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**UOG grad student Leilani Sablan embarks on ‘once in a lifetime’
deep-sea research expedition**

University of Guam graduate biology student and UOG Sea Grant biologist Leilani Sablan set sail into the Central Pacific on March 14 to partake in a deep-sea research expedition, joining a team of scientists, engineers, navigators, mappers, and remotely operated vehicle (ROV) pilots.

Sablan was selected to be an ocean science intern onboard the *Exploration Vessel Nautilus* of the Ocean Exploration Trust — a nonprofit founded by Robert Ballard, a National Geographic Society explorer-at-large who is best known for his discovery of the *Titanic* in 1985, among many other significant shipwreck discoveries.

Sablan will be helping to log data at Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll within the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. These deep-water areas are within one of the largest marine protected areas in the world, according to the Ocean Exploration Trust.

“It’s phenomenal to think I will be assisting in scientific exploration and discovery in Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll. These are some places I would never think I’d find myself — ever — in my life, and I feel this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Sablan said.

A deeper look at geology and biological diversity

Sablan’s main responsibilities involve recording operational, scientific, and engineering observations; capturing ROV camera footage; and logging samples.

The crew of approximately 30 individuals seeks to accomplish 13 ROV dives to characterize seamount and ridge features, which will help determine if mesophotic areas result in greater biological diversity in comparison to deeper areas with same or

similar features, Sablan said. The team also plans to compare specimens and video data to those of past expeditions in the region to help inform the identification of dense and diverse deep-water coral and sponge communities.

Opportunity for growth

Although deep-sea exploration is outside her field of study, said Sablan, who studies Guam's endangered green sea turtle population at UOG Sea Grant, she said this new experience will help her grow as a researcher and appreciate the different disciplines of marine science.

"Lani is a terrific student and researcher," said Peter Houk, UOG Marine Laboratory professor and academic adviser to Sablan. "[...] The *Nautilus* journey is about more than participation and assisting a great effort. It's also about personal growth, and I'm sure she'll benefit from the experience."

Fran Castro, associate director of UOG Sea Grant, who originally encouraged Sablan to apply, said it makes her proud to see students from Guam participating in these types of activities around the region.

"This at-sea venture is a great opportunity for up-and-coming scientists like Lani," Castro said. "She's a go-getter, and I'm glad she jumped at the chance to take this once-in-a-lifetime experience on how to live and work on research vessels."

UOG undergraduate biology student Pheona David will be the next intern to participate in an expedition onboard the *Nautilus* this month within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

The expeditions can be followed at www.facebook.com/nautiluslive.

The [Nautilus Science & Engineering Internship Program](#) is open to undergraduate and graduate students through Ocean Exploration Trust as part of the Nautilus Exploration Program. It is sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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Photo Caption 1:

Leilani Sablan, University of Guam graduate biology student and UOG Sea Grant biologist, prepares to board Ocean Exploration Trust's *Exploration Vessel Nautilus*, on March 13 from Oahu, Hawaii. Sablan, participating in the 2022 *Nautilus* deep-sea exploration expedition as an ocean science intern, will help log data at Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll within the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument to understand the area's geological history.

Photo courtesy of Leilani Sablan



Photo Caption 2:

The *EV Nautilus*, a 68-meter research vessel, sails across the ocean. Leilani Sablan, University of Guam graduate biology student and UOG Sea Grant biologist, is a participant in the 2022 *Nautilus* deep-sea exploration expedition made possible by Ocean Exploration Trust, a nonprofit founded by famed explorer, Robert Ballard, to survey unknown parts of the ocean and seek out new discoveries in geology, biology, and hydrography.

Photo courtesy of Ocean Exploration Trust



Photo Caption 3:

The *EV Nautilus*, a 68-meter research vessel, sails across the ocean. Leilani Sablan, University of Guam graduate biology student and UOG Sea Grant biologist, is a participant in the 2022 *Nautilus* deep-sea exploration expedition led by Ocean Exploration Trust, a nonprofit that promotes science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) education around the world using exploration and innovation to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers.

Photo courtesy of Ocean Exploration Trust