



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!

ITINERARY

DAY 1. SAN DIEGO - SAN FELIPE

ACROSS THE BORDER / SCENIC ROAD / CROSSING THE PENINSULA

Gather in San Diego in the morning. Meet your Group Leader and fellow travelers and depart for Mexico crossing the border at Tijuana. Brief stop at the colorful, lively Tijuana market to see, touch, and smell local delights. Begin the journey south along a scenic highway coasting the Pacific Ocean to reach Ensenada for a quick lunch. The drive then crosses the peninsula over hills and mountains through diverse climatic regions and ecosystems to reach the shores of the Sea of Cortes. From Mediterranean chapparal along the Pacific Coast, the road continues through the highlands before descending into the San Felipe Desert Region, the driest and one of the most desolate areas of the peninsula yet with a particular fascination. Stark landscapes are sprinkled with a variety of low, spiny cacti. Brief stops along the road for nature walks. The overnight is in a beach front hotel in San Felipe. The fishing and tourist town is located on the Sea of Cortes near the mouth of the Colorado River Delta where low tides can recede as much as 1.5 miles, a captivating site. A fish and sea food dinner is in a local restaurant.

HOTEL San Felipe Marina Resort, San Felipe

Driving time 5.5 hrs

DAY 2. SAN FELIPE - GUERRERO NEGRO

THE MAGNIFICENT DESERT / SUNSET BIRDING IN SALT MARSH

The sun rises in front of the hotel, a pre-breakfast beach walk rewards early risers. Departing San Felipe, the drive skirts the shores of the Sea of Cortes, past coastal dunes and a stunning rocky coastline against the blue waters dotted with islands. Lunch is at Bahía Gonzaga, a calm blue bay. Past the bay, the road continues inland. Plunge into the magnificent Central Desert that covers most of the peninsula's mountainous landscape. Rich in vegetation, the desert exhibits innumerable species of flora, many of which are endemic. Outstanding is 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 and for sighting desert birds. Woodpeckers peck the cardons providing homes for smaller birds to nest. The overnight is in Guerrero Negro. Located within the Vizcaino World Biosphere Reserve, a wildlife refuge, it is home to an important gray whale sanctuary, to an immense salt marsh which receives record numbers of migratory shore birds, and to one of the largest salt plants in the world. Set out to the salt marsh to spot birds migrating from Russia, Canada, and other latitudes. A large population of Ospeys have become permanent dwellers nesting on telephone poles, on posts and signs, and even on the ground. With luck, witness a memorable sunset.

HOTEL Half Way Inn, Guerrero Negro

Driving time 4.5 hrs.

DAY 3. GUERRERO NEGRO - SCAMMON'S (OJO DE LIEBRE) LAGOON - SAN IGNACIO

WHALES UP CLOSE / SALT MARSH AND OASIS BIRDING

Return to the salt marsh in the morning to compare bird activity at sunrise. Then, meet the Gray Whales. 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 salt plant and learn about its activities. At Scammon's Lagoon, board small *pangas* (fishing boats) for a memorable encounter among whales. 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 while spotting typical oasis birds among date palms and along a freshwater river. The endemic Xantus's Hummingbird may be sighted.

HOTEL La Huerta, San Ignacio

Driving time 2 hrs.

DAY 4. SAN IGNACIO - LAGUNA DE SAN IGNACIO - SAN IGNACIO

GRAY WHALES CONTINUED / LAGOON BIRDING

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 continues along the shores of the lagoon lined by small fishing settlements. At an eco-camp, board *pangas* for a second adventuresome ride among whales. Each outing is different offering new experiences. A large number of resident ospreys can be spotted all along the shore and large flocks of migrating birds may gather in secluded niches. 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, San Ignacio

Driving time 2 hrs.

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

Early morning birding in the oasis. Begin the journey back north taking the route via Cataviña. First stop returns to Guerrero Negro for a third excursion among whales in Scammon's Lagoon wishing farewell to the gentle giants. During the drive to Cataviña admire the rolling landscape and large variety of dense desert vegetation. Located in the midst of the Central Desert, the Cataviña Boulder Fields is a jewel in the desert. Granite boulders, white sand, sun, and fascinating combinations of desert plants, including the boojums, cardons and elephant trees, are 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 Mexican *botanas* (finger food).

HOTEL Misión Cataviña

Driving time 5 hrs.

DAY 6. CATAVIÑA – ENSENADA FAREWELL TO THE DESERT / BAY AND ESTUARY

Early in the morning, join an unforgettable walk to see the rising sun shining through the "pricklies" of the magnificent "desert garden", birds may be seen resting on the spines. After breakfast, continue exploring the setting with a nature walk to a small cave with simple rock art. The view from atop is stunning. Leaving the desert behind, stop for lunch in a pleasant San Quintin restaurant located in a historical ex-flour mill on the shores of San Quintin Bay, an important destination for Brants. Relax at the spacious terrace overlooking the bay, sight shorebirds, enter a small local museum, and continue the trip north. A brief detour is made in San Telmo de Abajo to search for the endemic gray thrasher, generally spotted perched on agaves. Cross one of the peninsula's most important agricultural areas to reach Ensenada for the overnight. Located on a bird-filled estuary, the pleasant Estero Beach Resort offers birding opportunities within the resort grounds.

HOTEL Estero Beach Resort, Ensenada

Driving time 5.5 hrs.

DAY 7. ENSENADA- SAN DIEGO BIRDING / CITY TOUR / ACROSS THE BORDER

Enjoy a relaxed morning at the resort with birding along the estuary. Depart for a brief city tour of Ensenada, a pleasant city on the shores of beautiful Todos Santos Bay important for fishing and tourism. After lunch and some free time to stroll along the main street for shopping or a café, drive the final stretch along the scenic coastal highway, back across the border, and into San Diego ending the trip where it began.

Driving time 2 hrs

FEATURES INCLUDED

- Comfortable private transportation from San Diego
- Hotel accommodations for six 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 with birding knowledge
- 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
- A specialized birder

DATE 2025

PRICE \$ 1,950.00 per person in double occupancy. Price based on a minimum of 18 participants.
\$ 400.00 single supplement

ENROLLMENTS QUESTIONS

For additional information please contact Andiamo
rosa@andiamo-travel.com
Tel +1 619 632 4571; +52 646 178 8909
Program opens for enrollments in September 2023

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 2 – 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.