



# MEXICO

## Baja Peninsula: Gray Whales and Desert Landscapes

**9 DAYS** | Choose your dates | Best season to travel: **FEB - MAR**

*Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from arctic seas to the warm waters of Baja California's lagoons to court, mate, give birth, and care for their young. Take part in one of the unique natural wonders of the world as you visit three whale sanctuaries for arm's-length encounters with these graceful giants. During your journey north along the arid peninsula, you'll also observe beautiful desert vegetation—including some of the region's 600-plus endemic plant species—enjoy opportunities to see birds and other wildlife, visit Spanish missions, and learn about daily life on a working goat ranch.*

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

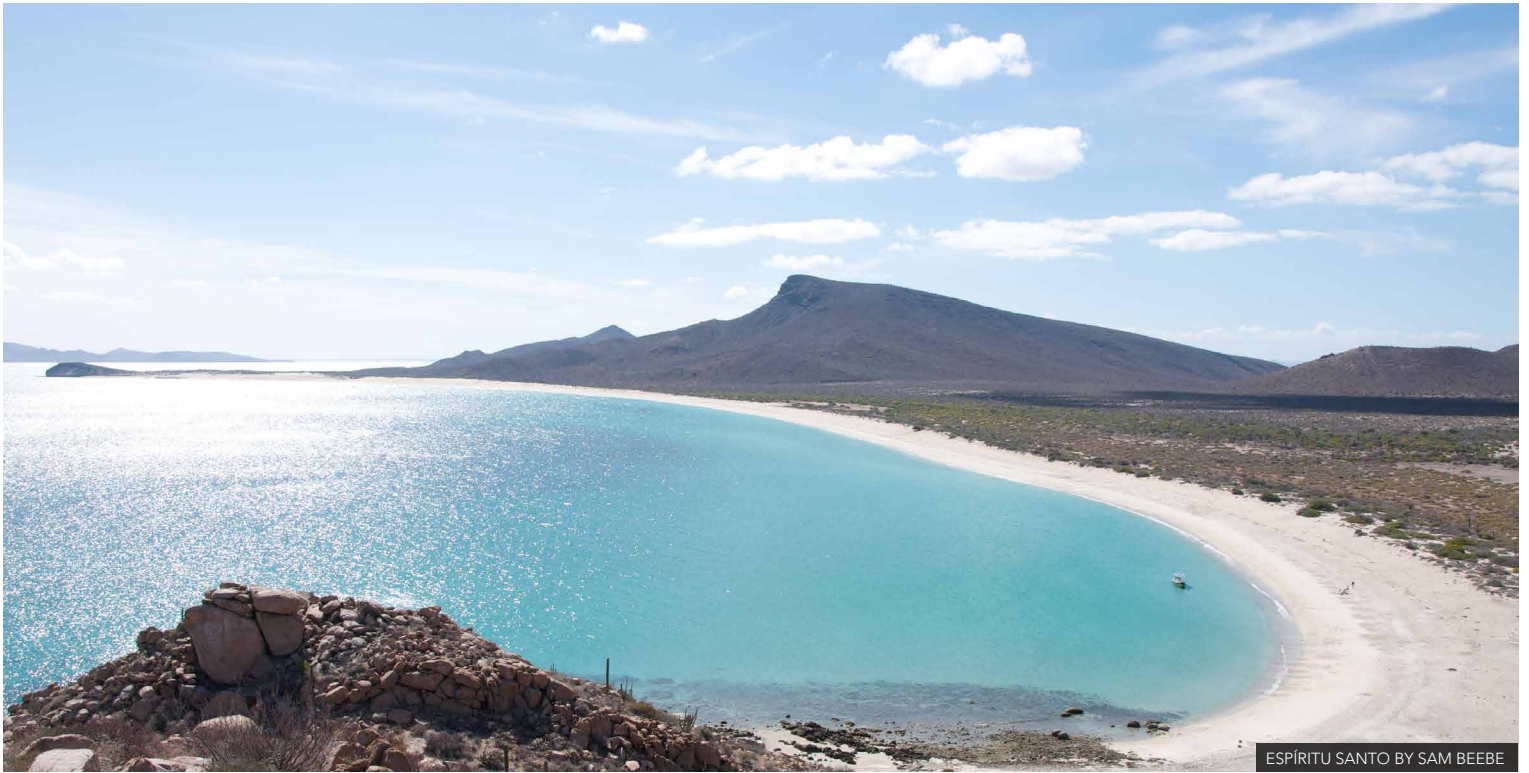
- Enjoy thrilling opportunities to view and photograph gray whales up-close during small-boat excursions.
- Explore hidden coves, snorkel with sea lions and tropical fish, and relax on the pristine beaches of Espíritu Santo, a protected island and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- Seek out resident and migratory birds in mangrove and coastal habitats and in the highlands' prickly desert vegetation.
- Walk through the scenic Cataviña Boulder Fields, where gigantic granite boulders, Boojum trees, towering cardon cacti, and contorted elephant trees dominate the landscape.

### WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Bilingual local guide
- Driver
- Accommodations
- Activities
- Private transportation
- Meals
- Beverages with meals
- Carbon offsetting



PHOTO BY DEBBIE JORDAN



ESPIRITU SANTO BY SAM BEEBE

## ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

### DAY 1 - LA PAZ

Upon arrival at Los Cabos International Airport, travel about two and a half hours to the hotel in La Paz. Participants should arrive at the airport no later than 1 pm. Although La Paz is the most important city of the southern part of the peninsula, its tree-lined streets and calm, clear bays inspire tranquility. A walk along the Malecón boardwalk is a treat. This evening, attend a welcome dinner and orientation at the hotel. *Overnight at Hyatt Place. (D)*

### DAY 2 - LA PAZ

Today, explore the wonders of the Sea of Cortez, considered one of the most biologically diverse marine areas in the world. Begin the day at the marina, where you'll board a boat and depart for Espíritu Santo. This protected island, declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1995, offers a variety of attractions: fascinating geology, snorkeling with sea lions and tropical fish in crystal-clear water, pristine beaches, and hidden and isolated coves. Later, return to La Paz and get to know the downtown area. Dinner is at a traditional seafood restaurant on the Malecón. *Overnight at Hyatt Place. (BLD)*

### DAY 3 - LORETO

Check out and head north along the peninsula. The road crosses an important agricultural area where Crested Caracaras are often seen perched on fence posts. Take a detour to Bahía Magdalena for an unforgettable experience: Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from the Arctic Ocean to the warm waters of Baja California's lagoons to court, mate, give birth, and care for their young. Set out on a boat ride in a gray whale sanctuary to view these giant mammals at arm's length. Afterward, continue to Loreto, the oldest mission and permanent settlement of the Californias. The city served as the capital of the territory for over 100 years, and the mission still stands today. Upon arrival, check in at your waterfront, hacienda-style hotel. *Overnight at La Misión. (BLD)*

### DAY 4 - LORETO

The island-studded portion of the Sea of Cortez facing Loreto is protected by the Loreto Bay National Marine Park. Take a boat to encircle dramatic Coronado Island, which offers azure waters, interesting geology, and a colony of sea lions. Return to Loreto for lunch. This afternoon, head for the mountains. The city is surrounded by the impressively rugged peaks of the Sierra de la Giganta, providing the scenery for one of the



peninsula's most beautiful side excursions, a drive along steep walls to San Javier Mission and village. Known as "the jewel of the missions," San Javier is one of the best-preserved missions and still retains its original orchard planted by the missionaries. Stop at a goat ranch to learn about life on a ranch and the process of making goat cheese. Enjoy a snack, with the chance to make your own tortillas by hand. Dinner this evening is at a traditional palapa-style restaurant. *Overnight at La Misión. (BLD)*

#### DAY 5 - SAN IGNACIO

The variety of scenery makes the drive between Loreto and San Ignacio particularly interesting; giant cardon cacti dominate the landscape on the way to San Ignacio. Drive along the crystal-blue waters of Bahía de Concepción, with a stop at one of its unspoiled beaches, where you can see mangroves rich in bird life. Continue to Mulegé, a mission settlement on a riverbed lined with palm trees. In Santa Rosalía, visit the old French Quarter and the mining museum of El Boleo to learn how the French established this copper mining town and brought over the prefabricated iron church designed by Gustave Eiffel that is still standing today. North of Santa Rosalía, depart from the blue waters of the Sea of Cortez and climb one of the steepest grades in the peninsula, leading to a plateau and to the "Tres Vírgenes" volcanoes, cones of red lava rock dotted with graceful white elephant trees. Stop to bird in the highlands among prickly desert vegetation before arriving in 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 and a plaza filled with Indian laurel trees. *Overnight at La Huerta. (BLD)*

#### DAY 6 - SAN IGNACIO

Continue the whale experience in San Ignacio Lagoon. To reach the isolated remote lagoon, cross an open stretch of desert and a salty mudflat. Board small pangas for a memorable ride among

the whales. After lunch, enjoy the tranquility of the lagoon and spot migrant birds along the shore. Return to San Ignacio to visit the mission and stroll in the laurel-filled plaza. *Overnight at La Huerta. (BLD)*

#### DAY 7 - CATAVIÑA

Depart for Guerrero Negro, home of the largest salt plant in the world, an immense salt marsh, and a whale sanctuary that receives a record number of migrant gray whales each year. Drive through the salt plant to reach Scammon's Lagoon and depart for a third and final outing among the whales.

Continue the drive to Cataviña with a nature walk in an area rich with desert vegetation. Enter Reserva de los Cirios, named in honor of the Boojum tree, Baja's signature plant. Arrive in the famed Cataviña boulder fields located in the enchanting Central Desert. A combination of sun, sand, gigantic granite boulders, Boojum trees, cardon cacti, and elephant trees create a superb desert garden landscape. Settle in at the hotel and enjoy a dinner fiesta this evening. *Overnight at Misión Santa Maria. (BLD)*



CRESTED CARACARAS BY MANJITH KAINICKARA

#### DAY 8 - ENSENADA

Begin the day with a beautiful walk in the magnificent Cataviña desert garden,

including a visit to a small cave with simple rock art. Lunch is in a San Quintín restaurant to taste traditional platters. Arrive at Ensenada and take some time to stroll the main streets and along the waterfront. Check in at the oceanfront hotel and relax, admiring the spectacular view. Your farewell dinner at the hotel is accompanied by the sound of crashing waves. *Overnight at Las Rosas Hotel and Spa. (BLD)*

#### DAY 9 - SAN DIEGO/DEPART

Depart for the last stretch along Highway 1, a very scenic portion with stunning views on the Pacific coastline. Cross the border into the United States and continue to the San Diego airport for your return flight. Arrival time at the airport is approximately noon. Departure flights should be scheduled no earlier than 2 pm. (B)

## PROGRAM PRICING

**\$3,495** (15 participants + 1 leader)

**\$4,095** (10 participants + 1 leader)

Price includes accommodations, meals, entrance fees, and activities as indicated in the itinerary, private transportation unless otherwise noted in itinerary, non-alcoholic beverages with meals, full-time guide for duration of program, and carbon offset.

International airfare, gratuities, and items of a personal nature are not included.

Valid for travel Jan. 15 – Apr. 30, 2021.

## TRAVEL PROTECTION

Holbrook Travel purchases Travel Protection on behalf of all participants. These plans help provide coverage once the trip has departed and offer benefits for Baggage/Personal Effects, Accident & Sickness Medical Expenses, Emergency Evacuation and more. Refer to the Plan Document for more details.

Optional additional coverage is available in the form of the Group Deluxe Plan, which offers benefits for Trip Cancellation/Interruption, in addition to many other insurance benefits and non-insurance assistance services. If interested in this optional plan, we can provide you with rates and plan details.

## THE FINE PRINT

*A \$200 per person deposit and enrollment form are required to secure your reservation. This deposit is refundable until 95 days prior to departure excluding a \$100 cancellation fee. Non-refundable final payments are due no later than 95 days prior to departure.*



This program includes optional carbon offsetting with ClimateSafe. Learn more at [holbrooktravel.com/climatesafe](http://holbrooktravel.com/climatesafe)



WHALE TAIL BY DEBBIE STURDIVANT JORDAN



ACTIVITY LEVEL

2

EASY-MODERATE

## WHAT TO EXPECT

This natural and cultural expedition traverses Mexico's Baja Peninsula through desert, mountain, and coastal habitats between the Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean. A highlight will be three excursions to observe gray whales who migrate here from the Arctic. To get close (often an arm's length away!) you'll board small, 8–12 passenger panga boats for excursions of up to 3 hours. Some panga rides feature small waves or swells; at some beachheads you'll wade in foot-deep water to embark or disembark. There are several short walks on flat but sometimes uneven terrain; and one optional short, steep hike. Other activities include exploring villages, farms and historic missions; birdwatching; and optional snorkeling with sea lions. Average winter high temperatures range between 59°–70°F; mountain temperatures occasionally fall below freezing at night. Your 935-mile route from La Paz to San Diego involves drives of 1–5 hours in comfortable, air-conditioned, private charter buses or vans; stopping in rest areas whose facilities range from modern to rustic.



DESERT PLANTS BY DEBBIE STURDIVANT JORDAN