

ITINERARY

WHALE WATCHING EXPEDITION

Birch Aquarium at Scripps

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 is the Gray Whale migration. 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 of the "friendliest" even 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.

Day 1. San Diego - Ensenada - San Quintin.

Begin in the morning by driving South to cross into Mexico. The scenic road to Ensenada offers breathtaking views. Stop for lunch and a brief city tour. Continue to San Vicente to visit a small Community Museum. The hotel in San Quintin fronts a wide-open beach offering spectacular sunsets.

Hotel: Desert Inn, Mision Santa Maria.

Meals: B / L

Day 2. San Quintin - Guerrero Negro.

The day is dedicated to admire 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* (Boo Jum Tree Reserve) established mainly to protect the unique plant. At Parallel 28, the state of Baja California Sur begins with the city of Guerrero Negro.

Hotel: Desert Inn, Guerrero Negro

Meals: B/L

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

Sight birds in an enormous salt marsh where birds migrate from Russia, Canada, and other latitudes. Drive through *La Exportadora de Sal*, one of the largest salt plants in the world and learn about its activities. Board *pangas* (small boats) for a memorable encounter with the gray whales in Scammon's Lagoon Sanctuary. 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.

Hotel: Desert Inn, San Ignacio

Meals: B/L/D

Day 4 . San Ignacio - Laguna de San Ignacio - San Ignacio.

Board vans for the two hour drive on a graded road to reach the secluded San Ignacio Lagoon. Experience a second adventuresome ride among whales. Lunch is in a palapa in the lagoon. Migrating birds can be spotted along the shore. Back in San Ignacio, enjoy a relaxed evening strolling in the plaza and choosing a restaurant for dinner.

Hotel: Desert Inn, San Ignacio

Meals: B/L

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

Return to Guerrero Negro for a final encounter with the whales! 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 boo jums, cardons and elephant trees make Cataviña a superb "desert garden". In isolated Cataviña, the nights reveal an enchanting desert sky. Dinner at the hotel consists of a variety of finger food.

Hotel: Desert Inn, Cataviña

Meals: B/L/D

Day 6. Cataviña - San Diego.

Begin the last stretch with a beautiful walk to visit a small cave with simple rock art. The return trip stops in a typical San Quintin restaurant for lunch and in Ensenada for shopping.

Meals: B/L

Features Include:

- Comfortable private motorcoach
- Five nights accommodations
- Most meals with one drink each. Meals are chosen according to the local specialty
- Snacks and drinking water
- All visits and excursions included in the itinerary
- Three whale watching excursions in two different lagoons
- Services of experienced guides and a naturalist from the Birch Aquarium at Scripps
- Taxes and tips of included meals and hotels. *Note: tips of drivers and guides are not included*
- Creative learning experiences during driving time

DATE: Thursday March 15 to Tuesday March 20, 2012.

PRICE: \$ 915.00 Double Occupancy
\$ 1,130.00 Single Occupancy (subject to availability)
Full payment preferred

Traveler must be able to endure extended driving periods, drives on dirt roads for up to 2 hours each way and board small fishing boats (pangas) 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 traveler can't join, he/she may spend time around the flat area while the activity is in process.

VALID PASSPORT MANDATORY

Please note: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information featured on this itinerary. 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.