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PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA RECOMMENDATIONS AND DESIGNS FOR PHASE I SIGNAGE



February 2010

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Credits

Photographs: José Alejandro Alvarez, Jerry Bauer and Jerry Wylie
Graphic Design: Liliana Peralta Lopez and Jorge Paniagua

TECHNICAL REPORT

PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DESIGNS FOR PHASE I SIGNAGE

Prepared by:

Jerry Wylie
Ecotourism Specialist
US Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry

Jerry Bauer
Biological Scientist
US Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry

In cooperation with:
Dominican Sustainable Tourism Alliance (DSTA)
Solimar International
Reef Check

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DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.



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I.0 INTRODUCTION

The USAID - funded Dominican Sustainable Tourism Alliance (DSTA) has selected the community of La Caleta and the Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta (PNSLC) to receive technical support to develop a community - based enterprise using the park as the attraction and setting for a variety of nature and culture-based tourism. This report provides designs and specifications for the initial phase of signage for park visitors as recommended by the assessment of biodiversity threats and conservation strategy for the park (Wylie and Bauer, 2009). It also supports the business plan developed by Solimar International (Silver, 2009).



2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SETTING

Site Description

The Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta was established in 1986 to protect the coral reef and prehistoric Taino archeological remains. As the first marine park in the Dominican Republic, it is situated 20 km east of the capitol city of Santo Domingo, population about 2 million, and immediately adjacent to the International Airport of the Americas and the town of La Caleta, with 60,000 residents. It is physically separated from the town by a busy four-lane highway (Map 1).

The park includes more than 5 km of rocky coastline with generally calm and clear tropical waters that attract SCUBA divers from the city and local bathers. It also has significant potential for kayak tourism (Wylie and Bauer, 2008).

This site is situated within an urban setting classified as “Urbano” in the ROVAP system. Urbano environments are typically dominated by a mix of residential, commercial, industrial and touristic infrastructure (hotels and convention centers), together with transportation and services associated with urban environments such as electricity, potable water, sewer systems, and traffic control. Within these environments there are green spaces, small gardens, parks, museums and a variety of opportunities for cultural and touristic activities. In addition, there will be constant contact with people in the environments (Wallace, et al., 2009).

Most of the park’s 10 square kilometers are underwater and include coral reefs, areas covered with sponges and seaweeds, and sandy flats. Four sunken modern ships provide artificial reef habitat and serve as attractions for divers. The park’s waters include 60 species of coral, 36 species of sponges, and 89 species of fish (Reef Check, personal communication).

The terrestrial portion of the park is highly modified and has very little natural vegetation or biodiversity. It contains scattered trees, grassy areas, a rugged shoreline of uplifted coralline limestone that is highly eroded, and extensive paved trails, roadways, and infrastructure in various levels of disrepair. Before they were seriously damaged by storms, other improvements included a large concrete pond, a small café, an archeological museum, and a ticket booth. There is also an active cemetery dating back to the 1880s.

Mission Statement and Business Description

The park offers a range of potential activities for Santo Dominicans, business travelers, and international visitors. A “Beach Club” managed by the community could provide natural, cultural, and culinary products to these target segments while supporting job creation, community development, and biodiversity conservation.

While final products are still being defined through market demand surveys and investment requirements, the following options are being considered:

- Museum/visitor center with gift shop and public restrooms
- Café/gift shop
- Dive shop
- Underwater interpretive trails for divers and snorkelers
- Aquatic center with boat and kayak rentals
- Walking/biking trails
- Guided tours
- Beach rental equipment

Project Partners

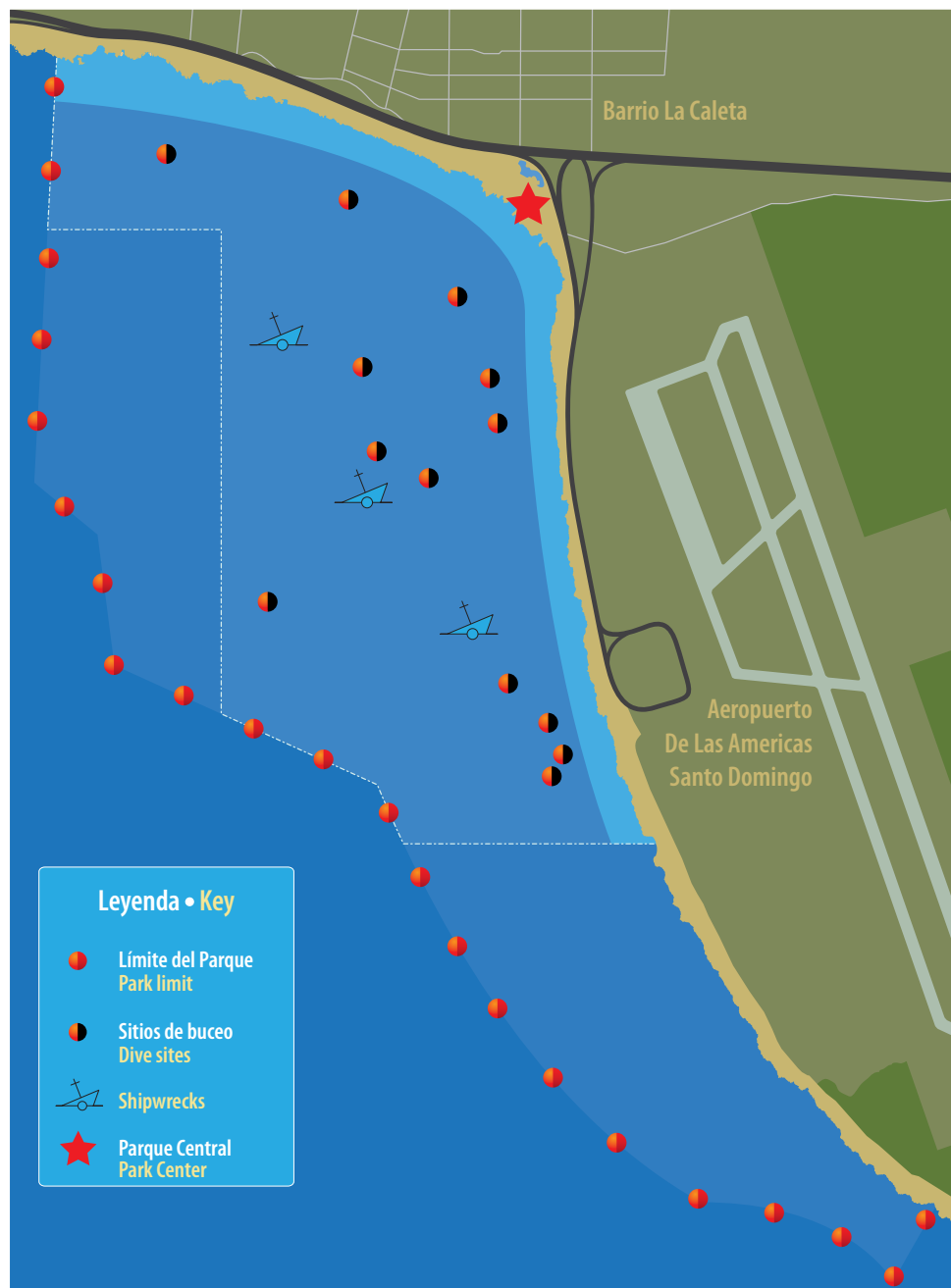
The community-based enterprise is currently being supported by USAID/DSTA through the active participation of SEMARENA, the U.S. Peace Corps, Reef Check, US Forest Service, the British Embassy, and the American Chamber of Commerce. Future projects involving Taino and underwater archeology will require the active participation of Indiana University the Museo de Hombre Dominicano (Museum of the Dominican Man), and Oficina Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural Subacuático (National Office for Underwater Cultural Patrimony).

Recent and Ongoing Activities

The park has seen many recent improvements. The old café has been cleaned out and its tattered thatched roof, removed; restoration and expansion of the ruined Taino museum was started in late 2009 (although it has been recently halted) and new trees have been planted.

Solimar International, as part of the DSTA project, has undertaken extensive business planning and capacity building with the community, including training in tourism operations, guiding, food services, sales/marketing, and the development of a business plan (Silver, 2009).

A grant from the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) was awarded to Reef Check to continue their program of reef monitoring, installation of buoys, and community workshops. In addition, two ceramic sculptures based on Taino designs were recently installed on the reef to attract divers. Reef Check also received a grant from the Programa de Pequeños Subsidios to reestablish lobster populations using artificial habitat and an education campaign for fishermen.



Map 1. Parque Nacional Submarino La Caleta.



3.0 INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF SIGNAGE AND INTERPRETIVE NEEDS

Current Signage

There are currently very few signs in the park, most of which are in very poor condition, and all need to be replaced or upgraded (Photo 1 - 5). The most recent installed sign (Photo 3) is a list of diving regulations located near the central parking lot and next to the fresh water rinsing tank used by divers and bathers. Unfortunately, its plastic cover is seriously obscured by mold and will soon become illegible. In addition, the adjacent concrete topographic map is confusing, incorrectly oriented (upside-down), and should be replaced.

Threats and Opportunities

The recently completed biodiversity assessment and conservation strategy identified the threats and opportunities for the park, the community, and visitors which can be addressed, in part, through proper information and environmental interpretation.

The most serious threats are the loss of reef habitat and associated species through natural and human impacts. This would not only reduce the park's value ecologically, it would also degrade its potential as a tourism attraction.

From a visitor's perspective, the greatest weakness is a lack of well-maintained public facilities, trained guides, and basic signage. The community's commercial opportunities are also limited by a lack of advertising, signage, and trained guides.

One of the most critical needs identified is environmental interpretation to educate local residents and visitors about threats to biodiversity and which would serve as a starting point for conservation actions. Interpretation of natural and cultural heritage can be delivered through displays in the visitor center, signage, and trained guides.

The lifestyle and culture of the Taino could be presented in the restored museum as well as outdoors. Future possibilities include a restored Taino hut, "living history" activities involving traditional artifacts and domestic activities, and interpretation of traditional use of native plants.

The historically documented 1725 wreck of the Spanish ship Nuestra Señora de Begonia at La Caleta's beach offers unique and exciting opportunities for archeologists, local residents, and park visitors. Archeological excavations would be a big attraction, and the resulting artifacts and information could be presented in the museum and interpretive panels along the shore. In addition, replicas of select artifacts could be displayed in an underwater "museum" for snorkelers.

Underwater art can also be used to promote dive tourism and environmental stewardship. Individual pieces or collections of art in underwater "galleries" have been successfully used to increase visitation to dive sites in the Caribbean and worldwide.

Figure 1 illustrates how advertising and environmental interpretation can promote community and economic development and biodiversity conservation. Promotional materials increase visitation, which in turn provides more income and profits for community members, funds for community projects, and infrastructure improvements that benefit both visitors and residents.

When visitors arrive at the park, interpretive signs and tours provided by trained guides will significantly enhance the quality of their experience, leading to word-of-mouth advertising, as well as increased public awareness of critical threats to the park. This will lead to public support for the park and environmental protection in general and provide opportunities for visitors to make donations to the community conservation fund. Interpretive signs and guided tours will also manage visitor activities within the park, minimizing damage to both terrestrial and marine resources.

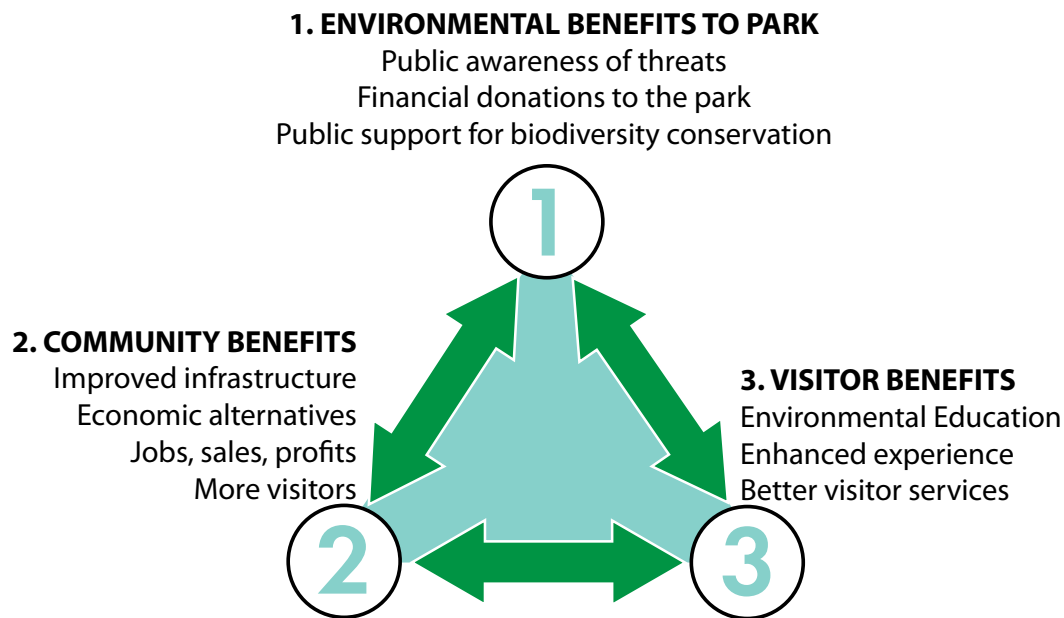


Figure 1. Summary of benefits resulting from promotional materials and interpretative programs.

Key Issues for Interpretive Planning

The assessment of biodiversity threats and conservation strategy identified the following issues for recreational use and environmental interpretation at the park:

1. What is the overall mission and vision of the park and its management goals for dive tourism, environmental education, and conservation?
2. Who are the audiences? SCUBA divers, snorkelers, school groups, local residents, Santo Domingo recreationists, or cruise tourists?
3. What is the primary interpretive message that will serve as the central organizing concept? What are the supporting sub-messages and the local stories?
4. What are the mechanical, financial, and legal constraints?
5. What are the potential threats and opportunities for biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism?

As there is currently no park management plan and business planning is still underway, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive plan for signage and environmental interpretation at this time. However, we can develop materials for the initial phase of operations that will help the park start its tourism program. This can be followed with more detailed planning for interpretive exhibits and guided programs at a later date.

Points of Contact

Until the museum/visitor center is reconstructed, the logical focal point for visitors is the café. It is here that refreshments and bathrooms are available and visitors can purchase souvenirs. Therefore, it is a logical place for making contact with people and introducing them to the park. We suggest this orientation be done informally by using colorful banners with minimal text. These will match the casual setting, provoke interest in the park, and help establish a “brand” and a positive image for the park for both visitors and local residents.

Two other key points of contact for visitors are the main plaza near the central parking lot and the proposed “Seaside Lounge” area where refreshments from the café will be offered. Both locations are good places for visitor information kiosks. A detailed description of Phase I signs and interpretive materials is provided in Section 4.0.

4.0 PHASE I SIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Signage should be designed and installed in a two-phase process. Phase I will meet immediate needs for visitor information and directions, while Phase II will emphasize heritage interpretation.

Approximately 30 individual signs, banners, or interpretive panels are recommended for Phase I. These are summarized in Table I and described in detail in the Annexes. As many of these signs as possible should be installed prior to the official park opening.

More detailed planning will be needed for future interpretive exhibits, a proposed underwater trail, and guided tours on land and with kayaks. Although some of this has been started, most of this work will be done in Phase II. Preliminary ideas for Phase II interpretive signage are presented below.

Highway Signs

Three painted metal signs are recommended to be installed along the highway. The first would be located one kilometer from the entrance (sign A), the second would be placed at the entrance to the café (sign B), and the third would be located at the main entrance to the central parking area (sign C). All signs should have the official yellow and green SEMARENA colors and include directional arrows. Designs for these signs are shown in Annex A.

Highway Flags

Large colorful flags could be installed on seven light posts along the highway to advertise the park (sign R). This design is illustrated in Annex A.

Welcome and Entrance Signs

Signs showing the park logo and name should be painted on existing concrete structures at each of the three entrances. The north and south signs are identical 3' x 9' panels (signs I and J). At the central parking lot we recommend the existing concrete mural and diving regulations (Photo 3) be replaced with a simple painted welcome sign (sign K). A design for this sign is presented in Annex B.

The welcome sign for the café should be a special design to match the décor of this commercial facility (sign L). We suggest something rustic painted or carved on a large piece of wood, perhaps suspended from the rafters. A preliminary design offered as a starting point for this sign is shown in Annex B.

Orientation Kiosks

Two identical informational kiosks are recommended to orient arriving visitors. One would be located on the plaza near the central parking lot. The other could be situated at a convenient location somewhere along the walkways between the café, Seaside Lounge, and the Museum/Visitor Center.

These kiosks would have a map in the center flanked by information panels and be approximately 6' by 3' in size (signs M and N). To keep costs low, these can be printed on durable outdoor vinyl and attached to a simple wooden framework. This design is illustrated in Annex B.

Directional Signs

Small painted wooden signs can be used throughout the park to direct visitors to various facilities. Those located on the ground would have directional arrows. Others would be mounted on walls to identify key buildings (signs D through H). Examples of these signs are presented in Annex A.

Table 1. Recommended Signs for Phase I

HIGHWAY SIGNS (METAL)

- A. Approach ("PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA 1 Km")
- B. Café ("NAME" of café when determined)
- C. Entrance ("PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA")

DIRECTIONAL SIGNS (PAINTED WOOD)

- D. Bathrooms & Office ("BANOS & OFICINA" and arrow)
- E. Museum ("MUSEO Y CENTRO DE VISITANTES")
- F. Ticket Booth ("BOLETERIA")
- G. Women's bathroom door ("MUJERES")
- H. Men's bathroom door ("HOMBRES")

WELCOME AND ENTRANCE SIGNS

- I. North Park entrance ("PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA") painted concrete
- J. South Park entrance ("PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA") painted concrete
- K. Central Park entrance ("PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO LA CALETA") painted on concrete map
- L. Café ("NAME" of café when determined) artistic wooden sign

ORIENTATION KIOSKS

- Two or three panels showing park map, fees, hours and rules in Spanish and English
- M. SE of Museum for visitors arriving from the southern parking lot
- N. NW of Museum for visitors arriving from the café or the north parking lot

INTERPRETIVE KIOSK PANELS

- O. Marine orientation: marine boundaries, buoys, wrecks, trails, sculpture and photos

VINYL BANNERS (6' x 8' DISPLAYED AT CAFE)

- P1. FISH/La Caleta has abundant species
- P2. THE REEF/Foundation for all sea life
- P3. THE TAINO/La Caleta was their home
- P4. ENJOY/The Colors of La Caleta (Park Attractions)
- P5. PADDLE/with kayak and snorkel (Sea Kayaking & Snorkeling)
- P6. SCUBA/Enjoy the Underwater World
- P7. BOATING/Rent a Yola for Fun
- P8. LA CALETA/A popular beach near the city
- P9. PARTNERS/Help Protect Biodiversity
- P10. VOLUNTEER/Help protect the reef
- P11. REEF CHECK/Saving Reefs Worldwide

VINYL BANNER (6' x 8' INSTALLED OUTSIDE MUSEUM)

- Q. MUSEUM & VISITOR CENTER/Coming Soon

HIGHWAY FLAGS

- R. Vinyl logo banners on 7 light posts along the highway

Marine Interpretation

Since the vast majority of the park is underwater, it is important to provide some basic information on these resources (sign O). A possible location for this kiosk would be either overlooking the ocean somewhere between the beach and the museum or near the “Seaside Lounge” where visitors congregate. This can be printed on durable outdoor vinyl and be the same size as the two orientation kiosks (3’ x 6’).

Possible subjects for a marine kiosk include the park’s aquatic boundaries, no-fish zones, threats to marine biodiversity, lobster houses, dive sites, wrecks, underwater trails, and planning for future projects such as an underwater sculpture garden and a snorkeling trail. A preliminary design developed in cooperation with Solimar International and Reef Check is illustrated in Annex B (sign O). A final design will be developed in Phase II.

Phase II will also require the development of small waterproof maps for two marine tours: kayaking and the proposed underwater trail featuring reef life and Taino sculptures.

Vinyl Banners

About a dozen large 6’ x 8’ banners (signs PI-II) could be used initially at the café and later in the remodeled visitor center. These would help market and interpret various aspects of the park and provide a preview of future exhibits in the Museum/Visitor Center. They can also be reproduced and sold as various souvenirs products: posters, postcards, T-shirts, etc. If printed in Spanish and English, however, not all would fit in the café. Even if they are hung two-sided, there is room on the outside rafters for no more than 10 banners plus perhaps a few more used inside the café as room dividers and decoration. Sample designs for these banners and how they can be displayed are shown in Annex C.

One additional banner could be installed on either side of the Museum entrance - one in Spanish and the other in English - to identify this facility and advertise that it is “under construction.”

Other Interpretive Displays

Based on preliminary discussions with Solimar International, a series of interpretive panels are anticipated in Phase II. These will cover such topics as Taino culture, history, ecology/conservation, the wreck of the Spanish ship Nuestra Señora de Begonia, and the story of the park and the community co-management project. The logical place for these is in the new museum/visitor center. However, if the museum remodeling project is delayed (or cancelled) these panels can be located at appropriate sites within the park to make an “outdoor museum,” providing convenient stopping places for guided tours.

Museum Murals

Decorative murals are currently being painted on the outside walls of the museum/visitor center (Photos 9 and 10). Although colorful and well-painted, these designs do not follow thematic interpretive guidelines and depict fantasy and distortions rather than correct natural and cultural history. The wrong message is being given by these images. We strongly recommend that all murals and interpretation be based on an approved master plan and be thoroughly reviewed before being installed. The task of implementing correct interpretation inside of the museum/visitor center will be much more difficult when misinformation and mixed messages are presented to the public.

Interpretive Planning Needs

Although this report discusses the initial needs and opportunities for informational and interpretive signage, a comprehensive interpretive plan should be developed before any Phase II projects are initiated. (Having such a plan would avoid the type of problems seen with the murals mentioned above.)

First of all, a plan should clearly identify the overall purpose or goals of the interpretive program, as well as specific messages and target audiences. Simply delivering information to the public is not enough. High-quality interpretive programs should reveal meanings, make connections, and provoke responses.

Park managers must decide what they want visitors to DO with the information. For example, if a goal is conservation of biodiversity, the desired response would be for local fishermen and scuba divers to limit their catch and respect no-take fishing zones. Responses can be more than behavioral; they can be intellectual (learning) or emotional (respect, awe, or pride).

Secondly, a central or “thematic” message is needed to help organize interpretation at La Caleta and link the various sub-themes in a cohesive package. It should be a short, complete sentence that captures what is most important for visitors to know about the park. Although much more work is needed, initial brainstorming with Solimar International has identified two possibilities:

- *La Caleta is where you can experience nature and history*
- *La Caleta is a small park full of nature and history*

Third, the plan should ensure interpretation is not only well organized and interesting but relevant, so that visitors feel personally connected to the park. For example, in interpreting Taino culture, we can show that “We all have a little Taino in us”: we use Taino words for many common things such as hurricanes, hammocks, and canoes.



Map 2. Recommended Signs for Phase I.

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1. Metal sign at the café parking lot should be replaced with a rustic wooden sign.



Photo 2. Metal signs in the park should be replaced with highway approach signs.



Photo 3. The concrete relief map and diving regulations are ineffective and should be replaced with a welcome sign.



Photo 4. Concrete structures on both ends of the park can be repainted as welcome signs.



Photo 5. Metal entrance sign will be replaced.



Photo 6. The remodeled café will include a gift shop and interpretive banners.



Photo 7. The Taino Museum remodeling project is currently on hold.



Photo 8. The museum, which originally featured human burials below floor level, will need all new interpretive displays in Phase II if it is remodeled.



Photo 9. Abstract fish designs painted on the exterior of the museum are colorful but not accurate representations of La Caleta's marine wildlife.



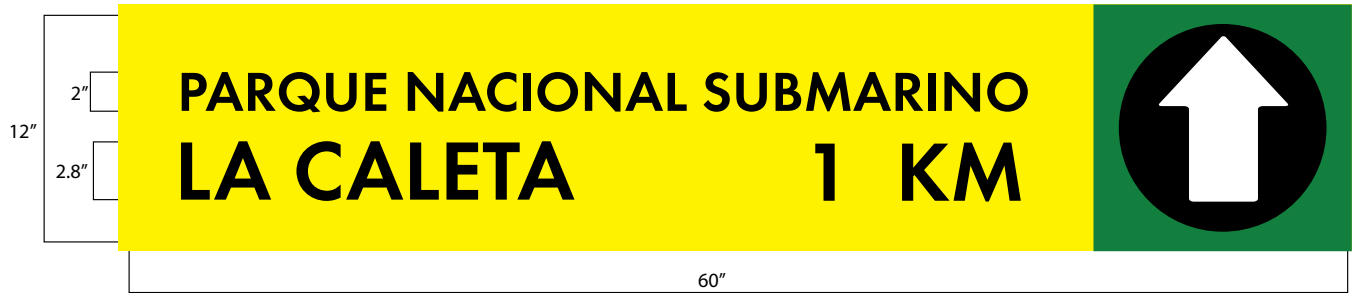
Photo 10. The fantasy mural on the museum's exterior is inappropriate for children and provides a distorted picture of Taino culture.

ANNEX A

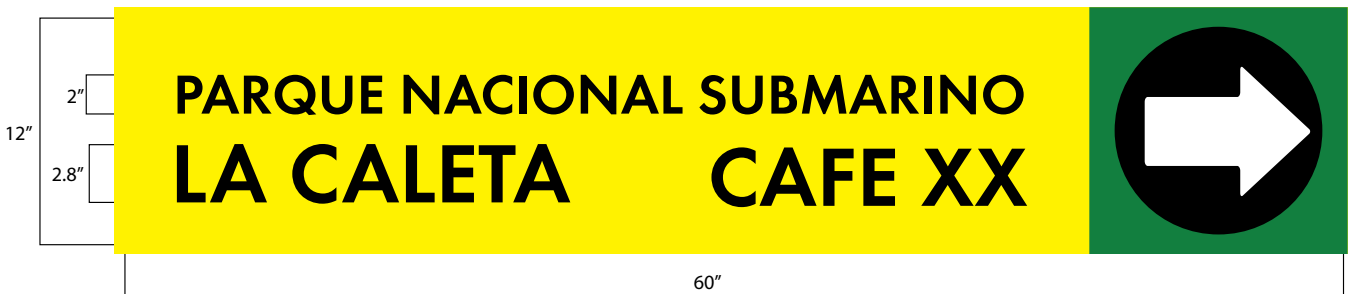
ROADWAY SIGNS, DIRECTIONAL SIGNS AND HIGHWAY FLAGS

ROADWAY SIGNS

ROADWAY SIGN "A"



ROADWAY SIGN "B"



ROADWAY SIGN "C"



Dimensions

Sign	Width	Length	Thickness
Sign A	12"	60"	2"
Sign B	12"	60"	2"
Sign C	12"	60"	2"

Colors

Yellow, Green, Black and White

Text

Size	Font	Points
2"	Futura Demi	200 pts
2.8"	Futura Demi	300 pts

DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

DIRECTIONAL SIGN "D"



DIRECTIONAL SIGN "E"



DIRECTIONAL SIGN "F"



DIRECTIONAL SIGN "G"



DIRECTIONAL SIGN "H"



Dimensions: 8" x 20". Printed on vinyl

HIGHWAY FLAGS "R"

4'



7'

PARQUE
NACIONAL
SUBMARINO
LA CALETA

ANNEX B

WELCOME SIGNS, ORIENTATION KIOSK AND INTERPRETIVE PANELS

WELCOME SIGNS



SIGNS "I" & "J" can be painted on existing concrete bases at the north and south entrances of the park. Sign "K" can be painted on a different concrete base near the central parking lot.

WELCOME & ORIENTATION SIGNS



SIGN "L" / Rustic Wooden Sign Concept for the Café

BIENVENIDOS 🌿 WELCOME

POR FAVOR PROTEGE EL ARRECIFE

- ★ No tocar o coleccionar coral.
- ★ Evita levantar arena al nadar ya que esto puede asfixiar a los corales.
- ★ No tires basura y por favor recoge la que encuentres.
- ★ Esta prohibido el uso de arpones.
- ★ Utiliza las boyas de amarre.
- ★ Esta prohibido el uso de anclas en zonas arrecifales.



PLEASE PROTECT THE REEF

- ★ Don't touch or collect coral.
- ★ Avoid stirring up sand and sediments that can smother corals.
- ★ Do not litter and please collect any trash you find.
- ★ The use of spearguns is prohibited.
- ★ Use available mooring buoys.
- ★ Do not anchor on the reef.





ORIENTATION KIOSK SIGNS "M" & "N". Dimensions: 90" x 47". Printed on vinyl

INTERPRETIVE PANEL

THIS MARINE PARK IS...

WONDERFULL

BECAUSE IT:

- ★ Is full of marine life
- ★ Is the first marine park in the DR
- ★ Has reefs, walls, caves and wrecks
- ★ Is the most well-studied
- ★ Is a very popular dive site
- ★ Is good for kayaking and boating
- ★ Is co-managed by the community



THREATENED

BECAUSE OF:

- ★ Over-fishing
- ★ Pollution and trash
- ★ Careless divers
- ★ Boat anchors
- ★ Siltation
- ★ Global warming
- ★ Invasive species



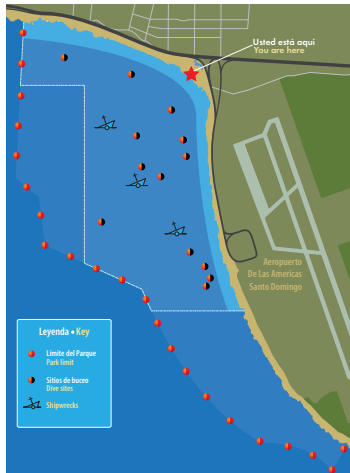
PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO
LA CALETA

ESTE PARQUE MARINO ES...

HERMOSO

PORQUE ES:

- ★ Es lleno de vida marina
- ★ Es el primer parque marino en RD
- ★ Tiene arrecifes, riscos y barcos hundidos
- ★ Es muy estudiado
- ★ Es un sitio de buceo muy popular
- ★ Es muy bueno para kayak y botes
- ★ Es co-managed por la comunidad



AMENAZADO

POR:

- ★ Demasiado pescadores
- ★ Polución y basura
- ★ Buceadores sin cuidado
- ★ Ancas de botes
- ★ Sedimentos del arrecife
- ★ Elevación de la temperatura del agua
- ★ Especies invasivas



PARQUE NACIONAL SUBMARINO
LA CALETA

Signs "0". Dimensions: 72" x 44". Printed on vinyl

ANNEX C

INTERPRETIVE BANNERS

INTERPRETIVE BANNERS

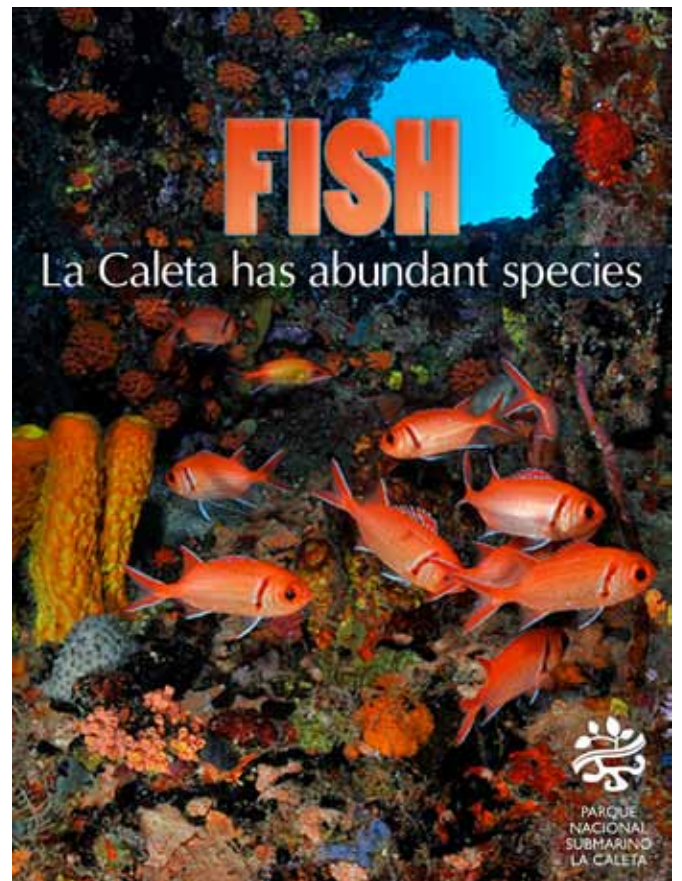
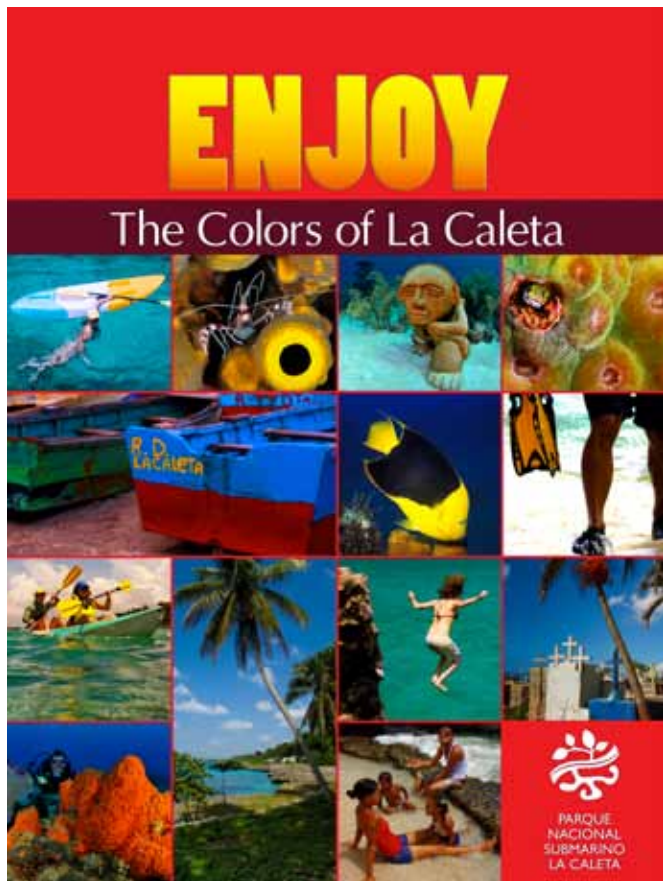
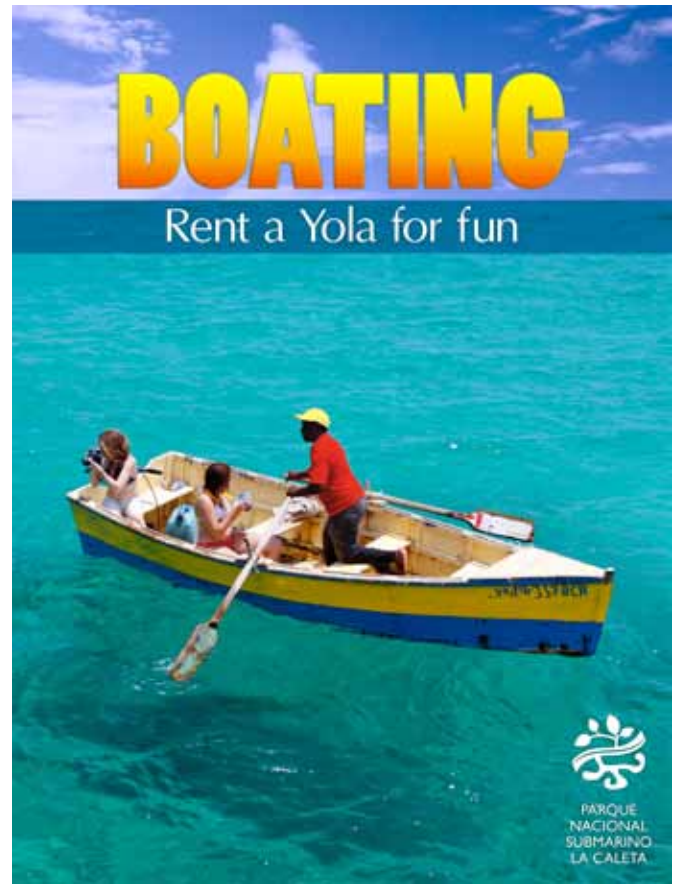


The remodeled cafe will have a rustic sign and will display large vinyl banners illustrating the park's attractions.

LA CALETA

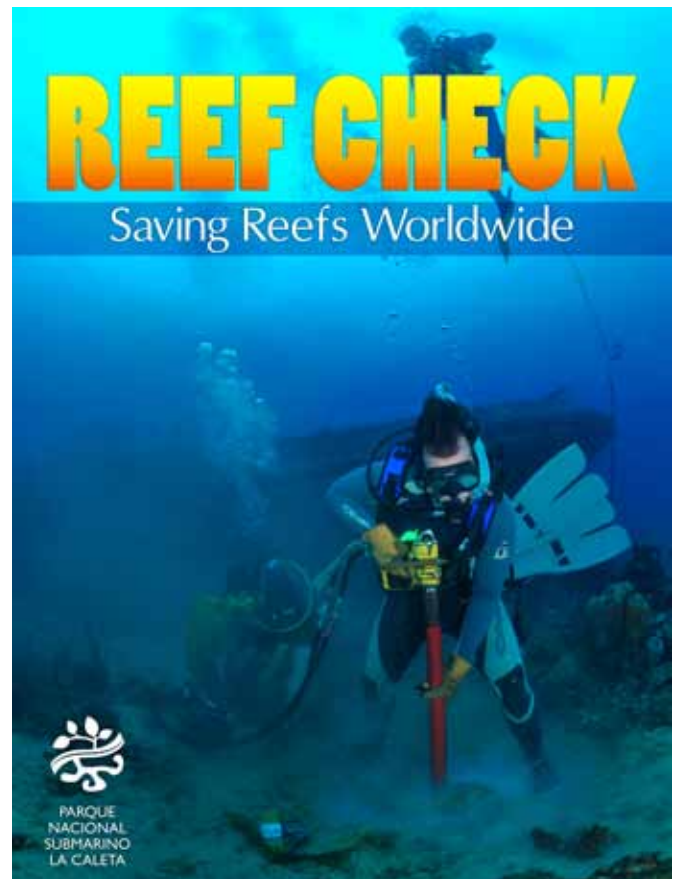
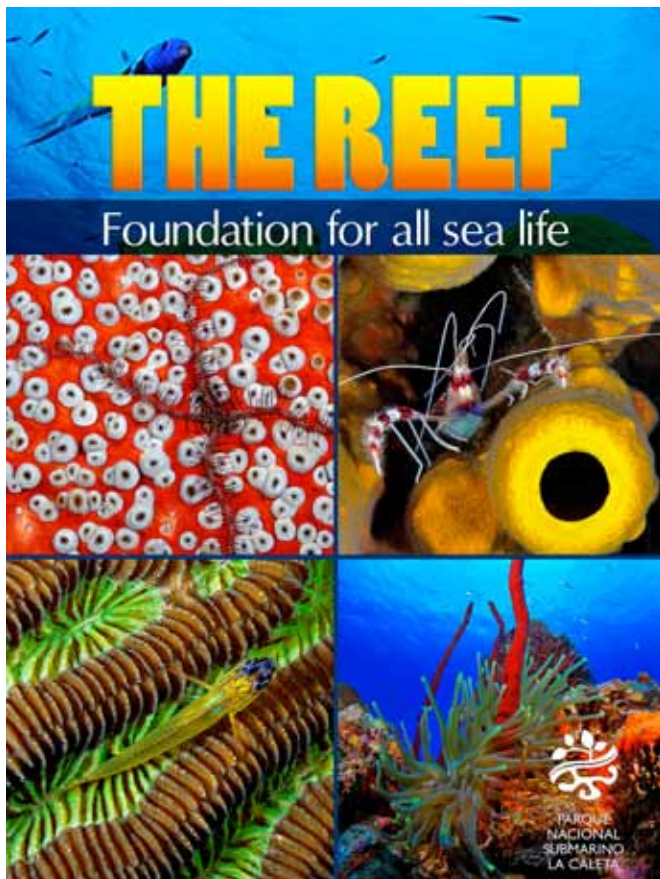
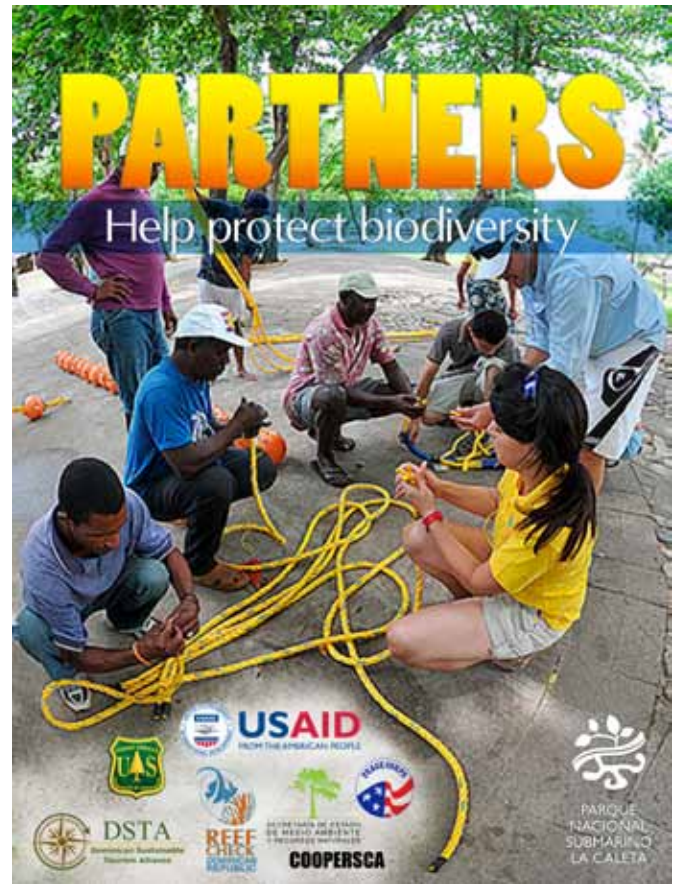
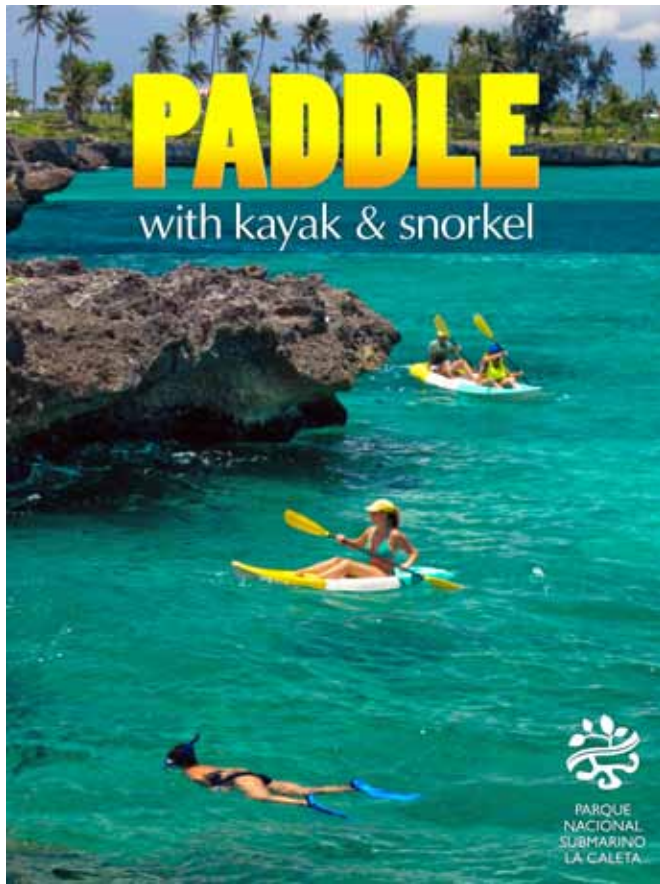
A popular beach near the city

PARQUE NACIONAL
SUBMARINO
LA CALETA



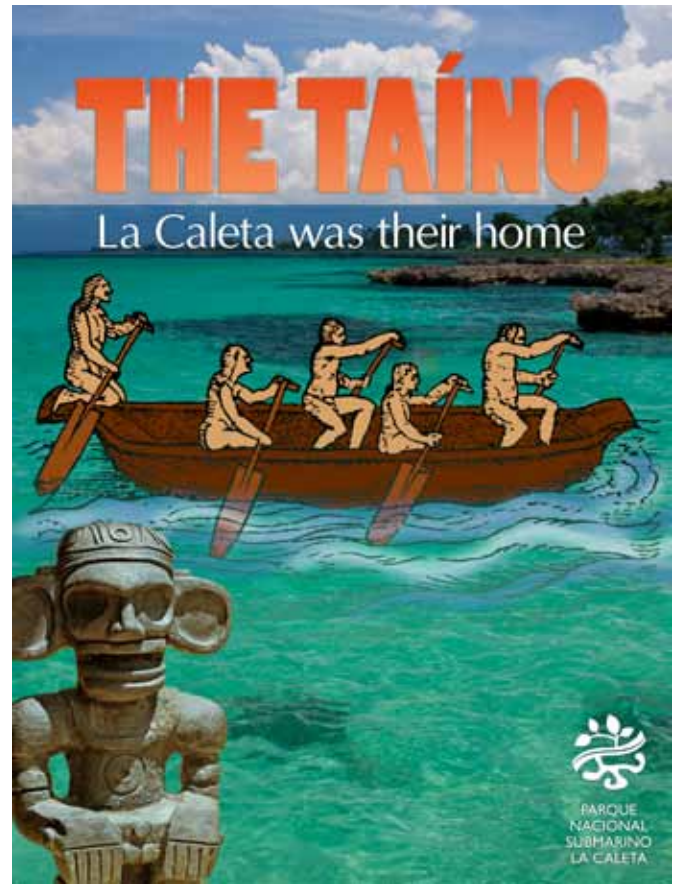
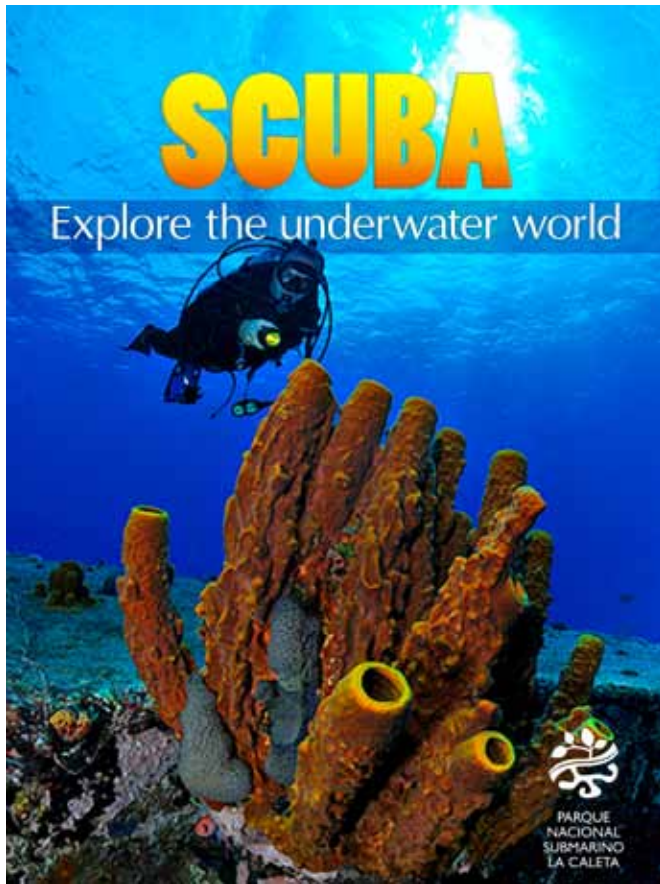
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INTERPRETIVE BANNERS



Dimensions: 4 x 8 feet. Printed on vinyl in both Spanish and English

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