

Republica de Cuba ~
A Journal Zine



Dylan R. Metcalfe



2025 WINTER



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COVER IMAGES & BACKGROUND FLAG: CREATIVE COMMONS

CUBA AT A GLANCE

Area
110,860 square kilometers (about the size of Pennsylvania)

Form of government
Communist state

Population
11 million (2023)

Life expectancy
78 years (2020)

Gross domestic product (GDP)
\$107 billion (2020)

GDP per capita
\$9,500 (2020)

Languages
Spanish (official)

Religions
Christianity 59%, folk 18%, none 23% (2020)

Sources: CIA World Factbook, World Bank

A history of U.S. and Cuba relations

Graphic By: Christina Vessa

The fall of Batista

1959

Fidel Castro and his supporters lead a revolt against President Fulgencio Batista, establishing a socialist state under Castro.



1962

The Kennedy Administration imposes an economic embargo on Cuba.

1960

Castro raises taxes on American imports. President Dwight D. Eisenhower responds by cutting ties with the Castro government and reducing imports on Cuban sugar.

1961

Bay of Pigs Invasion: President John F. Kennedy orders a military invasion to overthrow the communist Castro government April 17, 1961. The invasion failed.



Castro triumphant



1980

The Mariel Boatlift: President Jimmy Carter welcomes over 125,000 Cubans into the U.S.



1962

Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Union builds a missile base on Cuba. President Kennedy orders a blockade. Upon negotiations with Russia, the U.S. withdraws its missiles from Turkey.

1996

The Helms-Burton Act: Embargo on Cuba is tightened by penalizing foreign companies for doing business with the country.



1966

The U.S. Congress passes the Cuban Adjustment Act, allowing Cubans and their families to obtain permanent residence in the U.S.



1998

Arrest of the Cuban Five.



2012

Cuba lifts visa restrictions for Cubans who previously needed government permission to travel abroad.

2014

The U.S. and Cuba restore diplomatic ties following the return of U.S. subcontractor Alan Gross in exchange for three Cuban prisoners.

2008

Raúl Castro becomes president of Cuba.

2009

President Obama lifts travel restrictions to Cuba.

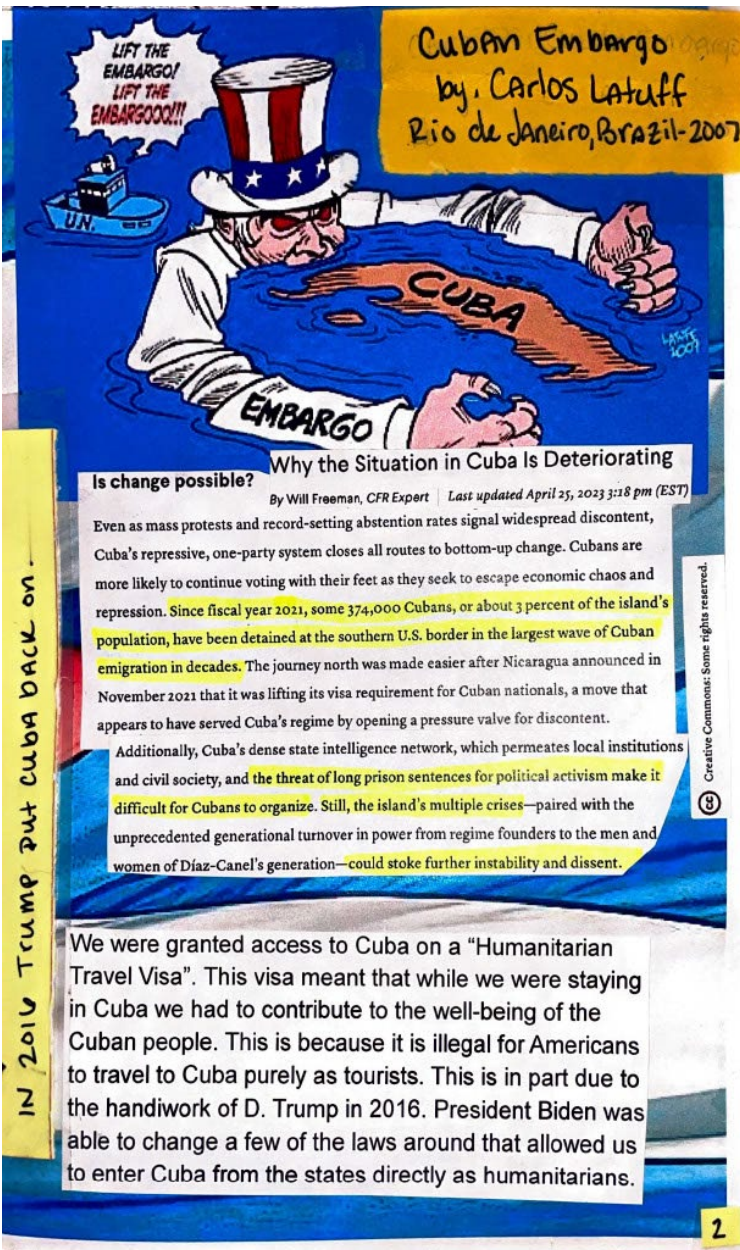


2015

The Seventh Summit of the Americas is held in Panama. President Obama may decide to lift Cuba from the list of state sponsor of international terrorism.

by the end of Obama's term, he did lift Cuba from the international terrorist list.

Source: The Council on Foreign Relations



Welcome to Havana!

Arriving in a country that is extremely impoverished, as a student with my own poverty experience, AND traveling with very wealthy people was a dynamic that took me several days to feel settled with. In some ways, I am still uncomfortable with the dynamic.



Our all-inclusive humanitarian trip was a thinly veiled elitist tourist vacation. While touring Havana we stayed in the nicest hotel in the country. We ate at the finest restaurants in the nicest bubbles of town. While we drove past the dilapidated buildings and the stray dogs, the closest we ever got to any of the real poverty of Cuba was when Cubans would beg for a dollar as we walk past. **Most commonly they were asking for medicine and bandages, clothing and food.**

There are rolling power blackouts throughout the country. Not many places are exempt from losing power. The further you are from the largest cities the longer those blacks last per day. For example, our scuba master while in the Gardens of the Queen had expressed that his family who all live several hours from Camagüey (the second largest city after Havana) experience up to 18 hours of no power a day. To put this into further perspective, most of the government buildings in the capital of Cuba sit empty because it is too expensive to staff the buildings let alone power them. **Most hospitals do not have back up generators.** And yet, the only time that my tour group experienced a power outage the entire 12 days we were in Cuba was on the very least day, while getting our visas checked on our way out of the country, and at an international airport. I personally had experienced the power outage once prior to this on the very first day as soon as I had arrived in Havana. Before meeting up with my group, I had ventured out into the city, only a few miles away from our hotel to get a tattoo from someone I had found on the internet and began talking to months prior to the trip. Halfway through the tattoo appointment the lights go out, and the only room cooled by AC goes off. I was initially startled, but quickly noticed my artist was unphased and simply opened the sealed shutter windows to let both light and air into the space.



There are more artists than there are people to buy art in this country.



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Alain (A-Line) Rubio was our tour guide while in Havana. He did a spectacular job at showing us the pretty and being very honest about the struggles and hardships that the Cuban people have never been free of. He is a Cuban native who got a college degree in linguistics. He did not set out to be a tour guide, but it is one of the more higher paying jobs in Havana and he is proud of the work he does. There were many moments that he and I connected on a level that he could never with the others I were traveling with simply because we have a similar lived experience.



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The hardest moment for me was during the classic car riding tour around downtown Havana. It was so glamorous to sit on the back of a 1960 convertible, dancing and singing on a sunny day. It was THE most touristy thing we had done the entire trip. While singing to the song Havana by Camila Cabello on the car speakers, and the photographer prompting us to pose as we pass by beautiful backdrops, I catch a blurred glimpse of the broken cobbled off streets, and the empty buildings populated by Cubans attempting to sell their hand-woven hats and hand painted fans. Just for an extra buck. I was left with a deep pit in my stomach. I felt as though the hundreds of dollars that it cost to have this experience, while not without its benefit to our driver and those who organize the trip, could have helped so many other humans in such bigger and impactful ways.

← Dylan & Penny
Photo: Cultural Cuba tour Co.

Photo Caption
TOP → DOWN
→ Alain in dynamic tour guide mode.
→ Dylan & Ana Showing off Ana's TAT WORK on Dylan's Hand.
→ A closed CAFE in old Havana.
→ The single largest & store front spotted on route from Havana to Camaguey.



The people were amazingly cheerful and pleasant. The food was phenomenal, the music, art and culture were thick and on every corner. The joy and creativity were a clear response to having no other choice when living in dilapidated buildings with no clean water.

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Should I ever find myself in Cuba again I plan to bring enough money to buy thousands of dollars' worth of art and be an active participant in building a power plant, a sewer system and a stronger electrical grid.

14/2/25 Biodiversity Record

NAME	SPECIES	1"	2"	3"
MAUR	GLASSY REEF SHEEP			
Dylan	NASSAW GROUPER			
LIZ	BLUE GROUPER			
ROB	GROUPER			
MAY	THREE SPARKLE			
WAYNE	GREEN MORA			
KELLY	MASS BELL			
Dylan	TIGER GROUPER			
MARY	REMORA			
Lori	RAINBOW PARROT FISH			
Taver	MIDNIGHT PARROT FISH			
KIM	LION FISH			
Quasi	BARTACH DA			
Dale	ONE ANGLER			
Sillian	YELLOW FIN GROUPER			
JIM	QUEEN TIGER			
JON	JAYDON			
JEFF	PERMIT			
TH	GREAT WHITE			
Brian	UPPER			
APOL	QUEEN ANGEL			
SPARK	2 LATE GROUPER			
THOM	ECUADOR SOCIETY			
ALAN	SPERM WHALE			

Legend:
 1 = 0
 10 = Single (S)
 2 = 10 = Few (F)
 10 = 100 = Many (M)
 + 10 = Abundant (A)

Our task as 'humanitarians' was to pick a species of fish to identify while diving. Record how many fish we spot at each dive each day. This data was then sent to a marine biologist to help track the population in each area and to monitor overall reef health.

Unfortunately, this was a very poor method, as I was the only classically trained scientific surveyor on the trip.

Left: photo of the Biodiversity Board.



I counted BOTH
NASSAW GROUPERS
&
TIGER GROUPERS

While in Cuba we learned that despite tourism from America being illegal, more than 80% of Cuban tourism is funded by American tourists. I fear what the current US administration can do to continue to strangle Cuba and their highest profiting income resource.

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Geology of Cuba



Figure 1. (Top) Tectonic map of the northern Caribbean region. (Bottom) Generalized geologic-tectonic map of Cuba modified from Iturralde-Vinent (2011).

"Cuba is the largest island in the Greater Antilles, and its geology records three important episodes: (1) the Jurassic breakup of North and South America (Pangea) and associated passive margin and oceanic sedimentary and magmatic evolution; (2) the sedimentary, magmatic, and metamorphic evolution of an intra-oceanic Cretaceous-Paleogene ophiolite-arc complex; and (3) the Paleogene "soft collision" and transfer of the NW Caribbean plate (and Cuba) to the North American plate."

GSA Today: Article pp. 4-10 Vol 26 ISSN 1052-0173 (Oct 2016) The Geology of Cuba: A brief overview and Synthesis

IMPORTANCE OF THE GARDENS



"About one-quarter of the planet's marine species depend on the food and shelter provided by tropical coral reefs—habitat that spans just one percent of the ocean floor. You can find almost 8 percent those reefs growing in Caribbean Sea, including this one visible near the southern coast of Cuba."

NASA Earth Observatory - Jan. 14 2020
"Cuba's Gulf of Guacanabo"

Science News Explores - March 15 2018
"Exploring the Mysteries of Cuba's Coral Reefs" By Bryn Nelson

"To the east, scuba divers and researchers love exploring another underwater wonderland. It's called Gardens of the Queen National Park and is about 90 kilometers (56 miles) off of Cuba's southeastern shore. Coral reefs there are so pristine that some visitors have nicknamed it "The Crown Jewel of the Caribbean."



← Allstar live boards

The Gardens of the Queen were breathtaking, and I did not know I would love diving with sharks as much as I did. I had such a fulfilling experience there. And yet it was equally devastating.

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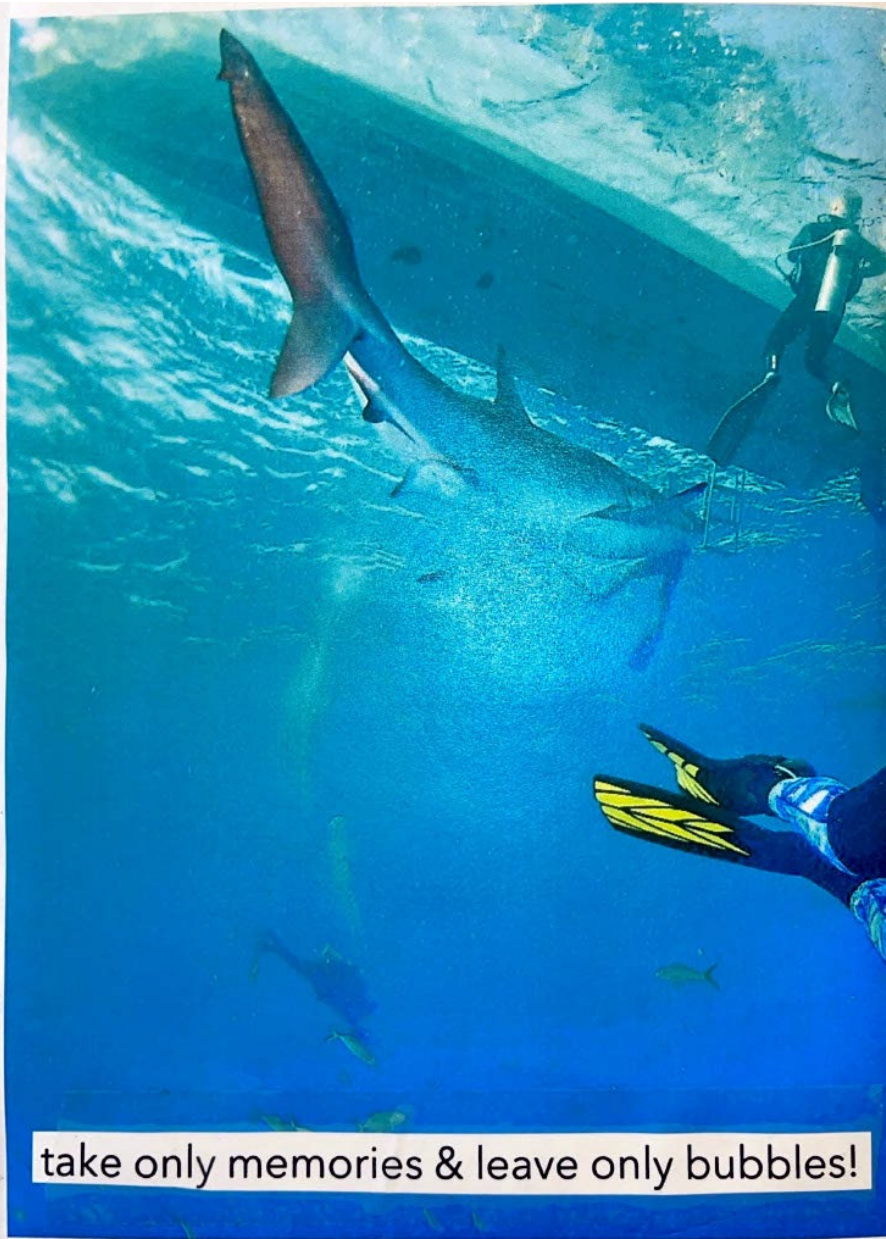
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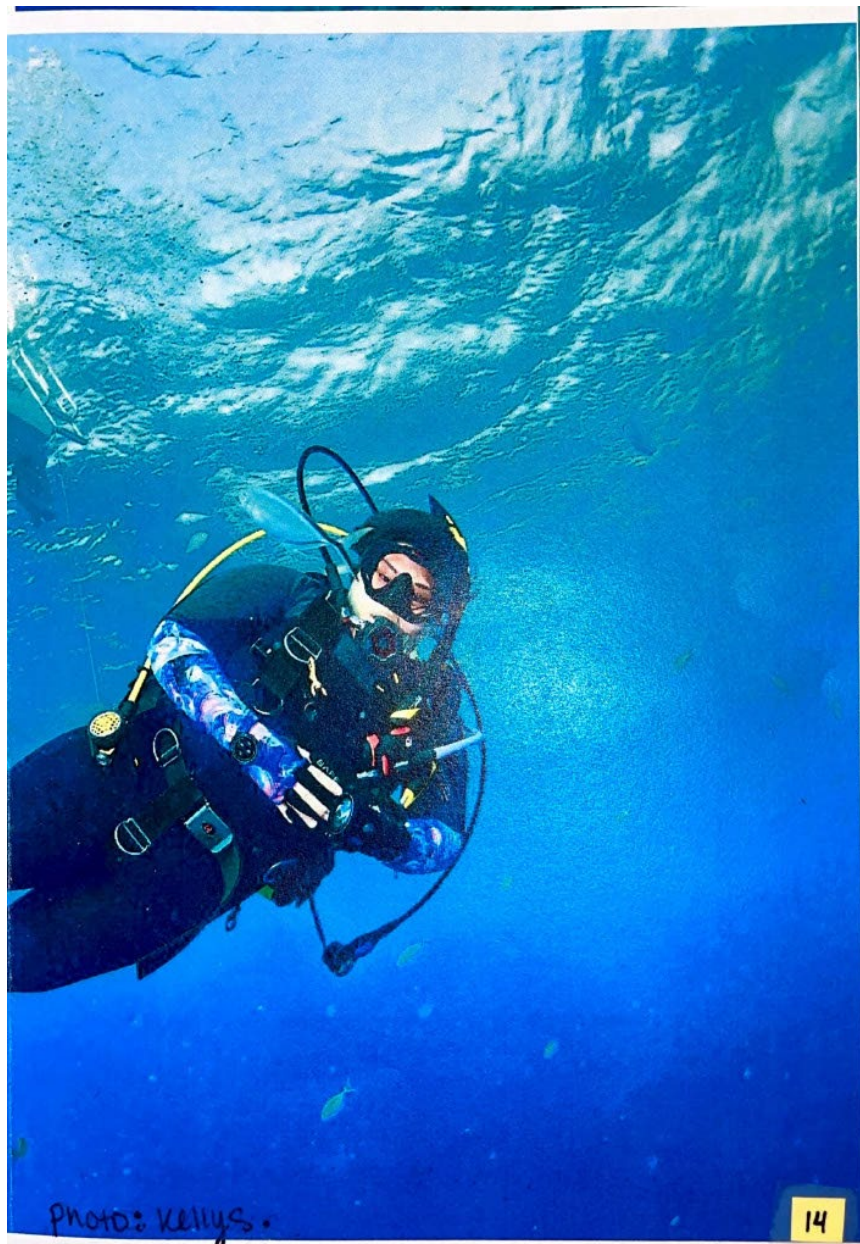
SCUBA Highlights





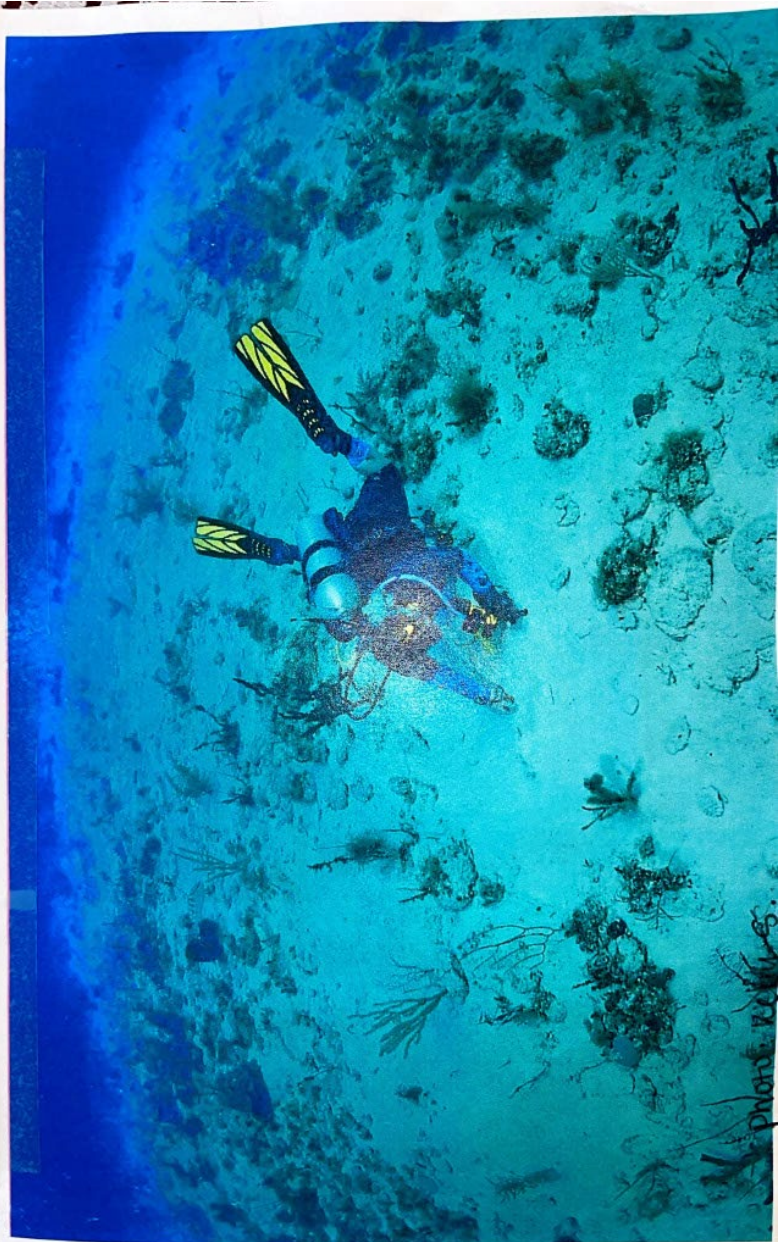


take only memories & leave only bubbles!



* All photos by Dylan unless otherwise stated.

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→ Cuban Sand ←

We spent 7 days in the Gardens of the Queen (GQ). We dove about 4 times a day every day. Adding up to 22 dives all around the mangroves and reefs. I briefed my dive master on my mission to collect at least one sand sample to bring home and evaluate. He lit up in excitement and brought me to two sites with visibly different sand composition.



The Sand that is considerably darker in color is a combination of the sand formation processes for the sample, one but clearly there is another process involved.



4 Google maps 4



TENDER #2 Group!

All star liveboards

He explained to me how most of the sand in Cuba is created in one of two ways. The first is by process of this algae *Halimeda copiosa* that naturally calcified over time as it grows and drops down to the reef floor to be ground up over time and turned into sand.



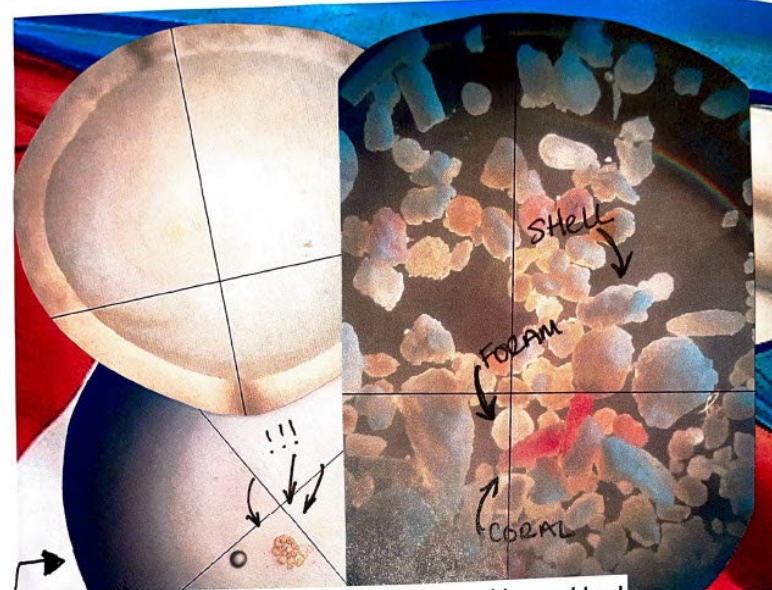
The second process is related to this in that other animals like the Parrot fish and sea cucumbers eat the same algae and end up depositing the sand we see today through their digestive system.



"Some species grow so vigorously in tropical lagoons that the sediment is composed solely of the remains of their tissues, forming a calcareous **"Halimeda sand"**. In fact some tropical reef systems, such as atolls, consist largely of Halimeda sand accumulated over the aeons.^[1] Overall, *Halimeda* represents the most common green algae large grains in the sediment of the lower latitudes." (Wikipedia)



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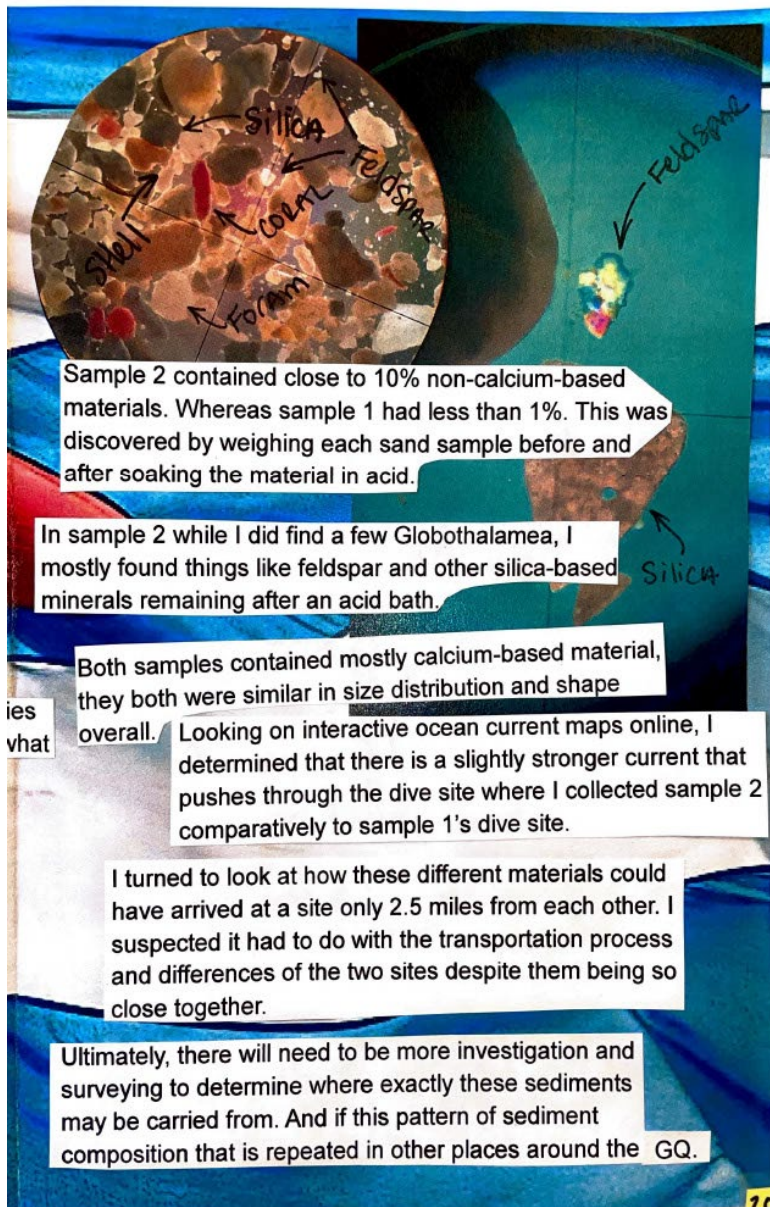
After collecting, drying and bringing the sand home I had the opportunity to start to evaluate the sand samples and their differences. Both by the naked eye and under a polarized microscope.

I had found that there was quite a bit of similarity between the two samples. The differences are what intrigued me the most.

The things that remained in sand sample 1 were primarily organic material. Primarily things like the microscopic remains of a Globothalamea, a multichambered foraminifera.

Geologically speaking, there is a nearby break in the small islands where the current from the Caribbean push inward closer to site 2. And site 1 is more protected against the middle stretch of the island. This suggests that the faster current has more energy go carry other sediments into the GQ and deposit near the 'corner' of the closest island as the current pushes in between the two land masses.

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Honorable Mention
 Dr. Kaatje Kraft
 For being my mentor in
 Not only this project but
 for the last several years!

AllStar LIVEABOARDS

Cuba's famous Gardens of the Queen, protected since 1996, is a fascinating and unique place to explore.



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