmingly beautiful Nature and I loved to see the awe of the beauty of this Earth in their eyes. Another example was in the time we spent with Andreas, the Trash Traveller, to see their engagement and care for this planet and the ocean and how precisely they are able to bring their voices for what they care about. I also saw them meet new people with openness and curiosity and am grateful for the friendliness and warmth they were met with." -Rabea

What moved me most on this journey was the maturity and wakefulness the youngsters carried, which was also reflected back to us by several people we met along the way.

The children did not travel as tourists, they arrived curious and left as something closer to what I would call caretakers, treating each place as if it were their own home in many ways. I was deeply glad they could engage with passionate scientists and activists who shared not only their knowledge, but their love for the Earth and the cultures woven into it. Watching them stretch beyond the familiar, away from family, navigating challenges together, I saw real growth in how they communicated and looked after one another and themselves. What also moved me was their willingness to engage with honest questions, especially in the preparation phase of this journey: about the privilege of travel, and the real footprint our journey leaves behind.

There were the moments that simply reached my heart, the experience of being together in the sheer, ancient beauty of the Algar do Carvão and the shared joy and awe of being close to vast ocean creatures. I am certain these kinds of direct experiences leave meaningful marks on their hearts. Meeting inspired people, being immersed in genuine experiences of nature, greeting the land and people with gratitude and respect, I believe many good seeds were planted in the hearts of these youngsters. I believe such a journey, where young people travel with caring and curious adults they trust and respect, who themselves carry questions about what is theirs to do, is an educational experience so rarely matched. I wish this kind of opportunity could be available to so many more young people, helping them seek a more meaningful way to move through this world." -Benjamin

