

April Talisman

Courage is grace under pressure. Ernest Hemingway

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MSOR People to People Exchange

Top 3 Things to Do In Cuba

1



Stay In Old Habana

2



Rent A Vintage Car

3



Learn To Salsa

The Importance Of Global Travel For Students

At an early age my parents exposed me to this beautiful planet through education and global travel. Jim and I have the pleasure of passing on the same exposure to our Adolescent students.

The recent People-to-People exchange to Cuba gave our students the opportunity to share a smile, make a friend, and gain real insight into the culture and customs of the Cuban people. Our Adolescents had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the Spanish language; they learned the importance of gaining a proficiency in Spanish for education and work.

The students had the opportunity to see the world from a much broader perspective and experience themselves as global citizens. The students interacted with the people of Cuba not just as tourists, they took the opportunity to build lasting relationships with some of the people of Cuba.

We want MSOR students to be global citizens, help solve the problem of our planet, be ambassadors of tolerance, empathy, respect, and peace. It was an amazing trip for many reasons. We hope you can join us on April 28th, for “Havana Nights,” a cultural exchange. We will have photos & videos, Cuban food & drinks, Cuban music & free Salsa dance lessons.

Ms. Shemi

Our experience in Cuba was amazing! The streets were filled with flavorful music and diverse people. As we walked out of the Ambos Mundos hotel with our suitcases and backpacks in hand, I knew that it would be my last time seeing this wonderful country as it is before it changes for tourists. When I walked down the cobblestone streets and through the crowd gathered around the marching band on stilts, I realized just how lucky we were to be experiencing the unique culture and vast history in person; not in a textbook, not only through pictures and art, and not through the news, but experiencing Cuba as if we were locals.

In Cuba we learned about their culture, politics, music, art, food, dancing, language, landscape, and history. An example of what we learned is this: because Cuba was colonized by Spain, it is a Spanish-speaking country. Most people speak Spanish which meant that we had to speak Spanish to locals and tourists that spoke this common language. We spoke what we knew and learned what we didn't. We were able to see many viewpoints about Cuba's economy, politics, culture, and history. I came to Cuba with an open mind and left with a mind full of knowledge and understanding.

When I saw how poverty in Cuba, it made me appreciate everything that I have. The dilapidated houses made me thankful for my house; the crowded school made me thankful for my school; the propaganda made me thankful for my government and country; and the poor families made me thankful for my family and the blessings we have. Going to Cuba opened my eyes to a world that was not like mine at all; it opened my eyes to a world that I can help; it opened my eyes to a country that needs our help.



When we were standing in front of scenery taking pictures, I realized that no camera on earth could ever capture the beauty of Cuba. When we were dancing the night away by learning how to salsa in the streets of Havana, I realized that not many experiences could compare. When we were listening to one Cuban band play, then it stops to let another one play across the street, I realized that we were actually in Cuba (How cool is that?!). When we visited a school for children with dysfunctional families, I realized how blessed I am to have a great family and school. On this trip to Cuba, I realized my full human potential and how to help people around me using the resources that I have.

Elsa Quay Corbin



Cuba, the small socialist country, is heavily influenced by Europe. Cuba may be economically poor, but the country itself has more beauty inside than I anticipated. This was my first international Adolescent trip. I was so excited. I love to travel. I have wanted to go to Cuba for a couple of years. Cuba is historically rich, and you can sense its richness with every step you take. Because of recent changes in law, the Cuban borders have recently opened to Americans. When I found out that we were going, I was so excited that I could barely sleep at night. It is a privilege to be able to go to Cuba. We may even be the first American middle school group to go to Cuba.

When we landed I could feel the heat just rushing into my body. It was a feeling that I had never felt before. I was standing next to the people I love and having an amazing moment. It is like we had accomplished something. At the arrival gate we met Mrs. Gabby, our tour guide, and later we met Roberto, our bus driver. We loaded the bus and headed to Revolution Square. There we saw an image of Camillo and Che Guevara, who were both socialist leaders. We took a few pictures and left for lunch. We ate at the Betty Boom restaurant. Most of us had either a pizza or a sandwich. It was delicious. Our hotel called us because they were ready for us to check in.

We stayed at Hemingway's hotel. Although it was old, it has more beauty than any other hotel. We all took a shower and got dressed to go to the cannon ceremony at the fort. Havana has historically been a walled city. Today, most of the wall has depleted or corroded. Little remains of the fort. A group went around the fort to see a gathering of soldiers as they marched and shouted commands with drums playing. Every time they went around, more and more people joined. As the fuse of the cannon went out, there was a large bang. It took so long. I was not expecting it to go off that loud. I stood in shock. I have never seen or heard a cannon go off before. It was amazing. The troops played their drums and exited dramatically.

We toured Old Havana and found a Catholic school for ages 2-4. The school was for children whose parents were displaced and needed help. During school they would sing and learn all day. Thankfully we were allowed in and joined the kids in singing. They were so cute and always happy. We then went and got private salsa lessons. It was lots of fun. I couldn't wait to go home and show my parents. We were all dressed up and got to ride in classic cars. We went to the ocean side and hired a photographer to take pictures of us. We took so many. As the sun set, we headed to dinner. Many of us danced to the music; it was hard to resist. We enjoyed every moment.

We went zip lining deep in the forest. We then swam in a river leading to a small waterfall. We were so tired that on the ride back, each one of us were asleep. We got back to the hotel and all took showers, got dressed, and went to an Italian restaurant. There we danced and had a lot of fun. This was our last night in Havana. I packed everything to get ready to go. I took a deep breath and a last glimpse of the city.

I was sad to leave, but before we left we headed to the village market. There I bought plenty of things for myself and my family. I bought so much that I did not know if I could fit everything in my bag. The trip to Verdero was long, but short. The view kept me busy. When we got there we checked in and all got wristbands. We ate a little lunch and headed to the beach and pool. That night we had a picture session and ate at the buffet. After we ate, we danced and watched a show with plenty of dancing.

We woke early ready to have a great last day. We took a bus to the docks where we boarded a catamaran. We sat on the net and it felt as if we were gliding on water. We swam with dolphins and snorkeled. Finally, we ate at a large buffet a few feet from the beach of the small island.

Shehan Sundrani





We went to Cuba on spring break from March 27th to April 1st. We went to Havana first. I had a bad experience in the hotel we stayed in. First, the shower glass broke. Second, water was dripping in the bathrooms. I had to switch rooms twice. Some of the Cuban restaurants didn't have any menus in English. They just gave out food (pre-set menu - I did not like this). Some of the roads were bumpy. The sun was strong.

I felt lucky to visit Cuba, because Americans don't visit Cuba that often. We went to Cuba to learn about Cuban history and practice our Spanish. We also got to try Cuban food and listen to some Cuban music.

We had a tour guide named Gabby who was awesome. All of us miss her already. I enjoyed dancing with her. We enjoyed walking around Havana and taking pictures. The funniest thing was dancing after dinner. We danced everywhere.

One of the main things that I missed was American food. At first I didn't want to go. But I realized how fun it was so I wished we could stay even longer. We wanted to visit Cuba before everything changes.

We rode on the catamaran and we liked sitting on the net. We also loved swimming with dolphins. The dolphin's name was Jessica. Next, we stopped to snorkel, and then we went to the beach. They had bananas, but they're sweeter than American bananas. The lemonade wasn't so good. I miss everything except for the food. The hotdogs tasted like chicken. They served hotdogs for breakfast.

We went to a Cuban school. The teachers took us to all the classes. The kids were around the ages of 2 to 4. They were having music class. The little kids were cute. We gave the children gifts of markers, coloring books, and pencils. They don't have a lot of markers in Cuba. **Kristen Daniel**



Our educational trip to Cuba was amazing. When we arrived at the hotel, all the buildings looked old and many were being rebuilt. On the inside there was electricity and other modern items. It felt like we had a warm greeting when performers were walking around the city, giving people a high five, dancing, and played music. It was an amazing first day.

Our next day of the trip was the day we learned a bit about salsa dancing. It started out when we went to the roof for breakfast. Then we left to see Hemingway's house and his boat. After that we went by the fishing village for lunch. The menus in most places are limited for us. This is also the day that I learned every food on the Island is made and grown on the island. Then we went to go learn how to salsa. I could keep the beat, but I did not want to dance. The beat is 1, 2, 3, _, 5, 6, 7.

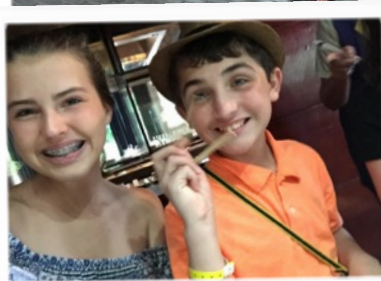
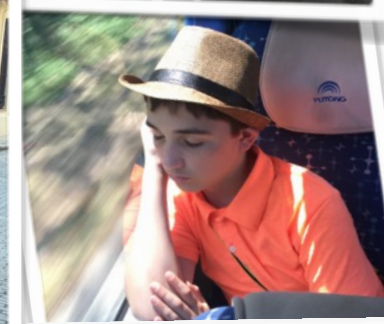
Day three was the fun day of Havana. We went zip-lining, walked through a river, and saw Hemingway's room in the hotel. This was a few people's first time ziplining, so I did what I could to help. This zip line was not the biggest or the farthest, but it was still fun. Walking through the river was not my favorite thing that day. The rocks were still slippery even with Tevas on. That day we ate late; I was very grumpy. I was knocked out when I got to our room. I found out that I sleep walked and talked that night. I walked and turned the lights on; then I began to mumble random words. It was a fun, yet tiring day.

Our fourth day, we gave gifts to a Cuban school with amazing little kids. It was so sad to see because these kids had parents that were not able to take care of them. It did make me feel better when they sang, danced, and had smiles on their faces. We then left to go to our new hotel. It took a few hours to get there. The view on the ride was amazing. There were so many trees and mountains. It was beautiful. When we got there, one of the first things that we did was go to the beach. We saw a baby Tiger Shark. First, it went around Gaven first, then it went near the group that was farther out. I believe that it was because so many people were bunched up together.

The fifth day was the water study day. We went on a catamaran, dolphin experience, snorkeling, built a sand castle on the beach, and met new friends. The day was a blast. We were allowed to sit on the net of the catamaran. I enjoyed it for the view of the water underneath. On the boat we met a 7 year old named Jack. I got along with him well. While we were on the catamaran waiting to get to the dolphin experience, we played rock, paper, scissors with two hands and other games. When we got there, it was his first time doing something like that. Since I have done something like this before, I went beside him. He acted like a little cousin you don't see that much. Then they surprise you, and either one of you can get carried away. Next we went snorkeling. I have never been a fan of snorkeling, but I still did it. Even though it wasn't my

favorite part of the day, it was still fun. So, after Jack and I went on the net, we rough housed a little until we got to the beach. Kaylie and I built an amazing sand castle. I say amazing because of the defense system we made around it. When we had to leave, I saw another little kid continuing to work on it. We then decided on what to eat for dinner and went with Japanese. They had a restaurant at the hotel, but they could only take eleven. We went to bed early to prepare for our journey home the next day.

The last day we woke up early in order to get all our stuff together and to make it on time. While we were on the bus, the adults had to go buy a few more things. The bus driver Roberto stayed, and we had a blast. I mainly journaled during that time, but I could hear all of it. It seemed like an instant and then we were at the airport saying our goodbyes. A few tears were shed. I was so glad my mom gave me some tissues to blow my nose. I was able to share these with those who needed them. We got to the airport thinking that we were not going to make it in time. We ended up making it on time, and soon we got on the plane. The flight back seemed shorter. I was the unlucky one on the plane that had a faulty TV. I guess I was saving my luck for customs. Almost no one was there, and it took less than ten minutes to get completely through. We all miss Cuba and want to go back. On the bright side, I am glad to have food I am familiar with, and I am glad to see my family after the trip. *Isaiah Girgis*





Cuba is a wonderful country which I enjoyed very much. The buildings look European and are mostly colorful. There are lots of billboards and graffiti supporting socialism and Fidel Castro. The graffiti in Cuba is pretty to see, and you can tell someone put a lot of effort into their mural. The streets in Cuba have lots of people walking around, and some of them are putting on acts so tourists will give them money. There are not that many cars that go down the streets where people are walking, but some do. Most cars in Cuba are from the 1950s, and many of them are brightly colored. They can have modern cars, but the cost is equal to that of a house in America. Our tour guide for the trip was a Cuban woman named Gabby; our bus driver for the trip was a Brazilian man named Roberto.

The people in Cuba are all very nice. In Cuba there is always music playing. The places we stayed at in Cuba are Havana, and Varadero. We stayed mainly in an area of Havana called old Havana. It was full of architecture from the days when it was still a Spanish colony. Varadero is also a nice town, but it is more of a town for tourists. Ambos Mundos is the hotel we stayed at in Havana; it is the same hotel Ernest Hemingway stayed at while his house was being built. The one in Varadero is more modern looking, has a pool, and you could go to the beach there. Every night at that hotel, they would put on different shows for the guests to watch.

We toured all sorts of places in Cuba and had many interesting cultural experiences. In our hotel, we toured Ernest Hemingway's room. You walk into museums in Havana without paying anything. One museum was about the Arabs who came to Cuba for trading purposes, and one was filled with antiquities from Cuba's founding. The Arab museum was filled with objects like weapons and accessories that belonged to them. All of us toured Ernest Hemingway's house which was great since we are reading *The Old Man and the Sea* in literature. We swam with dolphins and took pictures with a dolphin. We all went snorkeling and ziplining too.

There are several things that I noticed about Cuba which are unique. One is that there are a lot of stray cats and dogs in the cities. Also, most restaurants do not have menus; we only went to one where there was a menu; other than that, the restaurants have your food already set out for you. Pork and rice with beans are the most common foods there. I also noticed that Cubans use beautiful tile as their flooring. Finally, lots of people smoke in Cuba, but they smoke cigarettes, not cigars as might be guessed.

I believe we all had fun in Cuba and made lots of memorable experiences. We all learned new things about each other and about the country. All of us would like to go back to Cuba so we can go to the places we did not visit before, such as Viñales. We would also like to see Cuba again so we can spend more time with our tour guide Gabby. Cuba is a gorgeous country, rich with history, and we are all glad we got to experience it.

Kaylie Martin



A fundamental part of the Montessori Curriculum is traveling. Throughout my time at Montessori, I have been to many different places including Mexico, New York, Virginia, and Costa Rica, but almost nothing can compare to Cuba. This year we decided to go to Cuba for our “big trip.” We went to two cities, Havana and Veradero. Havana was historic and full of culture. Veradero is a small city on the Norther Caribbean Cost with lots of luxurious resorts. Before we went to Cuba, I thought it would be a struggling country with serious poverty. We watched a documentary on Netflix called *Cuba Libre*. This documentary gave us a good idea of what Cuba’s history and got us ready to understand Cuba today.

Our trip was full of fun and education. Where people had once fought, in Revolution Square, we walked. We went zip lining, rode on a catamaran, and even kissed a dolphin. We stayed in Havana for three days and Veradero for two days. In Havana (or as the local’s call it Habana) we stayed at the Ambos Mundos Hotel where Ernest Hemingway had once lived. We saw his work area and where he wrote brilliant novels that we read today. We also walked through Revolution Square where Fidel Castro, Che guevara, and Cienfuegos all fought. The feeling of walking through Revolution Square really got to me. There I imagined how lucky we are to be some of the first Americans to come back to Cuba. We are probably one of the only middle schools in Georgia to take big trips to Cuba. Another experience we had was riding around in 1950’s convertibles. Not only did we get a very scenic view of Havana and the ocean, but we also had a photo shoot with the colorful cars. During our whole tour we had an awesome tour guide, Gabby, as well as a chill bus driver, Roberto. These two-people toured us around the beautiful country of Cuba.

In Veradero, we stayed at the luxurious Iberostar Resort, which was right on the beach. In Veradero, we went to the beach and experienced a baby shark attack. We also had chicken fights in the ocean; Mr. Jim and I defeated Gaven and Nicholas. We all had a great time. At the resort,

each evening they had a variety show. These shows were a part of our “People to People,” exchange. The first night, the show was about Cuban history of sugar, Coffee, rum, tobacco and the second night was the Grammys in which we saw “Michael Jackson” and “Queen” perform. At the resort they had many different types of cuisine: Japanese, Italian, and Cuban. It was an all-inclusive resort so you could just walk up to a bar and get a Strawberry Daiquiri (Virgin, of course!). You could also go to the snack or lunch buffet and get an endless amount of delicious food. There was also a giant pool where you could go and relax. The one time we wanted to go to the pool, the maintenance crew had to come put more chlorine in the pool, so it was closed for the day. Also in Cuba, almost every restaurant we went to had a live band of some sort. After or before dinner, our class would go and practice our newly learned skills of salsa in front of everyone else. We loved this dance immediately.

In Veradero, we took a catamaran to an island about an hour off the coast. On the catamaran, we met this seven year old boy named Jack. His parents were from China, but they had just recently moved to Canada. We played *rock, paper, scissors*, with him, and made a new friend. At one point Jack and Isaiah started wrestling and we all thought that Jack had a certain future as a wrestler. Our first stop on the catamaran was interacting with, “Jessica,” the dolphin and second was snorkeling in the Caribbean. My predictions of Cuba were somewhat correct and incorrect; I can’t wait to go back.

Illiyaan Sundrani



On Spring Break 2017, the Montessori Adolescent Class was allowed a once in a lifetime opportunity to go to Cuba. I knew before I went on the trip that I would most likely never return to Cuba again, and I didn't think I would want to return either. However, after going to Cuba I would love to return! Cydney and I have actually already started working with our pastors on partnering up and putting a mission trip together.

This trip, unlike other trips the class has taken, was a "people-to-people" trip instead of a trip focused directly on education, it was a cultural exchange between our two countries. I liked this trip better because we could independently observe the culture and people, instead of being tied down to learning things you might not be interested in. Even though I know that my classmates and I would like to take credit for putting the whole trip together, we didn't. Our teachers and parents helped tremendously, and without their help, we wouldn't have been able to go on this spectacular excursion.

Our trip began at the Atlanta International Airport on March 27th, when we took our flight to Havana. When we arrived, we met our guide Gaby, whom we had only seen in pictures from Ms. Shemi's trip previous trip. Even from the pictures we knew that she was an awesome person. She spent every day of the trip with us, which made it even harder for us to leave her on April 1st. Gaby was an amazing guide and friend; we all miss her a lot.

Most public bathrooms in Cuba do not provide the common items you would need and do not function the way you would want them to. When you go to the bathroom in Cuba, don't expect the toilet to flush; doors to lock, sink to work, etc. Don't think that the stall will be any larger than the room you have in the passenger seat of a car; don't expect toilet paper to be provided. You will most likely be handed a few sheets before you go in to the bathroom, you will have to pay for it. This is not something you would find in America.

Before I went to Cuba, I wasn't grateful for the small things that you don't have to worry about in America, and I feel like most Americans aren't either. As Americans, we typically complain about our country instead of opening up our eyes to the world around us and realizing how lucky we are. Even though there are problems in America, other countries have it much worse. What made Cuba so amazing to me is that even though they had problems, they never complained about them. In Cuba everyone is equal; you wait your turn in lines; and you don't get special privileges over anyone else. Everyone earns their money, and they respect what they have and what they can do with it.

I feel like Americans think Cuba is a deserted country, in the middle of nowhere, where no one has been to in the past 60 years; all that happens there is war, and all Cubans try to escape because they hate it. However, it is nothing like that. Cubans are happy to live in their country; they are proud of it. They don't complain about where they live; they rejoice in it. Everywhere you go in Cuba, you will see some sort of sign that says something amazing about Cuba. After visiting, I felt embarrassed about how judgmental most people, including myself, have been of Cuba.

If you have never gone to Cuba, you might think about the country's history, which includes a lot of fighting and revolting, but a lot of other country's history is like that as well. The biggest lesson this trip taught me: do not make judgments about people or places based on what you hear or read. You need to base your evaluations on experience. I know that most people won't be able to travel to Cuba, and that's what makes me so grateful for this experience. *Mary Ella Bussey*



Our hard work finally paid off; our trip to Cuba was amazing. We learned many things about the history and culture of Cuba. Before I went to Cuba, I had predicted that the revolution had not only sparked a great change but made the people continue to suffer in Cuba. I learned that for the Cubans the revolution was the best thing that could have happened to them. From the spark of the revolution to today, many changes have been made. From the eyes of Cubans, all these changes were good changes. After watching the Cuba Libre documentary on Netflix, I imagined Cuba to be a country in poverty that continues to struggle. When I visited Cuba, I learned that they may be poor economically, but certainly not culturally. Cubans are very proud of are their architecture, education, healthcare, food, art, music, and dance.

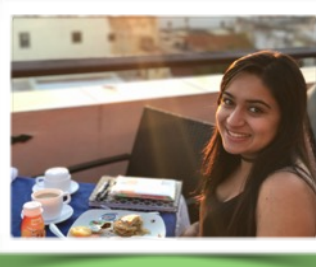
The food in Cuba is all grown in Cuba. Imported goods are very expensive for the local people. I observed the drinks on some of the menus, occasionally offered imported drinks, but if you look at the prices for these drinks you will find that they are more expensive than the drinks made in Cuba. For example, if I wanted a Coke (which is made in Mexico) it was \$2.00 in CUC, versus a Cuban Cola for \$1.00 in CUC. Most produce are organically grown. For some of us the food was not appealing because they serve healthy, unprocessed food, while in America, we a lot of processed foods. Every meal they served bread, soup, and rice. Cubans eat mostly fish and pork because these are the cheapest meats in Cuba. Chicken and beef were very expensive and hard to obtain. Cuba was not exposed to American culture for the last 50 years; however, they were exposed to European cultures. We saw that the Cubans people ate Italian and Spanish cuisine, which made sense based on the European influences. In some restaurants, they served rice and curry based meat with spices which gave us a sense of Arabian culture. Cuban cuisine incorporates spices and flavors from many parts of the world.. Cuban, being a socialist country, have free healthcare and education. My future goal is to be a doctor, their health care system greatly interests me. We also learned about their free education system.

The things that I will truly miss about Cuba is their music, dance, architecture and art. Cubans love to dancing and singing. They're some of the most talented people in the world. Their voices are angelic. I couldn't stop listening to them. I love how they produce all types of Spanish music, pop, romance, hip-hop, country, soul, rock, dance, and classical. The main dance in Cuba is salsa. While we were in Cuba, we took salsa lessons. Now we are able to teach our family and friends how to salsa. Throughout Cuba, you see people dancing, bands playing, and enjoying beautiful art and architecture.

Cubans are very proud of their art. If you walk around the streets, you will see various styles of artistry; on every corner there was hand painted art. It was beautiful, colorful, and inexpensive. Street art was common, especially in Old Havana. There was another kind of street art that could be seen on the highways and busy streets. National propaganda or civic pride, we saw this throughout Cuba. My favorite piece of propaganda was "SOCIALISM," depicted in large letters. Cubans, we learned are content with the revolution, we saw this happiness in their propaganda.

In Cuba, you may see Spanish, Russian, American, and Arabian /Byzantine architecture. We learned how to distinguish them by looking at the details in the buildings. The architecture is so beautiful; it is hard to these beautiful buildings in disrepair. We were walking the street wishing we had the money to save them.

Esha Sundrani



One of the most important parts of the Montessori curriculum is traveling. Maria Montessori believed that by traveling, her students would appreciate the many cultures of the world and become worldly people. Our principal, Ms. Shemi, firmly believes in this doctrine and allows all of her elementary and adolescent students to travel. I have been a student at the Montessori School of Rome for most my life, and I have been on my fair share of trips, but nothing compares to our trip to Cuba. Although every trip that I have been on has been enjoyable, none of them can compare to the level of fun and adventure that we had in Cuba. We not only had the time of our lives, but we bonded as a family and made memories that will last forever . Our trip consisted of spending time in two of Cuba's most cultural cities: Havana and Veradero. The first city that we stayed in was Havana (or as the locals calls it, "Habana"). Havana, being the capital of Cuba, was also the city that we flew into from Atlanta. In Havana, we were able to have many experiences that we all enjoyed. The first experience that we had was the cannon ceremony where members of the Cuban military re-enact the daily firing of a cannon from the fort. One of the main experiences that we had was staying in the Ambos Mundos, the same hotel in which Ernest Hemingway once stayed. Not only were we able to see his hotel room, but we were able to visit the house where he wrote many of his famous short stories and books. Another experience that we had in Cuba was riding around the city in 1950's convertibles. We experienced a scenic tour of old Havana, and we had a photo shoot with our convertibles. Some other experiences that we had in Havana include shopping at a handy-craft market, dancing in the many city squares, enjoying traditional Cuban food, and meeting an entire group of school children. Havana was an adventure that we will remember for a lifetime.

The second city that we stayed in was Veradero. Although this city was designed for tourism, we were still able to experience Cuban culture and find our own way to have fun. The first experience that we had in Veradero was checking into our resort and spending time at the pool. From there we hit the beach and reflected upon how lucky we are to be in the Adolescent Program. That same evening my roommates and I became locked in our room for 2 hours. It took a team of 7 people to free us. One of the biggest and most fun experiences that we had in Veradero was the Catamaran excursion. On this excursion, we were able to relax, sun bathe, enjoy unlimited sodas, meet a dolphin, snorkel in the clear waters of the Caribbean, enjoy a buffet of delectable Cuban cuisine, play on the beach, and dance till we dropped. Because of all the memories that we made that day, everyone enjoyed this one adventure tremendously. That same day, we ate at a fancy Japanese restaurant, played ping pong, had a second dinner at the buffet, and saw a night show called the Grammys. When the show was over, we all went to our rooms and fell asleep, dreading the next day which was our last in Cuba. One of the main things that I learned from Veradero is that you have to live in the moment and enjoy what is around you. Not only did we make lasting memories in Veradero, but we strengthened our bonds as a family and learned new things about ourselves and others. *Nicholas Whelchel*





The Montessori curriculum varies throughout grades. In the Adolescent Program, part of the curriculum is traveling. Students study a culture in depth and then take an educational trip to the location. This year we chose to study Cuba. We had many fundraisers, and with the help of our community, we could raise enough money for a 6 day and 5 night trip to Cuba.

Our trip started on Monday, March 27. We had a direct flight from Atlanta to Havana. Upon arriving to the airport, we were asked to fill out various papers. One of those happened to be our visas. I have never been so nervous to write down my name. After filling out our papers, we boarded the plane and took off. When we arrived in Cuba, stepping off the plane felt like a whole different world--different culture, temperature, environment--everything was different but the time change. It was different in a beautiful way.

Havana and Veradero, two of Cuba's most popular and beautiful cities, where we embarked on our adventures. We began our journey in Revolution square, we were given a brief history lesson., we also studied this important site in class. It was surreal to stand there. After being on a plane for an hour and a half, we were all very hungry. After Revolution Square, we went to lunch at a local restaurant called "Betty Booms." We then went to our hotel, the "Ambos Mundos." This hotel is made famous by Ernest Hemingway, he made the hotel his Cuban home for many years. We all took showers, dressed up, and went to see the Cannons Ceremony at the fort. Afterwards, we went to dinner at a Cuban restaurant that was delicious.

Tuesday was a day to remember. Tuesday began with us going on an hour and a half walking tour around the city of Havana. Next, we visited Ernest Hemingway's house. This trip was amazing because we are reading one of his book, "*The Old Man and the Sea.*" We saw his boat, *The Pilar*, his house, and his collection of books, weapons, and clothing. Leaving his house, we stopped for lunch at the fishing village near Hemingway's house. The fun continued with private salsa lessons, which would come in handy that night. That night after showering, we all dressed up and went on a ride around the city of Havana in original 1950s convertible cars. We also had a photo-shoot by the Malecon. The National Hotel and the Caribbean sea as our background and the setting sun provided us beautiful light. It was amazing!

Wednesday was a fun-filled day. We delivered presents to children at a local school, we went zip-lining, and we swam in a river. After delivering our presents and saying farewell to our stowaway, we got on the bus and drove for about two hours to a little town. The town is know for its mountains and nature areas; it is also one of the only town's in Cuba that doesn't have to pay any taxes to the government. It was an amazing day for us. We topped it off by eating at a burger place in Old Habana and dancing in the street until midnight.

Thursday was more of a casual, relaxed day. This was the day that we travelled two hours to Veradero, to the Iberostar Hotel at Veradero, where we would stay until the end of our trip. We arrived in the late afternoon around 4 p.m. Upon our arrival, we went to our rooms, changed into our bathing suits, and headed for the beach. After the beach, we ate at the *all you can eat* buffet. It was delicious.

Friday was my favorite day. We went on a catamaran to a cay about one hour off the cost of Cuba. We made three stops that day on the catamaran. The first stop, a dolphin experience, we swam with dolphins; our dolphin was 19 years old Jessica. The second stop was in the middle of the ocean, and we went snorkeling. We saw so many fish and an abundance of different coral. The water was so clear it was amazing.

Sadly, our trip had to end. On Saturday we woke up very early and drove 2 hours back to Habana airport. We were all so sad to leave Cuba, and a few of us got teary eyed when we had to say our goodbyes to Gabby and Roberto. It was an amazing



At the Montessori School of Rome, we are provided with many incredible opportunities. We experienced one of these opportunities this past week. For our Spring Break we traveled to Cuba! We ran businesses to raise money. Backdoor Scoop, our ice cream shop, and Lunchbox, our lunch service, were our two most profitable businesses. We had been studying Cuba and were very interested in visiting for a week.

We flew from Atlanta to Havana on Monday, March 27th. We were instructed to fill out various forms, and Customs was intimidating, but once we got our feet on Cuban soil, we were more than excited to be there. Our tour guide, Gaby, met us at the airport along with our driver for the week, Roberto. Our adventure in Cuba began with Revolution Square and a brief history review. This was not the only time history was presented though. Every corner had different flare with a completely different background than the one a block away.

The culture invites you to learn; the people spark curiosity; the music encourages you to sing and dance; and the architecture inspires awe. Every street has a different story and every person has a different background; each and every one of these insists on being explored. From the infrastructure to the dogs in the street, there is no question as to why people love Cuba. It is impossible not to fall in love with every aspect of its gorgeous atmosphere.

Havana, which is full of culture and music, was the most lively place we visited. From salsa dancing in the squares to visiting the cathedral--the first place in Cuba that President visited--Havana is a very special city. Havana is a very important historical city, and you would think that every building would be turned into a museum or something tourist-like, but in actuality it's not like that at all. There are museums, but most of them are free, and the remaining buildings are left just as they were many years ago.

At the beginning of the trip, I was slightly nervous because I had never been on a trip like this one, but I knew that I was in good hands. By the end of the trip I forgot about having any worries because I could not have asked for a better trip. Our tour guide was amazing; our bus driver was hilarious; and Cuba was perfect.

My most memorable moment from the trip was meeting our tour guide Gaby. She was so sweet and energetic the first day, and from that moment on, I knew that the trip would be amazing. I, along with some of the other students, developed a close bond with her. Gaby is in her mid-twenties, and her fiancé, Marlon, was our photographer one night! Our second night in Havana, we had a photo shoot in some of the vintage cars before going to dinner. Although we were only with Gaby for a week, we miss her dearly and wish she could be in America with us.

I was the most impressed with the atmosphere Cuba presented. It abided by more American principles than most Americans do. This may sound far-fetched, but in Cuba there are many different people from many different backgrounds. In America we have that as well, but there are stereotypes and discrimination against many people. In Cuba everyone is accepted and there are no discriminatory acts. In conclusion, the trip was amazing from the people to the infrastructure. I hope I can venture back to Cuba soon. Mary Ella and I are actually working on a partnership between our churches, which will allow us to possibly travel to Cuba for a mission trip. We are so excited and can't wait to see if it works out.

Cydney Adams

