

Baja California, Mexico, 2012

The whale-watching trip of a lifetime!



Dates:

- Wednesday 8 February - Tuesday 21 February 2012
- Saturday 10 March - Friday 23 March 2012
- Monday 9 April - Sunday 22 April 2012

Highlights:



- Baja California is one of the best places in the world for whale and dolphin watching. During this superb holiday we hope to see as many as 15 different species - as well as a host of other wildlife
- Fabulous whale watching with a good variety of whales and dolphins and are likely to have life-changing encounters with some of the largest and most inquisitive animals on the planet
- Good chance of seeing blue, humpback, fin, grey (see left) and sperm whales, among others
- Explore off-the-beaten-track on both sides of Baja California
- Small group on an exclusively-chartered boat with a highly experienced crew
- Wide variety of other wildlife includes California sea lions, Guadalupe fur seals, northern elephant seals, ospreys, blue-footed boobies and magnificent frigatebirds.
- Shore walks and snorkelling opportunities

More details

Travelling aboard one of the few vessels with a special whale-watching permit from the Mexican government, we cruise along the entire 800-mile-long Pacific coast of Baja California and then explore the island-studded Sea of Cortez.



On the Pacific coast, we visit the remote islands of Todos Santos, with its many harbour seals, and San Benitos to observe northern elephant seals. We spend two days in San Ignacio Lagoon – a magical place beside the desert where grey whales gather to breed. Local fishermen meet us at the entrance to the lagoon, and all our whale encounters are from their pangas, which are amazingly stable and great for close-up photography. February to April is a perfect time to see a little bit of everything, and we hope to encounter courting whales, mothers with their calves and some of the world-famous 'friendlies', which will literally nudge the sides of our small boats. Then we continue our marine safari south to an area off Magdalena Bay, where we hope to find feeding blue whales, before heading for the southern tip of Baja and a major breeding ground for humpback whales. With a little luck we should be able to listen to the unearthly songs of the humpbacks through an underwater microphone.

Rounding the peninsula, we enter the Sea of Cortez and spend the next five days cruising its tropical waters. We head for the best areas for blue, fin (see *left*), humpback, Bryde's and sperm whales and along the way expect to encounter short-finned pilot whales and enormous herds of dolphins (long-beaked and short-beaked common and bottlenose among them). We could also see killer whales, whale sharks, dwarf sperm whales, beaked whales, Risso's dolphins (all of these turned up in 2011), and more. It's one of those places where anything can turn up.

We'll walk on remote tropical islands, explore spectacular cactus forests, look for hummingbirds, snorkel with playful California sea lions, and visit an outlying colony of rare Guadalupe fur seals. We'll watch blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds, red-billed tropicbirds, brown pelicans and many other bright and beautiful birds. And we'll even find time to marvel at bioluminescent seas and spectacular night skies.

Itinerary:

Day 1: Fly London to San Diego – transfer to hotel near the marina – evening free to relax.

Day 2: Day at leisure in San Diego with a welcome brunch and orientation talk – board the *Spirit of Adventure* early evening and set sail.

Day 3 - Day 4: Cruise down the Pacific coast of Baja California with stops at Isla Todos Santos (harbour seals) and Isla San Benitos (northern elephant seals).

Day 5 - Day 7: Two full days in San Ignacio Lagoon, using small Mexican pangas to meet the friendly grey whales.

Day 8: Magdalena Bay area for feeding blue and humpback whales offshore.

Day 9 - Day 12: Four or five full days exploring the Sea of Cortez looking for blue, humpback, fin, Bryde's and sperm whales and a host of other wildlife.

Day 13: Expedition concludes at Cabo San Lucas – transfer to Los Cabos (San Jose del Cabo) airport and depart for home.

Day 14: Morning arrival in UK.

Accommodation:

Travel and accommodation is aboard the US-registered *Spirit of Adventure* – the best vessel for whale watching in the region. The air-conditioned cabins are small and have limited storage space, but we really only use them for sleeping. There's lots of deck space at different levels for superb whale watching and a spacious salon for relaxing and socialising. The 88-foot long / 25-foot wide vessel carries three sturdy 22-foot pangas or skiffs for shore excursions.

We stay in a hotel in San Diego within a 10-minute walk of the marina, in rooms with private facilities, on the first night.

Group size:

Only 27 places available (the vessel can accommodate 32 passengers but we have chosen to limit numbers).

Leaders: BBC zoologist Mark Carwardine and Rachel Ashton.

Prices (excluding flights): £3,095 per person sharing; £45 single supplement (San Diego hotel only).

Price includes: eleven nights' accommodation in cabin, all meals and most drinks on *Spirit of Adventure*; one night's bed and continental breakfast in hotel with private facilities in San Diego; welcome brunch in San Diego; excursions as described in the itinerary; pangas in San Ignacio Lagoon; Mexican tourist card; Mexican permits and fees; coach to Los Cabos airport from Cabo San Lucas at end of trip; guide services of Mark Carwardine/Rachel Ashton from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas; information pack; DVD of photos taken by Mark during the holiday.

Price does not include: flights; taxi transfers between airport and hotel; airport departure taxes; travel insurance; meals on shore (except breakfasts and welcome meal); alcoholic drinks, bottled water and canned sodas on board; crew gratuities aboard vessel (we suggest about US\$15 per night); Panga boatman tips (approximately US\$20); laundry and phone calls, personal items.

Booking details & more information:

- The trip is insured and fully bonded by Wildlife Worldwide (ATOL, AITO and IATA licensed).
- Please contact Rachel first to check availability and for a booking form T: 0117 904 8934; E: rachel@markcarwardine.com

