

MAGNIFICENT GRAY WHALES AND STUNNING DESERT

WHALE WATCHING SAFARI

With the Southwestern Yacht Club

Surrounded by a natural aquarium, the rugged magical landscape of Baja California Peninsula is home to vast deserts rich in vegetation, pristine beaches, jagged mountains, an array of shore birds and isolated villages. Of special attraction are the gray whales. Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from the Arctic Ocean to the warm waters of Baja California lagoons, designated as wildlife refuges, to court, mate, give birth and care for their young. Join the unique, unforgettable experience to view these giant mammals at arm's length, some may let themselves be petted!

Whale behaviors at the lagoons change as the season unfolds. Beginning in mid-January, whales arrive to give birth to their young outside the viewing areas. At this time, whales can be observed in the spectacular behavior of courting and mating. In February the lagoons reach the highest number of whales, up to 2,000 at one time! Spouts are visible at all times, mating still occurs and mothers with newborn calves begin to enter the observation areas. In March, as bulls and newly-pregnant whales depart, mother and baby pairs dominate the lagoons. Towards the end of the season, calves gain size and weight and mothers become less protective, offering a greater opportunity for close encounters. Whales remain in the lagoons up to mid April.

ITINERARY

DAY 1. San Diego - San Quintin

ACROSS THE BORDER

Gather in San Diego in the morning. Meet your Group Leader and fellow travelers and depart for Mexico. Cross the border, enjoy a Mexican pan dulce and coffee and begin the road south along Highway One, the guideline to the peninsula. Stop in Puerto Nuevo for a delicious lobster lunch on a traditional restaurant. The scenic portion to Ensenada along the Pacific Ocean offers breathtaking views. A melting pot of adventurers seeking fortunes in nearby mines established the city of Ensenada on the shores of beautiful Todos Santos Bay. Today it is a pleasant city offering a Mediterranean climate, friendly people and a historical ambiance. A brief stop to rest and continue to San Vicente to visit a small Community Museum. Cross one of the peninsula's most important agricultural areas to reach San Quintin. The hotel for the night fronts a wide-open beach.

Hotel Mision Santa Maria, San Quintin.

Meals L/D

DAY 2. San Quintin- Guerrero Negro

THE MAGNIFICENT DESERT

The day is dedicated to admiring the wonders of the desert. The mountainous peninsula is covered by innumerable species of flora, many of which are endemic. A large part of the drive crosses *Reserva Valle de los Cirios* (Valley of the Boojum Tree Reserve) established mainly to protect the unique tree, Baja's signature plant. Stops are made for nature walks, including a visit to a small cave with simple rock art. Lunch is in stunning Cataviña. At Parallel 28, the state of Baja California Sur begins with the city of Guerrero Negro, home of the largest salt plant in the world and one of the gray whale sanctuaries.

Hotel Half Way Inn, Guerrero Negro

Meals B/L/D

DAY 3. Guerrero Negro - Scammon's (Ojo de Liebre) Lagoon - San Ignacio.

BAJA'S BIRDS & WHALES UP CLOSE

Begin the day visiting a natural reserve in an enormous salt marsh where birds migrate from Russia, Canada, and other latitudes. Begin the Gray Whale experience in Scammon's Lagoon Sanctuary. Drive through *La Exportadora de Sal*, one of the largest salt plants in the world and learn about its activities. At the lagoon, board *pangas* (small boats) for a FIRST memorable encounter with the whales. Continue south to San Ignacio, a charming town that developed around its imposing 18th century mission, still in use today, in the midst of a lush, tranquil oasis. Visit the church and enjoy the relaxed life of the town around its tree-filled *zocalo*. Perhaps local school children will present a lively folk dancing performance for your evening entertainment.

Hotel La Huerta, San Ignacio

Meals B/L/D

DAY 4. San Ignacio - Laguna de San Ignacio - San Ignacio

GRAY WHALES CONTINUED

Continue the whale watching adventure in San Ignacio Lagoon. Board local vans for the drive partly on graded road to reach the secluded lagoon. Experience a second adventuresome ride among whales in this remote lagoon! A hot meal is served in a *palapa* at the lagoon. Migrating birds can be spotted along the shore. Back in San Ignacio, enjoy a relaxed evening getting into the small-town atmosphere and its slow pace of life. Visit the mission and join the local people at the plaza.

Hotel La Huerta, San Ignacio

Meals B/L

DAY 5. San Ignacio- Scammon's (Ojo de Liebre) Lagoon - Cataviña

ADIOS TO THE WHALES / DESERT GARDEN

The journey back north begins. First stop returns to Guerrero Negro for a final encounter with the whales in Scammon's Lagoon. Stops are made along the return drive to Cataviña to admire the large variety of dense desert vegetation. Located in the midst of the Central Desert, a combination of sun, sand, gigantic granite boulders, and amusing combinations of boojums, cardons and elephant trees make Cataviña a superb "desert garden". Due to this setting, nights in the tiny village of Cataviña are memorable. Dinner at the hotel consists of a variety of finger food.

Hotel Misión Cataviña

Meals B/L/D

DAY 6. Cataviña - San Diego.

FAREWELL TO BAJA

Before breakfast, join an unforgettable walk to see the rising sun shining through the "pricklies" of the magnificent "desert garden". Leave the desert behind and stop for lunch in a San Quintin restaurant to taste traditional platters.

A second brief stop is on Ensenada's main street for quick shopping or to rest in a café. Drive the final stretch along the beautiful coastal highway, back across the border and into San Diego.

Meals B/L/D

INCLUDED SERVICES

- Comfortable private motorcoach
- Five nights accommodations
- Most meals with one drink each. Meals are chosen according to local specialty
- Snacks and drinking water
- All visits and excursions mentioned in the itinerary
- THREE whale-watching excursions in two different lagoons on three different days
- Services of experienced local Group Leader
- Taxes and tips of included meals and hotels
- Creative learning experiences during driving time

Price does not include courtesies to group leader, drivers nor special excursions staff

DATE Sunday February 23 to Friday, February 28, 2020

PRICE \$ 1,160.00 - per person in double occupancy
\$ 1,415.00 - per person in single occupancy (subject to availability)
Full payment preferred.

Prices based on a minimum of 24 passengers.

ENROLLMENTS

For additional information please contact Andiamo at
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Program will open for enrollments in September 2019

VALID PASSPORT MANDATORY

Passport must not expire within six months of travel date.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Participants must be able to board small fishing boats from a beach and from a pier giving a step approximately of knee height, with possibility of wading into shallow water up to the knee.

Boat excursions are 2 ½ to 3 hrs each with the possibility of encountering rough seas.

Walks are usually short and on relatively flat terrain, however often on uneven ground. There are options for short but steep hikes, if participant can't join, he/she may spend time around the flat area while the activity is in process. Driving time varies from 1 ½ - 5 hours/day. The 3 hrs round trip in San Ignacio lagoon includes 1 hour on a graded road. Bathroom facilities on route range from modern to rustic.

PLEASE NOTE

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information featured on this program. Itineraries are based on our best information at this time. Circumstances beyond our control may require us to adjust itineraries or other details. We regret any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your understanding.