My Cuban adventure now feels like a hazy dream, with painterly splashes in the back of my head, and the texture of rust still crisp in my palm. Shortly after arriving in Cancún I resolved to rest a couple days before heading into the heart of Guatemala. My departure, however, was postponed after overhearing a German couple at the reception of the hostel. 'We want to drive through Central America', they told me. We researched the paperwork they needed to own a car, and set on an exhaustive quest for the best automobile they could get for under $2,000, perhaps an air-cooled Volkswagen or a Japanese four-cylinder. Dozens of polished wrecks later, we came across a bright red, clean "vochito" (Beetle). I can now say that Andris and Latoya, the –now– happy owners of this vintage beauty, will be recurring characters in this expedition.

The evening we purchased the car I drove down to Playa del Carmen, where I parked next to one of its most touristy streets. I just could not make any sense of that place: the people who run it, the architecture, its visitors. The Riviera Maya has too much neon that reminds us of our excess back home, and too many locals who keep quiet as they smilingly take the money from the pale drunks. As I walked in the dark beach heading back to the car in visible disgust, I saw an empty coconut lying in the middle of the street. I picked it up, removed the straw, and called it a free breakfast.

The following morning I woke up a little bit after dawn, and took one last swim in the Caribbean. Twenty minutes later my fingers glided across the windshield, covered in a mix of fine sea mist and thin sand, and set on to clean every window for the long journey ahead. I savored the coconut with the racing heart of a child, turned the ignition and drove down to Chetumal, right along the border with Belize.

TROPIGAS
TAXI

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