



Surrounded by a natural aquarium, the rugged magical landscape of Baja California Peninsula is home to vast deserts rich in vegetation, pristine beaches, jagged mountains, an array of shore birds and isolated villages. Of special attraction are the gray whales. Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from the Arctic Ocean to the warm waters of Baja California lagoons, designated as wildlife refuges, to court, mate, give birth and care for their young. Join the unique, unforgettable experience to view these giant mammals at arm's length, some may let themselves be petted!

Whale behaviors at the lagoons change as the season unfolds. Beginning in mid-January, whales arrive to give birth to their young outside the viewing areas. At this time, whales can be observed in the spectacular behavior of courting and mating. In February the lagoons reach the highest number of whales, up to 2,000 at one time! Spouts are visible at all times, mating still occurs and mothers with newborn calves begin to enter the observation areas. In March, as bulls and newly-pregnant whales depart, mother and baby pairs dominate the lagoons. Towards the end of the season, calves gain size and weight and mothers become less protective, offering a greater opportunity for close encounters. Whales remain in the lagoons up to mid April.

ITINERARY

DAY 1. SAN DIEGO - SAN QUINTIN ACROSS THE BORDER / SCENIC ROAD

Gather in San Diego in the morning. Meet your Group Leader and fellow travelers and depart for Mexico. Brief stop at the colorful, lively Tijuana market to see, touch, smell local delights. Then begin the road south along Highway One, the guideline to the peninsula. The scenic portion to Ensenada along the Pacific Ocean offers breathtaking views. A melting pot of adventurers seeking fortunes in nearby mines established the city of Ensenada on the shores of beautiful Todos Santos Bay. Today it is a pleasant city offering a Mediterranean climate, friendly people, and a historical ambiance. Stop for lunch and continue to San Vicente to visit a small Community Museum. Cross one of the peninsula's most important agricultural areas to reach San Quintin. The hotel for the night fronts a wide-open beach.

Hotel Mision Santa Maria, San Quintin.

DAY 2. SAN QUINTIN- GUERRERO NEGRO THE MAGNIFICENT DESERT

The day is dedicated to admiring the wonders of the desert and the striking landscape. The mountainous peninsula is covered by innumerable species of flora, many of which are endemic. A large part of the drive crosses *the Valle de los Cirios Nature Reserve* (Valley of the Boojum Tree Reserve) established mainly to protect the unique boojum tree, Baja's signature plant and a most important contribution to the world of unusual flora. Among the many other plants sighted are the giant cardons, the world's most massive cactus reaching a height of over 60 feet, and the aromatic contorted elephant trees. Stops are made for nature walks to recognize the variety of flora and to visit a small cave with simple rock art. Lunch is in stunning Cataviña. At Parallel 28, the state of Baja California Sur begins with the city of Guerrero Negro, home of the largest salt plant in the world and one of the gray whale sanctuaries.

Hotel Half Way Inn, Guerrero Negro

DAY 3. GUERRERO NEGRO - SCAMMON'S (OJO DE LIEBRE) LAGOON - SAN IGNACIO. WHALES UP CLOSE / BAJA'S BIRDS

Get up-close and personal with the magnificent Gray whales in Scammon's Lagoon. Embrace the sanctuary to view these enormous mammals at arm's length, some even let themselves be petted! Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from the Arctic Ocean to the warm waters of Baja California's wildlife refuges to court, mate, give birth and care for their young. Enter the sanctuary by driving through *La Exportadora de Sal*, one of the largest salt plants in the world and learn about its activities. At Scammon's Lagoon, board small *pangas* (fishing boats) for a memorable encounter among whales. Guerrero Negro is also home to an enormous salt marsh where birds migrate from Russia, Canada, and other latitudes. Ospreys are particularly numerous nesting on telephone poles, on posts, and even on the ground. Continue to San Ignacio, a charming town that developed around its famous 18th century mission in the midst of a lush, tranquil palm oasis surrounded by volcanic rock. Enjoy this small colonial town and its well-preserved Mission.

Hotel La Huerta or Desert Inn, San Ignacio

DAY 4. SAN IGNACIO - LAGUNA DE SAN IGNACIO - SAN IGNACIO GRAY WHALES CONTINUED

After breakfast, board local vans for the one-hour ride partly on a graded road that connects the town to the secluded San Ignacio Lagoon. The road crosses a stretch of desolate desert sprinkled with diverse vegetation, then skirts the shores of the lagoon lined by small fishing settlements. At an eco-camp, board *pangas* for another adventuresome ride among whales. Each outing is different, offering new experiences. Migrating birds and a large number of resident ospreys can be spotted along the shore. A hot meal is served in a *palapa* (thatched-roof) restaurant at the lagoon. Back in San Ignacio, enjoy a relaxed evening getting into the small-town atmosphere and its slow pace of life. Visit the mission, enter a home to make tortillas and join the local people on the plaza. Dinner is on your own to choose what you like.

Hotel La Huerta or Desert Inn, San Ignacio

DAY 5. SAN IGNACIO- SCAMMON'S (OJO DE LIEBRE) LAGOON - CATAVIÑA ADIOS TO THE WHALES / DESERT GARDEN

The journey back north begins. First stop returns to Guerrero Negro for a third excursion among whales in Scammon's Lagoon wishing farewell to the gentle giants. Stops are made along the drive to Cataviña to admire the large variety of dense desert vegetation. Located in the midst of the Central Desert, Cataviña is surrounded by a fascinating combination of sun, white sand, gigantic granite boulders, and a fascinating combinations of desert plants, including the boojums, cardons and elephant trees, beautifully arranged creating a natural superb "desert garden". Due to this setting, nights in the tiny village of Cataviña are memorable. Dinner at the hotel consists of a variety of finger food.

Hotel Misión Cataviña

DAY 6. CATAVIÑA - SAN DIEGO.

FAREWELL TO BAJA

Before breakfast, join an unforgettable walk to see the rising sun shining through the "pricklies" of the magnificent "desert garden". Continue the drive toward the border. Leaving the desert behind, stop for lunch in a pleasant San Quintin restaurant located in a historical ex-mill on the shores of San Quintín Bay to taste traditional platters. Relax at the spacious terrace overlooking the bay, enter a small local museum, and continue the trip north. A second brief stop is in Ensenada's main street for quick shopping or to rest in a café. Drive the final stretch along the beautiful coastal highway, back across the border and into San Diego ending the trip where it began.

FEATURES INCLUDED

- Comfortable private transportation from San Diego
- Hotel accommodations for five nights
- Most meals with one drink each. Meals are chosen according to local specialty
- Snacks and drinking water throughout the trip
- All visits and excursions mentioned in the itinerary
- THREE whale-watching excursions in two different lagoons on three different days
- Permit to enter Mexico
- Expert local Guide
- Taxes and tips of included meals and hotels
- Creative learning experiences during driving time
- Andiamo's personalized attention

FEATURES NOT INCLUDED

- One dinner
- Additional beverages
- Tips to Guide, Drivers, and special excursions staff
- Personal expenses

DATES Saturday February 17 to Thursday February 22, 2024
Monday March 18 to Saturday March 23, 2024

PRICE \$ 1,400.00 – per person in double occupancy
\$ 1,620.00 – per person in single occupancy
Minimum 18 participants

PERSONALIZED PROGRAMS

Travel in small private groups with your family or friends!

Andiamo gladly adapts programs to your interests and necessities: group size, date, itinerary.

ENROLLMENTS QUESTIONS

For additional information please contact Andiamo

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Programs open for enrollments in September 2022

VALID PASSPORT MANDATORY

Passport must not expire within six months of travel date.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Participants must be able to board small fishing boats from a beach and from a pier giving a step approximately of knee height, with possibility of wading into shallow water up to the knee.

Boat excursions are 2.5 to 3 hrs each with the possibility of encountering rough seas.

Walks are usually short and on relatively flat terrain, however often on uneven ground. There are options for short but steep hikes, if participant can't join, he/she may spend time around the flat area while the activity is in process.

Driving time varies from 1.5 - 5 hours/day. The 2 hrs round trip in San Ignacio lagoon includes a portion on a graded road.

Bathroom facilities on route range from modern to rustic.

PLEASE NOTE

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information featured on this program. Itineraries are based on our best information at this time. Circumstances beyond our control may require us to adjust itineraries or other details. We regret any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your understanding.

