

Whale and Dolphin Watching Holiday – Baja California Sur – Mexico

February 25th - March 3rd 2012



Humpback Whale

Whale Watch West Cork are running a whale and dolphin watching holiday to Baja California Sur, Mexico Saturday, February 25th to Saturday March 3rd 2012. This is a fully guided whale watching expedition with Nic Slocum PhD.

Our Mexican whale watching destination will be the lovely old town of Loreto which was the first Spanish settlement on Baja California Sur. The Spanish influence is still clearly evident in the old town. The settlement was founded in 1697 and served as the state capital of Las Californias until 1777. We will stay in the prestigious La Mision hotel, widely considered to be the best hotel in Loreto, close to the historic district and overlooking the serene and calm Sea of Cortez - dubbed by Jacques Cousteau “The Aquarium of the World” due to it’s rich marine wildlife diversity.

The Baja peninsular in Mexico is one of the finest destinations for whale watching in the world. February and March can furnish some superb sightings in the Sea of Cortez of blue, fin and humpback whales along with different dolphin species sometimes including the elusive killer whale and pilot whale. This provides an utterly unique and rare opportunity to view some of the largest mammals on earth...an opportunity that many people never have the chance to fulfil in their lives.

One of the many highlights of this expedition is a visit to Puerto San Carlos and Magdalena Bay on the Pacific side of the peninsular to see the birthing lagoons of the Pacific gray whale where close encounters with mothers and calves is a frequent occurrence and a superb opportunity for viewing and photographing these unusual animals. All boat based tours are accompanied by Nic Slocum but we also use a local guide with local knowledge and expertise and adhere very strictly to current safety and engagement protocols. The gray whale mothers and curious calves will sometimes approach so closely to the boat that you can literally touch them!

The unique local desert landscapes in this part of the Baja peninsular and the islands in the Bay of Loreto afford us good opportunities for the keen photographers amongst us. There is also an opportunity to get up into the mountains that form the backbone to Baja, the Sierra de la Giganta, and look at the cave paintings created by the early native inhabitants on this part of the north American continent.



Gray Whale Calf

Itinerary

Day 1. Saturday. Flight to Los Angeles arriving afternoon or early evening. Staying one night close to the airport in one of the excellent airport hotels – a chance to unwind, take a dip in the pool, have a nice meal or simply catch up on some sleep. After breakfast the following day we will fly down to Loreto, Baja California Sur leaving at around 11.30am – there is only the one flight a day to Loreto and it takes around 2 hours. We should be checked in by early afternoon.

Day 2. Sunday. Arriving in Loreto, Baja California Sur, early afternoon and settling into our hotel, La Mision on the Loreto waterfront, close to the old historic district. There are buildings in Loreto that date back to the 18th Century! Afternoon and

evening is free time to explore the area and get to know Loreto meeting at “La Palapa” for Margarita’s and to discuss the weeks itinerary and activity programme. The transfer to our hotel, La Mision from the airport at Loreto is around 15-20 minutes.

Day 3. Monday. We take a boat based whale and dolphin watching tour out of Loreto looking for the great whales, fins and humpbacks. There is a good chance during February of catching up with the giant blue whale, the largest whale on earth. Several dolphin species frequent the area including bottlenose and common dolphins along with their larger cousins, pilot whales and killer whales. We have seen all these species in the Sea of Cortez during February and March.

Day 4. Tuesday. A day tour to Puerto San Carlos and the Magdalena Bay area on the Pacific side of Baja to see the Pacific gray whales and their two tonne calves! Although you can see the whales from the land here we hire a Panga (local boat) with a local guide and head out on the calm waters of the bay looking for these huge mammals. Prior to their arrival at Magdalena Bay these whales have made one of the longest migrations in the animal kingdom travelling non stop from their northern feeding grounds in the Bering Sea all the way down to the bays and lagoons on the Pacific side of the Baja peninsular – a 12,000 mile round trip! The more inquisitive animals will approach the boat affording us excellent close viewings and sometimes the opportunity to physically touch the calves.

Day 5. Wednesday. This day has split options. *Option one* is to head up into the mountains of the interior of the Baja peninsular, the Sierra de la Giganta, to visit the cave paintings, the Cuevas Pintas, in the rock shelters and canyons of these impressive mountains. *Option two* is to take a sea kayaking tour (suitable for beginners) along the spectacular coastline south of Loreto exploring the coves and inlets and looking for California fur seals and seabirds. Later there will be time for snorkelling in the shallows of the bay looking for Yellowtail and marvelling at the outstanding variety of colourful fish in this part of the Sea of Cortez. No wonder Jacques Cousteau dubbed it "the aquarium of the world".

Day 6. Thursday. A tour to Isla Del Carmen, one of the largest islands in the Bay of Loreto. After a boat based whale watching tour looking for all types of marine wildlife we will spend time exploring this fabulously beautiful island. The islands dotted around this part of the Sea of Cortez are stunningly attractive with unspoiled, sun drenched beaches and out of this world rock formations.

Day 7. Friday. Free time in the morning for final shopping in the old Spanish district of Loreto prior to meeting for a light lunch and making the short transfer to Loreto airport for our evening flight back to Los Angeles.

Day 8. Saturday. Free day around Los Angeles followed by our flight home late afternoon or evening complete with sun tan and many memories. Some of our new found friends may choose to stay over a couple of day in Los Angeles to see the sights.

Day 9. Sunday. Arrive home to the European weather! Sorry. But you will have memories of the hot sun on your back and lovely images of wildlife encounters with

some of the largest animals that have ever lived on Earth...animals that many people will only ever dream about encountering!...and there is always next time to look forward to!



Inquisitive Gray Whale Calf

More general information about Loreto...

The immediate area around Loreto and the islands has nearly 250 km of coastline with 750 square km. of sea around 14 islands. The Sierra de la Giganta mountain range is one of the tallest and most spectacular in Baja and overlooks the town of Loreto and creates breathtaking backdrop. The surrounding desert landscapes are rich in unique plant and animal. The weather around Loreto is generally warm with more with more than 300 days of sunshine annually. The summer months can be hot but temperatures during February and March are warm and comfortable.

For those interested in local history the mountains around San Javier there are ancient missions to explore and there is the legendary sport fishing off Loreto with the famous Yellowtail being abundant during February and March. In addition to whales and dolphins the marine life includes the California fur seal (sealions) and many unique bird species. There is also an 18 hole golf course and tennis courts for the energetic amongst us...there is little that Loreto cannot offer.



Common Dolphins



Stovepipe Cactus

Contact Us...

We still have spaces on this popular whale watching holiday. To register your interest or request a booking form or if you have any questions at all please email or phone Nic on:

Tel: 00 353 86 120 0027

Email: nic@whale.ie

The cost of this week long opportunity is €1,950 (euro) This does not include the flight from Europe to Los Angeles.



Gray Whale blowing close to the Panga

What IS included:

- > Hotel accommodation in Los Angeles (hotel located close to the airport) on the outward leg only.
- > Return flight from Los Angeles to Loreto on Alaska Airlines.
- > Hotel accommodation in La Mision in Loreto with it's famous seafood restaurant, widely considered to be the best hotel in Loreto.
- > Food - breakfast and lunch every day.
- > We include one evening meal. The final evening on day 6 before we depart when we get together to celebrate our week in Loreto.
- > All boat tours to the islands and whale watching.
- > All transport where required including tours to see the cave paintings or kayaking as part of the different options on day 5.

What is NOT included:

- > Flight from Europe to Los Angeles. Fares are reasonable at this time of year and we will help in researching the best airfares...
- > We don't include hotel accommodation on the return leg at Los Angeles airport as many customers take an extra day out to explore Los Angeles and decide to stay in a hotel closer to the city rather than the airport.
- > We don't include evening meals EXCEPT on day 6 our final evening. We don't include evening meals as some people are couples and would like an evening to themselves so we let folks fend for themselves in the evening but many times the single travellers in the party get together.
- > Personal items purchased while on holiday such as souvenirs and presents.
- > Alcoholic beverages you might require at anytime.
- > Any tours or vehicle hire you require outside the published itinerary.



Adult Gray Whale

Wildlife and Photography Guides...

The lead wildlife guide on this whale watching holiday will be:

Nic Slocum PhD

Nic is an experienced naturalist and wildlife guide and is best known for his escorted tours taking enthusiasts out, both in Ireland and overseas, to view and photograph whales and dolphins. Nic has maintained a lifelong passion for the conservation of our wildlife and wild places and has appeared as an expert commentator on RTE, Channel 4 and ITV. A zoologist by training, Nic has published articles on conservation related issues in both regional and national newspapers. Nic Slocum lives and works in West Cork and is a director of Whale Watch West Cork which runs tours to watch whales and dolphins off the coast of southwest Ireland. Nic has been watching whales and dolphins from boats for over 25 years in places as far apart as New England, Argentina and New Zealand. Nic is no stranger to adventure and leading groups to remote places on earth; in 1976 he led an expedition across the Sahara desert crossing by the central route and re-crossing via the Tanezrouft Reg which earned him Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society.





Sandy beaches around the islands

Photography on the holiday...

Because Baja California Sur and the Sea of Cortez is such a unique destination we frequently have keen photographers join the holiday. We also run wildlife and landscape photography holidays to the region. If we have enough photographers in the party we take a photography tutor with us to help and advise the less experienced photographers amongst us. In this instance...

The **lead photography guide on this whale watching holiday** will be:

Chris O'Dell BSC

Chris is a photographer and cinematographer, a graduate of the London International Film School. Initially trained as a stills photographer, he travelled widely in the 70s and 80s filming documentaries of every kind, including the world famous "Cosmos" with Carl Sagan, and "The Heart of the Dragon", the story of China, for Channel 4. Chris was cameraman on two major wildlife series for Channel 4 with naturalists Gerald and Lee Durrell, "Ourselves and other Animals" and "The Amateur Naturalist". As a qualified diver, he spent a lot of time filming underwater for the BBC and other clients. He ran a successful production company making arts and music programmes for the BBC. Since 1990 Chris has been the director of photography on many very successful TV drama series including Agatha Christie's Poirot, Sharpe, Hornblower, Inspector Morse, the Morse sequel Lewis, and many single dramas. Chris lives and works in West Cork and photographs the wonderful changing light on the landscape of West Cork for which he employs Nikon, Apple, Photoshop, and Epson equipment. Chris O'Dell was chairman of the 2009 Corona Fastnet Short Film Festival.





Unusual rock arches around the islands



Desert landscape and deserted



Kayaking among the islands

Booking...

If you would like to book place/s on this holiday please request a booking form. A deposit of 20% will secure your place. In order to secure the flights from LA to Loreto we look for the balance of payment in January. To make life as easy as possible we are able to take payments in € (euro) or £ (sterling) equivalent. We can take credit cards, bank transfers or cheques...whichever is most convenient.
