Baja Peninsula: Gray Whales and Desert Landscapes

March 15–23, 2021
WHY BAJA MEXICO? The arid landscapes of Mexico’s Baja peninsula are host to a wealth of desert flora, bird life, and human history—but the showcase happens off its shores, during one of the world’s most expansive mammal migrations. The gray whales that spend part of the year off the coast of Baja are famously and atypically “friendly,” giving visitors a once-in-a-lifetime chance for up-close encounters.

Each year, gray whales travel thousands of miles from arctic seas to the warm waters of Baja California’s lagoons to court, mate, give birth, and care for their young. Take part in one of the unique natural wonders of the world as you visit three whale sanctuaries for arm’s-length encounters with these graceful giants. During your journey north along the arid peninsula, you’ll also observe beautiful desert vegetation—including some of the region’s 600-plus endemic plant species—enjoy opportunities to see birds and other wildlife, visit Spanish missions, and learn about daily life on a working goat ranch.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Enjoy thrilling opportunities to view and photograph gray whales up-close during small-boat excursions.
- Explore hidden coves, snorkel with sea lions and tropical fish, and relax on the pristine beaches of Espíritu Santo, a protected island and UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Seek out resident and migratory birds in mangrove and coastal habitats and in the highlands’ prickly desert vegetation.
- Walk through the scenic Cataviña Boulder Fields, where gigantic granite boulders, Boojum trees, towering cardon cacti, and contorted elephant trees dominate the landscape.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: EASY-MODERATE
Participants should be able to walk at least 2-3 hours over some uneven and potential slippery surfaces without difficulty and should be able to ascend or descend 50 stairs consecutively. Physical activities typically last for at least 2-3 hours at a time.
MARCH 15 – LA PAZ
Upon arrival at Los Cabos International Airport, travel about two and a half hours to the hotel in La Paz. Participants should arrive no later than 3:00 pm. Although La Paz is the most important city of the southern part of Baja peninsula, its tree-lined streets and calm, clear bays inspire tranquility. A walk along the malecon is a treat. This evening, attend a welcome dinner and orientation at the hotel. Overnight at Hyatt Place. (D)

MARCH 16 – LA PAZ
The Sea of Cortez has been identified as one of the most biologically diverse marine areas in the world. Within the Sea of Cortez Marine Park Reserve, the protected island and UNESCO World Heritage Site Espiritu Santo offers a variety of attractions: fascinating geology, snorkeling with sea lions and tropical fish in crystal clear water, pristine beaches, and hidden and isolated coves. Walk along the marina to board a boat and depart for the island for the day’s activities. Return to La Paz and get to know the downtown. Dinner is in a traditional fish and seafood restaurant on the malecon.
Overnight at Hyatt Place. (BLD)

MARCH 17 – LORETO
After breakfast, depart for Loreto. The road crosses an important agricultural area where Crested Caracaras are often seen perched on fence posts. En route, take a detour to Bahía Magdalena for an unforgettable experience: a boat ride in a gray whale sanctuary to view these giant mammals at arm’s length. The gray whales seen here are part of the annual migration across thousands of miles from the Arctic Ocean to the warm waters of the Baja Peninsula – one of the longest migratory routes by a mammal. All gray whales are born off the coast of the peninsula and participate in the migration between warm and cool waters throughout their lives. After the whale watching excursion, continue to Loreto, the oldest mission and permanent settlement of the Californias. The mission is still standing today. Check in to the beautiful hacienda-style hotel, located on the waterfront. Overnight at La Misión. (BLD)

MARCH 18 – LORETO
The island-studded portion of the Sea of Cortez facing Loreto is protected by the Loreto Bay National Marine Park. This morning, take a boat to encircle Coronado Island with its azure waters, interesting geology, a colony of sea lions, and more. Return to Loreto for lunch; then head inland for the mountains. The city is surrounded by the rugged peaks of the Sierra de la Giganta, providing the scenery for one of the peninsula’s most beautiful excursions, a drive along steep walls to San Javier Mission and village. Known as “the jewel of the missions,” San Javier is one of the best preserved missions, and still home to its original orchard first planted by the missionaries. En route, stop at a goat ranch to learn about life on a ranch and the process of making goat cheese. Practice hands-on tortilla making for your cheese and beans snack. Dinner is in a traditional “palapa” local restaurant this evening. Overnight at La Misión. (BLD)

MARCH 19 – SAN IGNACIO
This morning, depart Loreto and begin the journey to San Ignacio, with stops along the way. Observe the giant elephant cacti that dominate the scenery, then drive along the crystal blue waters of Bahía de Concepción. Make a stop at an unspoiled beach, where you can see mangroves rich in bird life. Continue to Mulegé, a mission settlement on a riverbed lined with palm trees. In Santa Rosalía, visit the old French Quarter and the Boleo mine museum to learn how the French established this copper mining town and brought over the prefabricated iron church designed by Gustave Eiffel that is still standing today. North of Santa Rosalía, head inland up one of the steepest grades in the peninsula leading to a plateau and the “Tres Virgenes,” red lava rock volcanoes dotted with elephant trees. Stop to bird in the highlands among prickly desert
vegetation before arriving in San Ignacio, a charming oasis town developed around its imposing 18th century mission, still in use today. Overnight at Desert Inn. (BLD)

MARCH 20 – SAN IGNACIO
Today, continue the whale experience in the San Ignacio Lagoon, one of the best places to view the migrant whales because of its isolation. Cross an open stretch of desert and a salty mudflat, then board small v pangas for a memorable ride among the whales. After lunch, enjoy the tranquility of the lagoon and spot migrant birds along the shore. In the afternoon, return to San Ignacio to visit the mission and stroll in the laurel-filled plaza. Overnight at Desert Inn. (BLD)

MARCH 21 – CATAVIÑA
This morning, depart for Guerrero Negro, home of the largest salt production plant in the world, an immense salt marsh, and a whale sanctuary that receives a record number of migrant gray whales each year. Drive through the salt plant to reach Scammon’s Lagoon, then embark on a third and final outing among the whales. Continue the drive to Cataviña, with a nature walk through desert vegetation. Enter Reserva de los Círios, named in honor of the endemic Boojum tree, Baja’s signature plant, and arrive in the famed Cataviña boulder fields, a superb desert garden landscape of enormous granite boulders, Boojum and Elephant trees, and Cardon cacti. Settle in at the hotel and enjoy a dinner fiesta. Overnight at Misión Santa María. (BLD)

MARCH 22 – ENSENADA
Begin the day with a beautiful walk in the magnificent Cataviña desert garden, including a visit to a small cave with simple rock art. Lunch is in a San Quintín restaurant to taste traditional platters. In the afternoon, arrive at Ensenada and take some time to stroll in the main streets and along the waterfront. Check in at the oceanfront hotel and relax, admiring the spectacular view. Enjoy a farewell dinner at the hotel. Overnight at Marea Vista Hotel. (BLD)

MARCH 23 – SAN DIEGO
Depart for the last stretch along Highway One, a particularly scenic portion with stunning views on the Pacific Ocean coastline. Cross the border into the United States and continue to the San Diego International Airport for your return flight. Arrival time at the airport is approximately noon. Note: departing flights should be scheduled no earlier than 2:00 pm. (B)

PRICING:
$5,295 per person
Based on 10 participants. Single supplement is $595.

Price includes:
- 8 nights’ accommodations
- 23 meals – 8 breakfasts, 7 lunches, 8 dinners
- Non-alcoholic beverages with meals
- Sightseeing and activities as described, including entrance fees
- Private vehicle transportation
- Full time guide for duration of the program
- All tips and gratuities
- Luggage handling, one bag per person
- Departure tax

Price does not include: international airfare, trip cancellation insurance, gratuities for hotel housekeeping staff, drinks purchased on own, items of a personal nature.

Holbrook Travel can assist with making your flight arrangements upon request. Trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended (offered through the Alumni Association of University of Michigan).
Enclosed is my/our deposit for $______ ($500 per person) for ____ person/people on the tour listed below. I/ we understand the final payment is due no later than December 10, 2020 (95 days before departure). Payment may be made by American Express, Discover, MasterCard, or VISA or by personal check. Please make check payable to Holbrook Travel, Inc. and mail deposit check to: Holbrook Travel, 3540 NW 13th Street, Gainesville FL, 32609. For questions please call the Alumni Association at 855-764-0064 or Holbrook Travel at toll free 800.451.7111, or email travel@holbrooktravel.com.

Full Passport Name________________________________ DOB ____________ Gender ______
E-mail _____________________________________________ Class Year ________________

Full Passport Name________________________________ DOB ____________ Gender ______
E-mail _____________________________________________ Class Year ________________

Badge Name(s) ______________________________________

Address ___________________________________________________________________
City _____________________________________ State ____________ ZIP ______________
Home Ph. (_______)_____________________   Cell Ph. (_______)______________________

Please book my/our air from __________________. I/we request an air upgrade to _____________.
☐ I will share a room with __________________________.
☐ I request a single room (limited availability).

Note: The undersigned has read the schedule of activities for the above-referenced tour, and agrees that their signature below represents their acceptance of the General Terms and Conditions.

Signature __________________________________________ Date________________

Method of Payment ☐ Check ☐ American Express ☐ Discover ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA
Account # ____________________________ Security Code ________ Exp. Date _________
Name of Cardholder _______________________________________________________
Signature ______________________________________________________________

Final invoicing will be sent by our tour operator, Holbrook Travel, Inc. The balance of the program price must be paid to Holbrook Travel. Final payment is due no later than December 10, 2020 (check or credit card).
GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Please read this information carefully, as payment of a deposit represents your acceptance of the following Terms and Conditions.

Not Included in Your Tour Price: 
- Domestic airfare from your departure city.
- Costs of passports.
- Personal expenses such as beverages, laundry, room service, and meals not specified.
- Communications charges.
- Trip cancellation insurance.

Additional baggage fees levied directly by the airline(s) may apply and are subject to change at any time. You should confirm directly with your airline(s) prior to departure.

International Air Transportation: 
- Estimated airfare: $695, Detroit to Los Cabos, Mexico; San Diego to Detroit. Holbrook Travel offers group airfare and ticketing. Group transfers between the airport and hotel are included in your program cost. A note about online airfare: Occasionally, you may be able to find airfares online that are listed at a lower cost. In general, individual fares lack the flexibility of group airfare and often require immediate purchase. You will receive your preliminary air schedule approximately 2½ months prior to departure. Please note that seat assignments on your international flight are usually done at airport check-in. Holbrook Travel is unable to guarantee any seat assignments.
- Due to the nature of tour operator tickets, other restrictions apply, including but not limited to, frequent flyer mileage accrual, stopovers, alternate travel dates, upgrades, and airline taxes and departure fees. If you prefer to make your own travel arrangements, booking the tour “Land Only” is available. We recommend that if you choose to make your own airline reservations, you do not purchase non-refundable tickets or those with high penalties for changes. If you choose to make your own air arrangements, Michigan Alumni Travel and Holbrook Travel, Inc. shall not have any liability for any loss resulting from cancellation of this tour or changes in this tour.

Cancellations, Changes and Refunds: 
- If you must cancel your tour, the effective date of cancellation will be upon our receipt of your notification. All cancellations need to be submitted in writing. Refunds for cancellations are subject to the following per person charges: Cancel 95 days or more before departure: $200 charge; Cancel 95-0 days before departure: no refund. Please note that we will not refund the cost of any unused portion of your tour package. We will not charge a fee for any changes made to your reservation outside of 95 days before departure. From 94 to 30 days before departure, if you make any changes to your reservation, a $100 per person administrative fee will apply, in addition to any fees or penalties imposed by airlines, hotels, or other third parties. Changes are subject to availability, and cannot be guaranteed. If your reservation changes from double occupancy to single occupancy for any reason, you will be charged the single supplement. No changes to your reservation can be made within 30 days of departure. If due to unforeseen circumstances Holbrook Travel cancels your tour, you will receive a complete refund of all payments you have made to us.

Health and Medical Issues: 
- We welcome all travelers, but request that you be in good health to participate on a Holbrook Travel tour. All of our tours involve a reasonable amount of walking (typically two to three miles per day). You must be able to get on and off motorcoaches on your own. We regret that we cannot provide individual assistance; in such cases you must be accompanied by a companion who will assist you. Please note that our itineraries cannot accommodate wheelchairs. We reserve the right to re-assign anyone whose physical condition or behavior, in our opinion, compromises the operation of the tour or detracts from the enjoyment or safety of the other tour members. In that event, Michigan Alumni Travel and Holbrook Travel assume no financial responsibility for any unused portion of the tour. For the convenience of the majority of our travelers, Holbrook Travel has a no smoking policy on all tour buses. We will arrange sufficient rest stops so those who wish to smoke may do so.

Required Information: 
- Upon reservation, you must provide your full name as it appears on your passport, date of birth, and gender (for details, please visit tsa.gov). In the event an airline ticket is issued with incorrect information you have provided, or if you use a different passport than originally cited, you will be responsible for charges associated with the ticket’s reissue. A passport valid for at least six months after the completion of your tour is required for U.S. citizens on this tour.

Responsibility: 
- The liability of Alumni Association of the University of Michigan (AAUM) as sponsor, and Holbrook Travel Inc., as tour operator, is strictly limited. AAUM and Holbrook Travel, Inc. purchase transportation, hotel accommodations, restaurant and other services from independent suppliers not under our control. We serve only as agents for these suppliers in securing tour arrangements, and therefore we will not accept responsibility for wrongful, negligent, or arbitrary acts or omissions of these independent contractors, their employees, agents, servants or representatives. AAUM and Holbrook Travel, Inc., are not liable for injury, damage, loss, accident, or delay that may be caused by events not within our control, including without limitation, acts of terrorism, war, strikes, the defect of any vehicle, or the negligence or default of any third party. All coupons, receipts, and tickets issued are subject to the terms and conditions specified by their carriers, cruise line, and other independent suppliers. We will make every effort to operate our tours as planned, but we reserve the right to make itinerary changes as necessary. If unforeseen circumstances require us to change a hotel, we will select alternative accommodations of the same or better quality and may change due to factors such as government regulations, water levels, or weather conditions. The services of any AOA and AIC career may be used in connection with these tours. The participant understands that if he/she books special low cost airlines with penalties, and cancels the reservation, he/she is responsible for any penalties incurred from the airline.