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**BAJA CALIFORNIA SPECIAL
and
LAGUNA SAN IGNACIO WHALE WATCHING
w/Roger Devore and Ronn Patterson
February 26 - March 6, 2015
\$2800/person (double occupancy)
Single supplement (+\$1200) available**

This Baja Special features whale watching, wildlife viewing and nature and cultural exploration in both the Sea of Cortez and the famous San Ignacio Lagoon – the best known place for the friendly gray whales. In addition, you will explore and experience a few of its most special towns, villages and wild places connecting Loreto and San Ignacio.

Roger Devore will bring along his photo expertise -see his website www.devorephoto.com/ and Ronn Patterson his naturalist's knowledge on this unique trip across the Baja Peninsula. Whether your interest is photography, botany, marine mammals or desert scapes, this trip is sure to enthrall you.



The **Sea of Cortez** is both one of the Earth's youngest and richest seas. Thirty- one species– one-third of all the cetaceans in the world, are found here. Blue whales, humpbacks and others are “extreme feeders” – indicating the enormous richness of this place. A herd of over 1000 common dolphins can thrill you for hours. They, and at least a dozen other top predators including orcas, manta rays, Humboldt squid, sperm whales, fin whales, Brydes whale, several other cetaceans, whale sharks, and California sea lions are also present year round.

A special feature of our two days (day trips from Loreto) in the Sea of Cortez will be looking for and hopefully spending time with blue whales, commonly found there at this time of the year. We will also hop ashore on one or more of the islands along the way and may even find time to snorkel. Sea birds, including brown and blue-footed boobies, magnificent frigate birds, endemic yellow-footed gulls, and others are abundant.

The Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) gets its name the Vermilion Sea due to the super abundance of vast, dense masses of plankton that form the basis of a feeding bonanza coloring large patches of the sea red. Diving birds, ravenous fish, legions of invertebrates, marauding seals and sea lions, leaping mantas and acrobatic herds of dolphins create interspecies feeding frenzies that are the trade mark of this area. At night, this abundance of plankton lights up the sea with its bioluminescence.

LAGUNA SAN IGNACIO is simply the best place to be with friendly gray whales, where the whales - cows with calves- literally approach, and you become the watched, and the whales the watchers. It is an experience that will live with you forever. More people have told me that this trip and this experience changed their lives than any other. The lagoon is also the winter home of many sea birds including a legion of shore birds, black brant, terns and many others. It is possible to find five or more species of herons and egrets feeding together in the same intertidal pool, along with a dozen species of shore birds. The land surrounding the lagoon is a rich and extreme desert with its own secrets waiting to be experienced.

The town of **LORETO** is the oldest Spanish settlement in Baja California and served as the capital of Spanish California from 1697 to 1777. Its early mission is still standing and is supported by an interesting museum of the early mission period. The town itself is a jewel of Mexican life and its location along the edge of the Sea of Cortez is idyllic.



The **VILLAGE OF SAN IGNACIO** dates from 1728 and its charming mission dominates this quaint, authentic village. It feels like an extended family where you too can join in the family of Mexico and Mexican life. Part of the charm comes from the lush palm oasis with its spring fed stream and pool, where you can kayak or hike on numerous trails. Needless to say a spring, stream and pool in the midst of the desert is a magnet for an abundance of birds. You will be living, by spending a couple of nights right at the spring, this magic both day and night. And if you wish, we will arrange an optional mule ride to some of the remarkable cave paintings in the area.

Along the way, you have lunch in two additional special villages, **Santa Rosalia**, formerly a French mining town and currently still with a French bakery and a church built by Gustave Eiffel, of Eiffel tower fame – and still a mining town. The town today has a charming hustle and bustle that makes it something of a cross between real life Mexico and a Disney experience.

The other seaside town we may stop in for one of the lunches is **Mulege**, once the home of an open air prison where the prisoners spent the days with their families at home, going back to the prison at night. It is also a mission site, has one of the few rivers and esteros in the area, as well as a large date grove dating back to mission days.

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Day 1 February 26, 2015

Fly to Loreto, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The most common way is to book with Alaska Airlines (but others fly there also) and the most common connection is through Los Angeles. This flight will bring you to the heart of the rich natural and cultural heart of Baja California. There will be time (most likely) to explore the mission and vibrant cultural life of this wonderful Mexican town.

Day 2 & 3 February 27 & 28

These two days we will use local boats to explore the rich Sea of Cortez. The waters around Loreto have historically proven to be the best for finding an abundance of its rich ocean life: whales, including blue whales, and the many ocean birds and marine life. Several islands are close at hand for exploring. You can continue exploring the life of Loreto in the



evening. Maybe you will catch the bell ringing at the mission or be entertained by one of the many sellers of local folk art.

Day 4 March 1

Today we will drive to Laguna San Ignacio, arriving in time for dinner, orientation and a lecture about the natural history of the lagoon. Along the way we will stop for lunch in Santa Rosalia. During this transit of the Baja Peninsula you will experience its changing landscape. Much of the drive is along the shoreline of the Sea of Cortez, and last year we were able to view a large whale shark feeding below us as we stopped along the highway to watch.

At the lagoon, you will be staying in cabañas or cabins next to the shoreline where you can hear the whales blowing at night. The cabañas are next to a large dining and living room area complete with a large library of information about the area, the people and history, and the whales, plants and ecology of this area. The facilities are owned and run by local residents who work as fishermen during part of the year, and as knowledgeable and enthusiastic whale guides during the gray whale calving season. It is a wonderful opportunity to get to know both the guides and the whales.



Day 5 & 6 March 2 & 3

These are very full days spent mostly whale watching, both morning and afternoon, with meals, lectures, and little relaxation time built in. Any free time left, there is always continuing desert exploration, birding and listening to the blows of the whales from your cabaña.

Day 7 March 4

A full morning of whale watching after breakfast. Then, after lunch, we will depart for another famous place: the village of San Ignacio and an oasis in the desert – Ignacio Springs. This will be more than a visit as it is your home for the next two nights. From here you can experience the magic of abundant water in the middle of a large desert. There are numerous hiking trails around the springs and date groves and an opportunity to kayak, if you choose. The photo opportunities are great, using Ignacio Springs as your base. In addition, we will be taking some of our meals in town, close by, with further opportunities to explore this national treasure and a few of the wonderful families that make it “muy amable”.

Day 8 March 5

A full day of exploring the spring, the date groves- of enjoying the birding and photo opportunities of the town, the people, the church and the museum. Optionally, you may also choose to take a day trip by mule! to explore one of the caves with aboriginal art done thousands of years ago.

Day 9 March 6 Friday

Our last day is another transitional day with a drive back across the ever changing landscape of the Baja peninsula and another lunch and opportunity to briefly visit another special seaside town – Mulege. We will then continue to the airport at Loreto and a return to home in the afternoon. If you wish to spend more time in the area on your own, let us know and we can offer suggestions about more of the Baja Peninsula and surrounding areas of Mexico.

Details: The package price includes meals, transportation, whale watching, lodging, conservation fees and tipping while in Mexico on this tour. Not covered are flights to/from Loreto, items of a personal nature and optional parts of the program (mule ride to cave paintings, kayak rentals, etc.)

