

the cuba diaries

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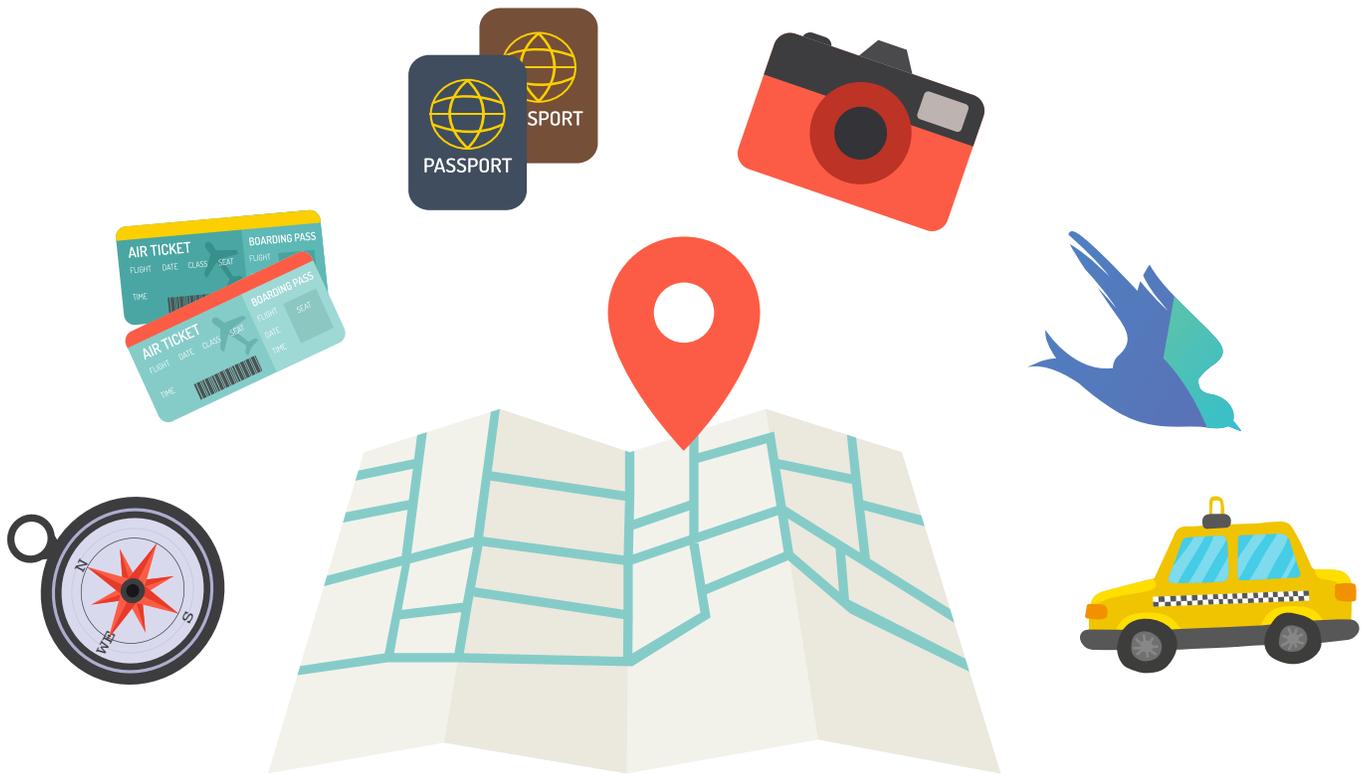
Crocodylus rhombifer is ready for a close up.



From Central Park to Zapata National Park

Macaulay students were given the opportunity to take part in a unique experience in Cuba—studying tropical ecology at the Peninsula de Zapata National Park with scientists from America and Cuba.

The site is one of the Caribbean's most important wetland areas, and at nearly 700,000 acres, one of the largest biosphere reserves in Cuba. It was a rare chance for the students to explore a site that is relatively untouched by coastal development.



Making it happen...

Going from New York City to Havana doesn't happen over night. An overview of the nitty gritty details behind this exciting adventure.

Who?

Ten Macaulay Honors College students left New York City with Baruch College associate professor David Gruber. Co-teaching the course were two noted ornithologists from the University of Havana, Drs. Lourdes Mugica Valdes and Martin Acosta Cruz, who greeted the students at the airport in Havana.

Why?

Macaulay students made the trip as part of a study abroad course called Cuban Tropical Forests and Reefs. Over the two-week period, they conducted marine and terrestrial fieldwork by collecting data, analyzing it and then presenting their results and conclusions.

How?

This trip was made possible through funds from the Chancellor's Strategic Investment Initiative and is the college's first field study program in partnership with the University of Havana's department of biology and institute for marine biology research. Given that climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental toxification cross international boundaries, students in this field should have a global understanding of these issues.



To remain competitive in a global economy, U.S. undergraduates need exposure to the international community through study abroad. Thanks to the Opportunities Fund almost 70% of Macaulay students study abroad, five times the comparable national rate.



I cannot begin to describe how much this trip meant to me. These past few days have not only supplied me with so much knowledge about animals and nature—which I had been trying to fall back in love with—but also family.

Here, in this beautiful country, I finally learned how to swim, got over my fear of spiders, and learned so much in an environment that I could only have dreamed up.

Leanne







I have learned so much and you have given me so many opportunities to apply my knowledge in the field, which is very important to me since I'm a city girl who wants to work in nature for a career. These past few months I've kind of been doubting myself and this course has reminded me why I love biology so much and that being a conservationist is the only goal I consider devoting my life to.

I never thought I would get to visit Cuba and I thought that my connections to this country would die when my grandfather did. I'm so happy to know that this is only the beginning of my journey with reconnecting to my country and its allure and its life.

Anna

Anna McPheran '16 (Queens) gets a look at *Cubophis cantherigus*.



Never in my life have I done anything that has resonated with who I am as this trip has. I've done many things in my life, and been to many places, but only Cuba has ever given me the feeling as if I was home.

Antonio



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David Gruber & Anna McPherran