

Join us in Baja California, Mexico

The best whale-watching trip on Earth

23 February - 7 March; 10-22 March; 25 March - 6 April

If you want to see whales, Baja California – the 1,200km-long peninsula on the Pacific coast of Mexico – is *the* best place to go. And renowned whale expert and zoologist Mark Carwardine, and Rachel Ashton, are the perfect tour leaders to show it to you.



About our trip

Baja California is the best place in the world 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 island-studded waters of the Sea of Cortez. Unlike some travel companies, we explore both sides of the Baja peninsula. Travelling down the Pacific coast we visit the remote islands of Todos Santos, 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 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. 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 sub-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 (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, look for endemic hummingbirds, snorkel with colourful fish and California sea lions, and visit outlying colonies 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, whale sharks, Munk's pygmy devil rays, ocean sunfish, blue-footed boobies, Laysan albatrosses, black-footed albatrosses, magnificent frigatebirds, red-billed tropicbirds, and various hummingbird species.
- Shore walks and snorkelling.



Dates in 2023

TRIP 1: 23 February - 7 March (led by marine biologist Scot Anderson and Rachel Ashton)

TRIP 2: 10 - 22 March (led by Mark and Rachel)

TRIP 3: 25 March - 6 April (led by Mark and Rachel)

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

Day 1: Fly from the UK to San Diego and overnight in waterside hotel.

Day 2: Welcome breakfast at 9.00am to meet the rest of the group and for a full briefing. Day at leisure in San Diego. We board the *Spirit of Adventure* early 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 Todos Santos to view resting harbour seals and a variety of seabirds. The second is at 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, 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.

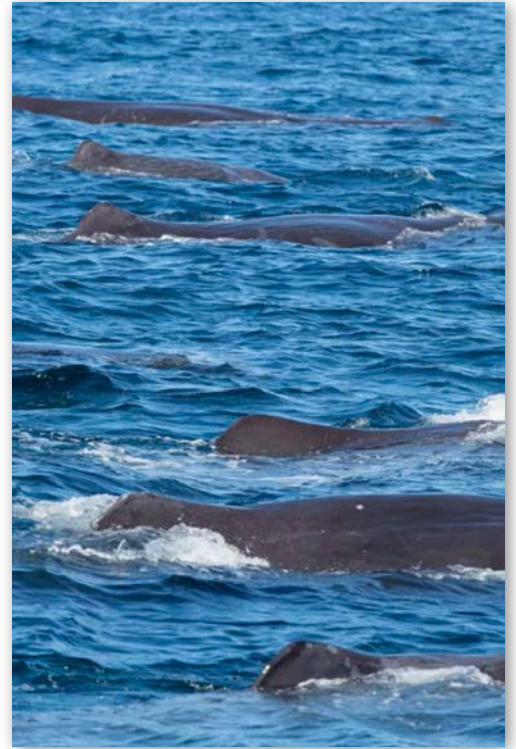


Day 7: We have one more day on the Pacific coast and cruise past the Magdalena Bay area, which is a major feeding ground for blue whales and other species.

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, snorkel with California sea lions, and we hope to see whale sharks, and, conditions permitting, to snorkel with them as well.

Day 13: Our expedition ends early in the morning at Cabo San Lucas, on the southern tip of Baja California. We spend a couple of hours there before transferring by coach to Los Cabos (San José del Cabo) airport.

[Day 14: Arrive back in the UK if flying straight home.]





Price (excluding flights)

£5,995 per person Sharing on boat;

£85 single supplement (San Diego hotel only)

Payment schedule

- Non-refundable deposit on booking: £500pp
- Final balance (and single supplement if applicable) 90 days prior to departure

Price includes: 11 nights' accommodation in twin or triple cabin, all meals and some drinks on *Spirit of Adventure*; one night's bed and breakfast in hotel with private facilities in San Diego; excursions as described in the itinerary; pangas in San Ignacio Lagoon; Mexican tourist card; Mexican permits and fees; luggage transfer from hotel in San Diego to boat (for passengers this is a 15-minute walk along flat pavements); coach to Los Cabos airport from Cabo San Lucas at end of trip (depending on your flight time); guide services of Mark Carwardine/Rachel Ashton from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas; information pack; evening talks/slideshows; final night

slideshow of photos and films taken by Mark and Rachel during the trip, with link to download it once home.

Price does not include: flights; taxi transfers between San Diego airport and hotel; taxi from Cabo San Lucas to airport if your flight time does not fit with our coach transfer (about US\$80 per taxi); airport departure taxes; travel insurance; meals on shore (except breakfast); alcoholic drinks, canned sodas on board; crew gratuities aboard vessel (we suggest about US\$35 per day); Panga boatman tips (approximately US\$30 total); visa to enter USA (ESTA), which is bought online and currently costs \$14 (you will be given a link with the full trip information); extra nights in hotel; laundry and phone calls, personal items.

Number of passengers:

Maximum is 27, plus 2 leaders and 7 crew.

About the boat: the *Spirit of Adventure* (right) at 88 feet in length, is perfect for whale watching, with a highly experienced crew (and fantastic food). While the cabins are small (all twin with two triples) and they have no en-suite facilities or portholes, it is a very clean and comfortable boat – and, of course, part of the holiday's charm is that it isn't a luxury cruise!



About our leaders

Mark and [Rachel Ashton](#) have co-led the Baja California trips together for many years. For the first trip of the season (23 February - 7 March), Scot Anderson will join Rachel in Mark's place (Mark has a long-term commitment working in Antarctica)). Scot is a renowned Californian marine biologist whose wide knowledge ranges from the

ocean's tiniest creatures right up to the largest. He's worked in Baja for many years, and Rachel and he have worked together on the *Spirit of Adventure* before – between them have been on the trip more than 90 times. Mark and Rachel will co-lead the next two trips (10-22 March and 25 March - 6 April).





To book (and for more information)

Contact Rachel Ashton

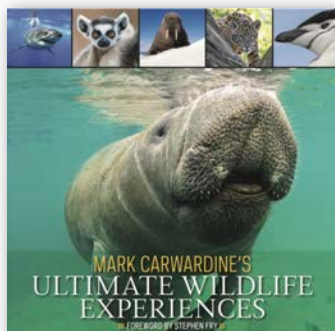
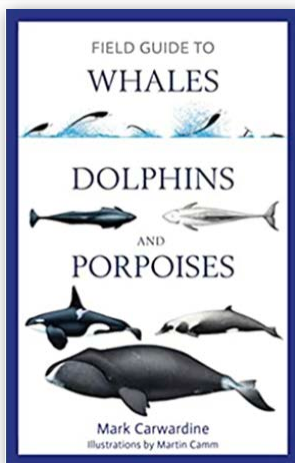
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Don't leave home without Mark's brand new, ground-breaking field guide to the world's cetaceans [click here](#)



Read Mark's chapter about Baja California in his Ultimate Wildlife Experiences book [here](#)



[Your financial protection is guaranteed when you book with us](#)

Please note that if the trip has to be cancelled because of Covid-19, you will have the choice of transferring to another trip or a full refund.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ...

Mark's incredible knowledge of and passion for wildlife and photography are addictive. We've gained a deeper appreciation of the wonders of our planet, while filling our bellies with laughter and building new friendships along the way. BW & DW (Baja California 2015, 2017 & 2022)

I recommend Mark and Rachel's Baja trip wholeheartedly and guarantee that it will change your perspective about this planet. From mother grey whales bringing their calves over to be scratched in their breeding lagoon, to blue whale blow on your face, to swimming with whale sharks, it is all the most extraordinary experience. DO (Baja California 2020)

Mark and Rachel's safari was wonderful! Grandstand views of so many marine mammals and other creatures, excellent organisation and a friendly atmosphere on board. And how such tasty meals were prepared in such a small kitchen I will never understand! AW (Baja California 2015)

Mark and Rachel's trips are very well organised and go the extra mile – you never leave disappointed. We would always recommend them above any others and are so grateful for the amazing experiences and friendships we have made along the way. MW (Baja California 2013, 2017, 2020 & 2022)

Mark always puts both the passengers and the wildlife at the front of his thinking, so that we have the most exciting and enthralling time, knowing that the wildlife is not being stressed or harassed. The whole holiday experience – from the first phone call to the airport goodbye – is exciting, friendly and fun. That's why I keep returning! CS (Baja California 2011, 2016, 2018 & 2022)

Baja must be the best wildlife experiences anywhere in the world with wonderful people, amazing food, and a fabulous crew. I have travelled with Mark for many years now and my life is so much richer as a result. He is also one of the world's very best wildlife photographers and has taught me so much. PB (Baja California, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 & 2022)

I can't put any monetary value on the memories of travelling with Mark and Rachel in Baja. When the real world is grim, I can revisit those blue, humpback and ever-friendly grey whales, orcas, leaping Munk's mobula rays and dolphins in their thousands, glorious sunsets and seascapes ... and shall be able to do so for ever. LT (Baja California 2011, 2016, 2020 & 2022)

