

## WHALE WATCHING EXPEDITION

### Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Members Only

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 is the Gray Whale migration. 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 of the "friendliest" even 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 - Ensenada - San Quintin.

##### ACROSS THE BORDER

Board the motor coach at a designated site in San Diego. Meet the group leader and the naturalist from the Birch Aquarium at Scripps and begin the journey south. Cross one of the busiest borders in the world, learn about its multiple activities and enter Mexico. Stop at a *panadería* (bakery) to choose a freshly baked *pan dulce* (sweet roll) to enjoy with a cup of coffee. The scenic road to Ensenada offers breathtaking views on the Pacific Ocean. 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. Drive through its older streets and have lunch. Continue south through one of the peninsula's most important agricultural areas where indigenous people have migrated from remote areas of Mexico to work as farm laborers. Make a stop in San Vicente to visit a small Community and end the day in San Quintin. The hotel fronts a wide-open beach. Meet fellow participants, get to know your group leader, Birch Aquarium naturalist and review the upcoming adventures while enjoying margaritas at a pre-dinner gathering.

Hotel Mision Santa Maria, San Quintin

Meals Lunch in Ensenada. Dinner at hotel in San Quintin

#### DAY 2. San Quintin - Guerrero Negro.

##### THE MAGNIFICENT DESERT

The day is dedicated to admiring the wonders of the desert. The mountainous peninsula is covered by innumerable species of flora, many of which are endemic. A large part of the drive crosses *Reserva Valle de los Cirios* (Boojum Tree Reserve) established mainly to protect the unique endemic plant. The whimsical vegetation suggests a world of fantasy.

Stops are made for nature walks and in Cataviña for lunch. Continue to Guerrero Negro, home of the largest salt plant in the world and one of the gray whale sanctuaries. Situated on the 28<sup>th</sup>. parallel, it marks the beginning of the Vizcaino World Biosphere, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to whales, migrant birds, endemic vegetation, gigantic rock art caves and the salt plant. At the hotel, a lecture on the Gray Whales is imparted by the Birch Aquarium naturalist.

Hotel Halfway Inn, Guerrero Negro

Meals Breakfast at hotel. Lunch in Cataviña. Dinner at hotel in Guerrero Negro.

**DAY 3. Guerrero Negro - Scammon's (Ojo de Liebre) Lagoon - San Ignacio**

**MEET THE WHALES & BAJA'S BIRDS**

Sight birds in an enormous salt marsh where birds migrate from Russia, Canada, and other latitudes. A unique, unforgettable experience is a boat ride among the whales in Scammon's Lagoon, a Gray Whale Sanctuary, to view these giant 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 this wildlife refuge to court, mate, give birth and care for their young. To access the sanctuary, drive through *La Exportadora de Sal*, probably the largest salt plant in the world, and learn about its activities, then board *pangas* (small boats) for a memorable encounter with the whales. Continue the trip to San Ignacio, a charming town that developed around its imposing 18<sup>th</sup> century mission, still in use today, in the midst of a lush, tranquil oasis. Upon arrival enjoy a lively folk dancing presentation at a local school. Settle in the hotel and meet for margaritas to share the experiences of your first whale excursion with your fellow travelers.

Hotel Desert Inn, San Ignacio

Meals Breakfast at hotel. Bag lunch on boat in the lagoon. Dinner at hotel in S. Ignacio.

**DAY 4. San Ignacio - Laguna de San Ignacio - San Ignacio.**

**GRAY WHALES CONTINUED**

After breakfast, board local vehicles for the drive that connects the town to the secluded Laguna de San Ignacio, part of the road is graded. Experience a second adventuresome ride among whales in this remote lagoon! A hot meal is served in a *palapa* (a thatched-roof construction) at the lagoon. Migrating birds can be spotted along the shore. Back in San Ignacio, visit the tree-filled *zocalo* (plaza) and the mission church. Enter a home where date bread and pie are made and enjoy the company of the pleasant host while learning to make flour tortillas by hand to taste with local ranch cheese.

Hotel Desert Inn, San Ignacio

Meals Breakfast at hotel. Lunch at the lagoon.

**DAY 5. San Ignacio - Scammon's (Ojo de Liebre) Lagoon - Cataviña.**

**FINAL WHALE ENCOUNTER / VIZCAÍNO DESERT WALK /FAREWELL FIESTA**

Return to Guerrero Negro for a final encounter with the whales! Stops are made along the return drive to Cataviña to admire the large variety of dense desert vegetation. Located in the midst of the Central Desert, a combination of sun, sand, gigantic granite boulders, and amusing combinations of boojums, cardons and elephant trees make Cataviña a superb "desert garden". In isolated Cataviña, the nights reveal an enchanting desert sky. Dinner at the hotel consists of a variety of finger food. A farewell gathering to share experiences and a final question and answer session with the group leader and Birch Aquarium naturalist concludes the evening.

Hotel Mision Cataviña, Cataviña

Meals Breakfast at hotel. Bag lunch on boat in the lagoon. Dinner at hotel in Cataviña.

**DAY 6.** Cataviña - San Diego.

**FAREWELL TO BAJA**

Begin the last day with a beautiful walk to visit a small cave with simple rock art. The return trip stops for lunch in a San Quintin restaurant to taste traditional platters. In Ensenada, spend a brief time to stroll in the main streets and along the waterfront. Drive the final stretch along the beautiful coastal highway, cross the border back into San Diego to reach the final destination. A box dinner is on the go.

Meals Breakfast at hotel. Lunch in San Quintin. Box dinner on the go.

**INCLUDED SERVICES**

- Comfortable private motorcoach
- Five nights accommodations
- Most meals with one drink each. Meals are chosen according to the local specialty
- Snacks and drinking water
- All visits and excursions included in the itinerary
- Three whale watching excursions in two different lagoons
- Services of experienced Group Leader and a naturalist from the Birch Aquarium at Scripps
- Taxes and tips of included meals and hotels. Creative learning experiences during driving time

*Price does not include courtesies to Group Leader, drivers nor special excursions staff*

**DATES** March 04 - 09, 2019

**PRICE** \$ 1,110.00 Double occupancy  
\$ 1,370.00 Single occupancy (subject to availability)  
Full payment preferred.

Program for Members Only to the Birch Aquarium at Scripps  
Minimum capacity 25 passengers

**VALID PASSPORT MANDATORY**

Passport must not expire within six months of travel date.

**PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS**

Travelers 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 and 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 traveler can't join, he/she may spend time around the flat area while the activity is in process. Driving time on bus varies from 1 ½ -5 hours/day including one hour 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 itinerary. 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.