BAJA CALIFORNIA AND THE SEA OF CORTEZ: AMONG THE GREAT WHALES

8 Days | Nat Geo Venture | 100 Guests | Expeditions in: Jan/Feb/Mar | From $5,990 to $10,400

Enter the California gray whale birthing lagoons of Bahia Magdalena for close encounters with these gentle giants, a rare privilege in the natural world. Plus explore the islands dotting the azure Sea of Cortez, one of the best places to see marine mammals.

DAY 1: Loreto/San Carlos/Embark
Upon arrival in Loreto, transfer to San Carlos and embark National Geographic Venture. Tonight, we’ll anchor off the coast of Isla Santa Margarita. (D)

DAY 2: Bahia Almejas/Rehusa Channel/Isla Magdalena
Awake anchored in Bahia Almejas, the southernmost part of the Bay. We’ll stop at a large frigatebird colony enroute to the spectacular whale grounds of Bahia Almejas. Whales in this part of the bay tend to be very active, seemingly oblivious to our presence so settle in for some great experiences. During lunch, the ship will reposition to Isla Magdalena where we’ll head to shore to explore the ever-shifting sand dunes, on a cross-island walk to one of the most pristine beaches in the Pacific. Bird watching can be excellent here with abundant seabirds in action and shorebirds patrolling the beaches as they fatten up and prepare for long journeys to Arctic breeding grounds. (B,L,D)
DAY 3: Boca de Soledad
Each winter, during their long migration, gray whales travel south from their Arctic feeding grounds to breed and give birth, and raise their calves in these sheltered waters. We’ll transfer to López Mateos and spend the full day observing, and with luck, interacting with these majestic creatures. Together with savvy local Mexican fishermen we’ve known for years, we’ll venture out in Zodiacs to view the numerous mother-calf pairs that thrive in this sheltering region. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before heading back to the ship in late afternoon. (B,L,D)

DAY 4: Hull Canal/Cruising
Kickstart your morning with morning stretch hosted by our onboard wellness specialist on the sun deck. After breakfast, we’ll explore the vast mangrove system via kayak, standup paddleboard, and Zodiac, and learn how these massive ecosystems support their surroundings. This afternoon, we’ll sail out through “La Entrada” as we leave Magdalena Bay behind. Traveling south along the coast of the peninsula, there is a chance of seeing a wide variety of marine life, including the largest animal on Earth, the blue whale. Hear naturalist talks and learn photography basics. (B,L,D)

DAY 5: Gorda Banks and Cabo Pulmo
Ease into the day with a majestic sunrise over the iconic Friars Rocks at Land’s End. We’ll spend the rest of the morning searching the seas of Gorda Banks seamount, a renowned gathering place for whales, especially humpbacks, dolphins, and other sea life. Following lunch, we’ll set out to snorkel the pristine reefs of Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, one of the most successful national marine parks in the world, and chat with locals about their advocacy to protect this unique place. (B,L,D)

DAY 6: Los Islotes and La Paz
Awake this morning off the rocky island of Los Islotes, where we’ll don flippers, a mask, and snorkel (which we provide) and swim with curious sea lions. Then we’ll reposition to the colorful city of La Paz to garner insight into the culture of Mexico, “Malecon” on a guided walking tour. Dinner will be an unforgettable cultural experience, complete with local cuisine, dancing, and folklore. (B,L,D)

DAY 7: Exploring the Sea of Cortez
Our plan is flexible as we explore some of the Sea’s many uninhabited islands. Our Captain and Expedition Leader will choose the perfect combination of activities for the day. We may go ashore at Isla San Francisco, where a sweeping arc of white sand beach beckons you to kayak or stand-up paddleboard. Or, hike to the nearby ridge for unparalleled views over Isla Danzante with your naturalist. You may also visit the abandoned salt works on Isla Carmen. You’ll get a chance to see the great diversity offered in the Sea of Cortez, and with some luck, spot the amazing wildlife. (B,L,D)

DAY 8: Loreto/Disembark
Disembark in Loreto after breakfast and transfer to the city center. Here you can choose to visit the first mission in Baja California, as well as the nearby museum to learn more about what makes this town so special. Enjoy free time to explore the quaint shops and vibrant side streets. After lunch, transfer to Loreto Airport for flights home. (B,L)
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