

# Whale watching in Baja California, Mexico, 2014

*The whale-watching trip of a lifetime!*

Baja California, the 1,200km-long peninsula on the sub-tropical west coast of Mexico, is the top whale-watching destination on Earth. Whale expert and BBC zoologist Mark Carwardine is the perfect tour leader to show it to you.



## About our trip

Baja California is one of the best places in the world (if not *the* best) for whale and dolphin watching. During this superb holiday, we hope to see as many as 10-15 different cetacean species – as well as a host of other wildlife – and are likely to have life-changing encounters with some of the largest and most inquisitive animals on the planet.

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

Travelling down the Pacific coast we visit the remote islands of Todos Santos, with their many harbour seals, and San Benitos, to observe a large rookery of northern elephant seals. We spend two days in San Ignacio Lagoon – a magical place beside the desert where literally hundreds of grey whales gather to breed. Local fishermen meet us at the entrance to the lagoon, and all our whale encounters are from their 3 pangas (10-person, 22-foot-long boats), which are amazingly stable and superb for close-up photography. February, March and April are the perfect times to see everything, and we hope to meet courting whales, females with their calves and some of the world famous 'friendlies', which will literally nudge the sides of our small boats. We then continue our marine safari south to an area off Magdalena Bay

where we hope to find feeding blue and courting humpback whales.

Rounding the tip of Baja, we enter the Sea of Cortez and spend the next days cruising its tropical waters. We head for the best areas for blue, fin, 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, dwarf sperm whales, rare beaked whales, whale sharks, Risso's dolphins, and more. It's one of those places where almost anything can happen.

We'll take nature walks on remote tropical islands, explore spectacular cactus forests, look for endemic hummingbirds, snorkel with colourful fish and 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.

## Highlights

- Fabulous whale watching with a good variety of whales and dolphins and life-changing close encounters with some of the largest animals on the planet
- Good chance of seeing blue, humpback, fin, grey and sperm whales, among others

- Explore off-the-beaten-track on both sides of Baja California
- An exclusively chartered boat with a highly experienced crew
- Wide variety of other wildlife includes California sea lions and Guadalupe fur seals, northern elephant seals, blue-footed boobies, layson albatrosses, black-footed albatrosses, magnificent frigatebirds and hummingbirds
- Shore walks and snorkelling opportunities

## Dates in 2014

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

*Please note these may change by a day or two.*



**Itinerary** (exact day-to-day itinerary may change according to weather and whale sightings)

**Day 1:** Fly from the UK to San Diego and transfer to the Best Western Yacht Harbor Hotel, a 10-minute taxi drive from the airport (there are Best Western shuttle buses, too), and less than a 10-minute walk from H&M Landing, which is the marina where our boat, the Spirit of Adventure, is moored.

**Day 2:** Welcome brunch at 9.30am to meet the rest of the group and for a full briefing. Day at leisure in San Diego. We will re-meet in the Best Western foyer at 6pm before boarding the Spirit of Adventure early in the evening.

**Days 3 - 4:** We spend two days cruising down the Pacific coast of Baja California, whale watching in the daytime and travelling overnight. We make two stops en route. The first is at Isla de Todos Santos: depending on sea conditions, we plan to launch our pangas (we bring three of these eight-person boats aboard the Spirit of Adventure) and cruise among the rocks to view large numbers of resting harbour seals and a variety of seabirds. The second is at Isla de San Benitos: a tiny archipelago comprising three small islands, which have a substantial colony of northern elephant seals. We will land on West Benitos and explore on foot, watching rookeries of Guadalupe fur seals, California sea lions and northern elephant seals, ospreys, common ravens, and more.

**Days 5 - 6:** We have two full days in San Ignacio Lagoon with the friendly grey whales. Mexican fishermen meet us at the lagoon entrance, and we transfer from the Spirit of Adventure to their 10-person, 22-foot pangas, for all whale encounters. The fishermen have 3 pangas, which enables all of us to go out 2 or 3 times a day. There are literally hundreds of grey whales in San Ignacio at this time of year, so they are hard to miss as they spyhop, blow and breach in close proximity! This is also the best place to encounter the well-known 'friendlies' – individuals that repeatedly approach and nudge the small boats, encouraging us to scratch them.

**Day 7:** We have one more day on the Pacific coast and cruise past the Magdalena Bay area, which is a major feeding ground for blue whales and a number of other species.

**Days 8 - 12:** We round the tip of Baja, travelling through an important

humpback whale breeding ground at Gorda Bank and enter the Sea of Cortez. We spend the next four days packing in as much whale and dolphin watching as possible. Fin, Bryde's, sperm and short-finned pilot whales are here year-round, humpback and blue whales visit in winter, and there are many other residents and visitors. We will make a few shore landings to explore the arid terrain, enjoy a beach walk or perhaps a snorkel.

**Day 13:** Our expedition concludes early in the morning at Cabo San Lucas, on the southern tip of Baja California (we are likely to disembark at 7am US time). We transfer by coach 30 miles northeast to Los Cabos (San Jose del Cabo) airport where the trip concludes.

**Day 14:** Arrive back in the UK.

### Differences between the three trips

All three trips are always utterly fabulous and, if Mark had to choose just one, he honestly wouldn't know which to go for. Here are a few typical differences (but please bear in mind that nothing is fixed in stone when it comes to wildlife watching and every trip is different):

- **NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEALS.** In February, the huge males are defending their territories with vigour, clashing on the beaches of San Benitos. By March, most males have gone to sea. By April all the males have usually gone to sea, but there are still plenty of females and pups.
- **GREY WHALES.** In February, there are more adults in San Ignacio and usually more breaching, spyhopping and other surface activity - but the calves are much smaller and can be less interested in whale-watching boats. In March, there are still plenty of adults, and the calves are more confident. By April, many of the adults are on their way back north, but the remaining mothers and calves tend to be at their most confident and friendlier than earlier in the season.
- **BLUE WHALES.** In February and March, we are more likely to see blue whales in both the Sea of Cortez and Pacific; in April encounters are more usual only in the Pacific (though in April 2010 and 2011 we had fabulous encounters in the Sea of Cortez!).
- **WHALE SHARKS.** There is perhaps a better chance of seeing whale sharks in March and April, probably less chance in February (we had a huge one up close to the boat in April 2011).
- **WEATHER AND WATER TEMPERATURE.** It's usually warmer, both in and out of the water, in April.





**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; evening talks/slideshows; memory stick of photos by Mark taken during the trip.

**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 day); Panga boatman tips (approximately US\$20); laundry and phone calls, personal items.

#### Payment schedule

£3,295 per person sharing; £65 single supplement (San Diego hotel only).

- Non-refundable deposit on booking: £500 pp
- 2<sup>nd</sup> payment: £1,397.50 per person six months prior to departure
- Final balance (and single supplement if applicable): £1,397.50 per person 90 days prior to departure

*(please note all money goes through Discover the World, with whom we are bonded and insured, but we organise all the trips and are your main contact throughout the booking procedure)*

#### To book (and more information)

Contact Rachel Ashton:  
**T** 0117-904-8934  
**M** 07791-058-342  
**E** [rachel@markcarwardine.com](mailto:rachel@markcarwardine.com)

