

Tour Report Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast 6 – 17 February 2025

Blue whale



Humpback whale



Grey whale



Sperm whale



Compiled by Helen Bryon

For marine mammal watching, Baja is simply hard to beat. Between January and early April, baleen whales gather here en masse in order to mate and breed, so the diversity of species possible to see in a relatively short period of time is staggering. Grey whales migrate from their Arctic summer feeding grounds to sheltered lagoons located along the Pacific Coast of the 1,200 kilometre long peninsula. Since 1972, they've had quite the reputation for being 'friendly', coming up to pangas and allowing themselves to be stroked by humans, resulting in surely one of the most emotive wildlife experiences on the planet. Further south, lies Gorda Banks, a humpback breeding area where the whale watcher's whale put on quite a show. Their breaching knew no bounds, and tail and fin slapping was a common occurrence. In the Sea of Cortez, we came across the largest creature to have ever lived, blue whales, so many of them in fact that we lost count. With Bryde's and toothed sperm whale also being seen during our nine-night voyage aboard Searcher, we were truly spoilt. In addition, we drifted through mangroves, watching waders, seabirds and raptors, walked through rookeries of Northern elephant seals, fiercely guarded by beachmasters, and observed vocal and endearing Guadeloupe fur seals. We snorkelled with Californian sea lions and witnessed the absolute phenomenon that is a being completely and utterly surrounded by a super pod of long-beaked common dolphins. For ninety minutes they swam with us, proving to be an absolute highlight.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what makes this destination so special, but what we can say is that if it is on your radar, delay no longer. Add it to your bucket list immediately! You'll thank us.

Day 1:

Thursday 6 February 2025

London Heathrow to San Diego

The group met up at their London Heathrow British Airways departure gate and flew nonstop to San Diego. 10 hours and 45 minutes later, we were on American soil and taking taxis to our overnight hotel, The Bay Club Hotel & Marina. After a little time to settle in, we met up again in Reception at 7 pm for a welcome briefing and having been well fed on the flight, headed out on foot for a drink. We settled on Bali Hai, a restaurant and bar ten minutes away, got to know each other, and then, after a long day, enjoyed an early night.

Day 2:

Friday 7 February 2025

Day to explore San Diego before boarding Searcher

Weather: misty and rainy, 18 degrees

Due to the time difference, most of the group were awake by 3.30 – 4 am, and by 6ish were setting off for walks in the vicinity. It was a wet and overcast morning but we knew that an osprey was nesting about half an hour's walk from the hotel and viewing it proved to be popular. We pretty much had a free day but many of the group met in Reception at 8.30 am to join Helen for breakfast. As we walked to check out possible options, we passed black-crowned night herons standing tall and conspicuous on a roundabout before settling on a diner called Point Break.

Afterwards, the group went their separate ways to explore the city. To the chatter and colour of red-crowned parrots, some opted for trolley bus tours, whilst others visited the historic Gaslight District. Those who undertook a harbour cruise were treated to a wealth of bird life from great blue heron to surf scoter, and Western grebe to bufflehead, as well as viewing the renowned 'Embracing Peace' statue located next to the hugely impressive Midway aircraft carrier, now a museum. We had pre-arranged late check-out from our hotel as well as secure luggage storage, so others chose to simply relax in the vicinity and enjoy a leisurely lunch.

From 3.00 pm we were able to check into Searcher and my word, were we prompt! Taking a succession of taxis to Fisherman's Landing, we checked in and boarded our home for the next nine nights. We met some of the crew, had our photo taken (so we could all remember names over the first few days) and set about unpacking and settling in. Dinner at either Mitch's Seafood Grill or Pizza Nova followed, and we were back onboard ready to officially meet the whole crew and have a safety briefing by 8.00 pm. Captain Mike

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Todter introduced his team, Kaden Hile, Shane Tuschen, Ryan, Rob Lujan, chef Josh Evans and sous chef Jeff Bartley, and then we met, Tom Jefferson, our cetacean specialist and onboard naturalist. We learnt that he would be supported by Tabata Olavarietta, a Mexican observer, who would join us in Ensenada tomorrow. We were now ready and raring to go. We had a birthday to celebrate too, so after some local bubbles and the presentation of a card and cake, we began to wind down and think about bed. The engines began at 00.45 am and by 1.15 am, we were out in the Pacific, heading just across the border to enter Mexican waters.

Day 3:

Saturday 8 February 2025

Enter Mexico, day at sea

Weather: sunny, becoming overcast, 19 degrees

A little bleary-eyed after our first night at sea, breakfast was served at 6.30 am, during which we were joined by a pod of long-beaked common dolphins. Our excitement levels were palpable (and audible!) as they led us into port and we delighted in their presence. For 20 minutes we ooh-d and aah-d as they rode our bow, leapt in our wake and generally welcomed us to Baja. Our wildlife experience had begun!

We docked at Ensenada around 8.00 am and had been warned that we may be there for an hour or two to clear arrival formalities. We busied ourselves sitting on the stern deck in bright, glorious sunshine, watching California sea lions lazing on a jetty, barking loudly, while we added pied-billed grebe and great-tailed grackle to our bird species list. By 10.20 am we were off, heading back into the Pacific rollers (and we were rolling!) with another pod of long-beaked common dolphins coming right for our bow. We watched them cross in front of us and then Mike announced grey whale blew some way off our starboard side. Deciding not to join them as we had a lot of miles to cover today, and we hoped we'd be having very close encounters with them in two days, we continued south. We watched the blows until they disappeared though, and were pleased to be off to a good start!

No sooner had our lunch of tomato bisque with grilled cheese sandwiches and salad been served when more grey whale blows were spotted, this time off the bow. Racing outside, we saw them drift off to our starboard side so we resumed our meal (the soup very much needing to be eaten quickly due to the swell) before some retired to bed for a snooze whilst others lapped up the very welcome sunshine on the stern deck. At 2.00 pm, more grey whale blows were announced. They were also some way off but one very obligingly fluked, causing a flurry of excitable shrieks! It was becoming increasingly choppy so as the afternoon wore on, more of the group retired to their cabins to rest.

An early dinner of pork chops with sweet potato mash and asparagus was scheduled for 5.30 pm (vegetarians enjoyed delicious roasted aubergines with mushrooms), after which, in preparation for tomorrow, Tom delivered the first of several presentations, this one on Northern elephant seals. Establishing that they are the pinniped master divers of the deep, diving for squid and lantern fish, he took us through their distribution, breeding, and moulting cycles, in a brief but informative 15 minutes. Eyelids were beginning to droop as jet lag and two busy travel days caught up with us, so despite the time being only 7 pm, the group retired to bed.

Day 4:

Sunday 9 February 2025

West San Benito island

Weather: overcast with sunny spells, 19 degrees

Supplementing the usual cereal and fresh fruit this morning, hot food options of porridge, eggs and/or pancakes were on the breakfast menu. Service started at 6.30 am after which we readied ourselves for a day on Western San Benito Island. It had been another choppy night of sailing and quite a few in the group were looking forward to a day on land.

Having dropped our anchor, a number of California sea lions approached Searcher as we gathered on the

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

stern, curiosity getting the better of them at our arrival. Following a safety briefing on how to get into and out of the skiffs safely, we set off with our picnic lunches, plenty of water, binoculars, cameras and layers, and were ferried in three groups of seven over to shore.



Waiting to greet us was a large male Northern elephant seal and his harem. We kept our distance (as you would with two tonnes of animal) yet were close enough to enjoy their proximity as they emitted a bewildering number of vocalisations. We then set off on foot through the currently empty, seasonal fishing settlement. Ravens flew overhead and endemic San Benito savannah sparrows flitted around us as Tom began to tell us more about the elephant seals.

We moved through the village, stopping at the church, and pausing to view the small yellow daisy-like flowers of San Benito Island tarweed, before continuing to more elephant seal rookeries on the opposite shore. An osprey flew over as we used a narrow elevated boardwalk, constructed to protect the many shearwater burrows underneath. Lining the beaches, young males kept their distance from alphas and a plethora of this season's young stayed close to Mum. Some nursed, others slept soundly, and more than a few vocalised their disgruntlement at our approach, so we stepped back, maintaining a comfortable and respectful range. Repeatedly throwing sand on themselves to keep cool, they sneezed out salt water, scratched themselves, luxuriated in stretching out their rear flippers and generally dozed. When they did raise their heads to watch us, they were nothing short of utterly endearing.

Having had plenty of time to take in and photograph not only the elephant seals, but the scenery, the brown pelicans atop the rock outcrops, the crows and Western gulls tearing at deceased carcasses, and a flock of Brant parading along the shoreline too, those intending to do the five-six kilometre walk around the island set off. They soon doubled back on themselves, however, as we all noticed a male Northern elephant seal approach a female and attempt to mount. Being a not-every-day sighting, we stopped to see what would happen next. He approached the female again and succeeded in mating with her before a larger male came careering at him from across the beach and he shuffled away with surprising speed, showing his subservience.



At this point, we noticed some Guadeloupe fur seals on a promontory up ahead so proceeded to walk towards them together, carefully side-stepping sleeping elephant seals as we went. The beautiful purple and white flowers of Pacific Island Bush Mallow were pointed out blooming next to vicious spines of Cedros cholla. We'd been warned about this cactus - seemingly with an inbuilt magnet for hiking shoes - and were armed with combs to use if required to unhook their barbs.



The walkers then continued in earnest, spotting Forster's tern soon after leaving the rest of the group who returned to the previous beaches to set up residence and observe the elephant seals. A few clients saw a peregrine falcon, others watched a whimbrel and we enjoyed fleeting glimpses of another endemic, San Benito Island side-blotched lizard. All too soon, we returned to our landing point for our 1.00 pm launch back to Searcher. The walkers wouldn't be collected until 2.30 pm so an opportunity lay ahead to grab showers whilst at anchor, and to relax back onboard. Empanadas and crudités helped fill the gap (as if we'd ever feel hungry on this trip) after our packed lunch onshore.

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Once we were all reunited on Searcher, the walkers told us of their adventures. Parts of the path ascending to a disused lighthouse on the island had been heavily eroded, resulting in what was essentially a scree slope. They had made it but with considerable effort. They'd had lunch with a view at the lighthouse, paused to view Cedros barrel cactus on the way back down to the landing beach, and we upped anchor shortly thereafter at 3.10 pm.

We were all eagerly anticipating tomorrow and the sailing was smoother than we'd experienced so far, so the group relaxed both inside and out, until 4.15 pm when Pacific white-sided dolphins were spotted off the starboard deck and bow. Being at the southerly point of their range, we were unlikely to see them again so lapped up the sighting and were treated to a few individuals before they disappeared as quickly as they'd arrived.

Later, the sunset was glorious and we tucked into fresh yellow tail (fish) or mushrooms with rice and salad, fuel to sustain us through a rather animated presentation on grey whales by Helen and Tom. With expectations set for the next few days, everyone retired to bed. Tomorrow couldn't come soon enough!

Day 5:

Monday 10 February 2025

San Ignacio Lagoon

Weather: overcast, cool and windy to start, clearing later, 20 degrees

Waking to a calm Pacific, there was a gorgeous, rather ghostly silver sheen to the ocean. We were out on deck, eagerly awaiting the left turn into San Ignacio Lagoon, when an excitable shriek of "breach" broke the still air and we turned to see an enormous splash far off our port stern. Unable to identify the type of whale by the time we'd seen the splash, we ascertained that it was likely to be a grey or humpback whale. Regardless, our appetite had been whetted and our eagerness to get there rose. Come on, let the whale action begin!

Despite the sudden descent of a distinct mizzle, blows were being seen with increasing frequency and we had all gathered at the bow as if by unspoken command. The waiting was over, we were finally here. Passing numerous bottlenose dolphins and more whale blows galore, we cruised into the protected waters of the lagoon and Captain Mike came down to the galley to introduce us to what is undoubtedly a very, very special place. With Searcher being one of only a handful of vessels permitted to stay here overnight, we cruised to our anchorage, knowing that a local whale-watching company, Kuyima, would be coming to take us out regularly over the next few days. Armed with cameras and waterproofs, we boarded our three pangas

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



(taking seven each), met our pangueros (panga drivers) and set off in search of encounters.

The novelty of viewing grey whales in very close proximity is a humbling experience. When these giants rise next to you, exhale, accept your presence and then gracefully return to the depths, it moves one's soul. Having the chance to notice little details, such as the knuckles lining their backs (caudal peduncles to be precise), or being able to differentiate individuals by the sea lice on their heads, is a rare privilege indeed. Ninety minutes later we were back on Searcher comparing notes. Two clients had been fortunate enough to get their hands on a 'friendly' and we excitedly chattered amongst ourselves as we chowed down on fresh churros, hot from the oven. Amazing!

We didn't have to wait long to get back out there, just a short turnaround of about 30 minutes. One panga enjoyed a rather 'Zen Zodiac' or 'Peace Panga' experience as they pulled up next to a snoozing adult, who deep in the realms of dreamland, calmly slept on. The two other pangas set off together and had an incredible time coming across a mother and calf pair who swam back and forth between them, allowing almost possessed humans (!) to clamour and paw at the water, desperate to look them in the eye and feel the smooth sponginess of their skin, again and again and again. Trust me, it is addictive! It is also nothing short of remarkable that these gentle giants allow us so close, seemingly getting as much out of the interaction as we are.

Back on Searcher, while we wolfed down our delicious shrimp salad lunch, we were distracted (of course) by grey whales swimming past in very close proximity. We were literally champing at the bit to get back out into the pangas as whales were everywhere. This afternoon though, none showed any interest in approaching us. Fair enough. Here, the whales dictate the timetable, and any interactions are always, quite rightly, on their terms. As such, we watched, we waited, we fell in love with them, and we lost ourselves in the magic of the lagoon.



Once all were safely back onboard late afternoon, we toasted the events of the day with gin and tonics or beers and then a few of the crew noticed our anchor line moving in an unusual manner. Realising that a whale must be scratching against it, we all raced to the bow and watched delightedly as an adult appeared immediately before us, heading back down for another scratch. We watched this repeatedly (rub, rise, breathe, repeat!), laughing out loud, and thanking our lucky stars for being here!

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Towards the end of a simply wonderful day, we watched the sunset, ate a fabulous meal of salad followed by chicken with quinoa, and indulged in 'just a little' wine, the result of which was a rather raucous evening! Somewhat high on life, we laughed well into the night. Ahem, let me rephrase that. We laughed until 9 pm, we still had jet lag after all...

Day 6:

San Ignacio Lagoon

Weather: sunny and windy, 19 degrees

Tuesday 11 February 2025

Breakfast was scheduled a little earlier today for 6.00 am, as although the whale watching area within the lagoon doesn't open until 8.00 am local time, we remained on Searcher's San Diego time, meaning that we'd be picked up by our pangueros at 7.00 am. Most of us were up and about long before that, out on deck enjoying the beautiful, almost full moon set behind the mountains to the north. The wind was brisk and the lagoon choppy but there was still plenty of activity when we set off for the first of our four excursions today. Adult whales were out in abundance and when exhaling, Helen pointed out the rainbows appearing in their blow. Streamlined and beautiful, royal terns flew overhead as brown pelicans dived fiercely into the blue, in contrast to long lines of cormorants (Brandt's and double-crested) that flew low over the lagoon. One panga even got views of a coyote on a beach and a passing turtle. Fantastic! The clouds were clearing, revealing a beautiful day ahead and we were an excitable bunch once again back on Searcher for a delightful mid-morning snack of guacamole, salsa, tortilla chips and ceviche.

Half an hour later we set off, with two boats heading towards the mangroves found on the northern shore of the lagoon, and one boat searching for more whale interactions. Although the latter were unsuccessful in finding a friendly, they had a superb trip nonetheless, waxing lyrical about the many breaches and spy hops that they'd witnessed. Wow!



The mangrove trip was also a great success. Serenely gliding through the still, calm, shallow waters had resulted in sightings of great, little blue and tricoloured heron, great, cattle and reddish egret, black-crowned night heron, osprey, long-billed curlew, white ibis and flying flocks of willet and yellowlegs (they were unfortunately too swift to be identified as the greater or lesser variety). We were thrilled to see mangrove warblers, and even more so, to come across a pair of vermilion flycatchers quite unexpectedly. Talk about eye-catching! Shortly before re-entering the lagoon, we passed 'Pelican Island' where the exaggerated red

bills of males belied the fact that they were in full breeding plumage. As occasional dolphins meandered by, a juvenile Harris's hawk flew overhead and the receding tide exposed several turkey vultures sitting amongst other waders on a long expanse of beach.

Our third foray into the lagoon was a quieter one. There were plenty of bottlenose dolphins around, and plenty of adult greys spy-hopping and swimming past us, but in general, this was whale watching rather than whale interaction, with one exception. One panga got a little more than they bargained for when a massive adult surfaced to breathe directly underneath them. The first we knew of it was an unexpected shower for those at the front (directly in line with its blow holes!) followed by being lifted almost clean out of the water before the whale went back down under. Phew. Was there nervous laughter? Absolutely...and

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

plenty of it!



The fourth and final panga ride in the lagoon proved to be a memorable one. Whilst one panga embarked on a beach walk, coming across whale vertebrae, sand dollars, shark egg sacks, a turtle carapace and other bits and bobs, two others set off whale watching. Six of the group had not yet had a 'touch' and Helen was desperate for this to change. Five were in her panga and one was in a neighbouring one, and we intended to stick together! It wasn't looking too hopeful as the wind was really picking up and conditions were decidedly choppy but with 45 minutes to go, we passed Searcher and noticed the anchor line being tugged again. Sure enough, we watched as a grey whale emerged after a back scratch. We followed it. Another adult appeared, swimming directly between our pangas, parallel with us, and we hoped and prayed that it may be curious.

It veered towards one panga and everyone started making a real fuss (as noise potentially holds their interest). It then dived and we stayed stationary for a while hoping it may re-appear. Helen suddenly saw it directly pass underneath her, very close to the surface, and she screamed at the clients to get into position on the right-hand side of the panga and get their hands in the water in case it emerged. Grabbing a scoop off another client in her panic (sorry!) to hold the interest of the whale, it rose right next to the panga tantalisingly close. It wasn't close enough though so the clients had 5eir arms 'helped' to go a little deeper, submerging their arms almost fully, until four of the six finally achieved success and touched the whale (which came back for more we might add). The adrenaline hit was instant, even for those watching. What a moment! We headed back to Searcher with grins plastered over our faces and a huge sense of relief.

We empathised hugely with the two clients who had missed out, but they took it in their stride and were happy for the others (what selfless legends). It had been an epic few days in wonderful San Ignacio Lagoon and although we left to surging seas (we had been warned), we were happy. Many of the group, due to the rough conditions and the excitement of the last few days, decided against sea bass for dinner, instead, retiring to the security of their cabins for the night.



Day 7:

Wednesday 12 February 2025

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Offshore Magdalena Bay

Weather: overcast initially, clearing to sunshine, 18 degrees

It was still choppy, but we were in high spirits, and more than ready for breakfast when it was served at 6.30 am. Josh came up trumps (yet again) with blueberry pancakes that went down a storm. No sooner had we finished (seconds in many cases!) when we got a call from the bridge that humpbacks were one mile off the bow. We were out on deck pronto, hanging on tightly and adhering to the three points of contact rule, with our binoculars and cameras at the ready. We approached closer and closer towards three individuals who turned out to be very obliging, and if we may anthropomorphise, quite interested in our presence. Surfacing ahead of us repeatedly, we followed their progress as they blew, flipper slapped and fluked. One then breached clear of the water right in front of us and our delighted reactions could have been heard in Mexico City! We lost them for a while so slowed, and they reappeared spotted off our stern. Two split off surveying our port side and one more rose to breathe two metres from our starboard deck. We watched them in astonishment, marvelling at their proximity. It appears that not only the greys are friendly down here!

After an hour we lost them, which was perfect timing as Tom was due to deliver a presentation on how to identify cetacean and pinniped species often seen around the Baja peninsula. An hour later we were fully gunned up and ready to recognise them for real. In a strange feat of timing, humpbacks were then announced once again, and we went outside to enjoy their company for a little while.



The low cloud of the morning had evaporated leaving in its wake the most glorious blue sky and deep blue ocean, so many of the group soaked up the welcome sunshine whilst Helen went through the species list covering what we'd seen so far for those who were interested in keeping tabs. Proceedings were interrupted by yet more humpbacks at 11.40 am, and they cruised alongside us, keeping us entertained, and happy, until lunchtime. The beef, fish or veggie teriyaki proved to be popular, after which everyone relaxed in the salon or out on deck, keeping watch for any signs of activity.

Mid-afternoon yet more humpbacks came into the mix. An adult breached right off the bow (the second one today) causing more oohs and aahs than you can shake a stick at! We stuck with it for an hour, watching it remain just below the surface, using its enormous tail as steerage. The white undersides of their huge pectoral flippers glow aquamarine underwater, providing a clear indicator for tracking their progress. Clearly feeding, at one point, one lunged forward, mouth open, before falling back beneath the waves. It also did a huge tail slap, causing the hovering Heerman's gulls above to dive down to try and retrieve any stunned fish on the surface.

We delighted in seeing our first magnificent frigatebirds and our one and only albatross (black-footed), whose wing span was unmistakable soaring low over the ocean. We spotted black-vented shearwater too, and long-beaked common dolphins made an appearance at 4.30 pm. As the sun set, humpbacks breached far off into the distance, having given us a taste today of what we hoped was to come tomorrow when we hit their renowned breeding ground, Gorda Banks, off the southern tip of the peninsula. We were ready for more!



Day 8:

Offshore Cabo San Lucas

Weather: sunny and windy, 24 degrees

Thursday 13 February 2025

It is difficult to put into words quite what we experienced today. There are good whale-watching days and there are great whale-watching days. This was a great one! By 6.15 am we were off, watching a pair of

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

breaching humpbacks directly ahead of us. A third joined them and three hours later (yes, you read that correctly, three hours later), they were still breaching, as well as tail and pectoral flipper slapping. We even had a double breach which simply defied gravity and our expectations! Absolutely awed by their athleticism, we were glued to our spots on the bow and in front of the wheelhouse, with breakfast for most, delayed until their departure at 9.15 am.

Wildlife first!



Half an hour later, we passed two grey whales as most of the group settled on the stern deck, keeping an eye out for wildlife and enjoying the sunshine. Far off the stern, we saw what we initially thought were leaping dolphins, but these proved to be marlin. At least nine beautiful arcs clean out of the water were witnessed alongside the many splashes all around caused by leaping mobula rays.

A little later still, Mike called out a pair of humpbacks with a calf off the bow. Approaching carefully, we were astonished to see grey whales with them. Tom ascertained that the humpbacks appeared uncomfortable with the greys and we watched this unusual interaction until they moved off. During the next few hours, we counted up to 19 grey whales in these waters, which is rare, and possibly the result of cooler water temperatures caused by La Niña and a lack of food further north.



Next up was a female humpback with a calf. The calf emulated everything the mother did from tail slapping, flipper slapping and mini breaches. The size differential was remarkable and the youngster stole our hearts as we followed them for some time. The female rolled onto her back repeatedly holding up both pectoral fins before smashing them down into the waves in quite a feat of strength. It was only 11.20 am. What a morning!



Around lunchtime, as we tucked into fantastic burgers, we came across yet more humpbacks, one of which did the mother of all breaches. Not only did it throw its massive weight right out of the water in front of our disbelieving eyes, but it did a 360-degree turn in the air before slamming back down into the depths. By now, we were approaching seven hours of almost nonstop humpback action and we were having to pinch ourselves that it was happening. Tom assured us it was and summed everything up perfectly when he announced that after a lifetime spent researching marine mammals, this was by far and away the very best humpback experience he'd ever had. Us too. Whoop whoop!

Other than the mobula rays that continued to flaunt themselves all around us (almost always managing to evade being caught on camera due to their ability to appear out of nowhere), things finally quietened down for a short while on the wildlife front so we took the opportunity to try on snorkelling equipment in preparation for our first aquatic activity tomorrow. Beige socks proved ideal when helping the tight neoprene slide on easily and we had quite a few laughs parading around on the stern deck before pulling up close to a long crescent-shaped beach at Punta Arena. The skiffs were launched and we set off to stretch our legs and enjoy a little beachcombing. The walk produced new sightings of sanderling, crested caracara, greater roadrunner, loggerhead shrike, pyrrhuloxia and northern mockingbird.

The Gulf of California was calm and tranquil as we watched the sun set behind the rugged mountains of the Baja peninsula. This was the first time in a week that we hadn't seen it sink below the oceanic horizon, but

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

it was a lovely end to a superb day, topped off with crab cakes for dinner. Before bed, Tom quickly ran through a presentation on Guadeloupe fur seals and then we prepared ourselves for a long cruise north through the night. We were heading to San Jose with blue whales on our minds. We were very much hoping to find them.

Day 9:

Isla San Jose

Weather: sunny and calm, 27 degrees

Friday 14 February 2025

Happy Valentine's Day! We certainly felt the love today.

Summed up in numbers, we had five hours of continuous blue whale watching, saw four whale species overall, three of which were new, enjoyed two excursions on Isla San Jose and finished up with one back deck BBQ. Today was absolutely stonking!

It all began with an early start. Anchored off Isla San Jose, we rose in the dark and readied ourselves for breakfast at 5.30 am. As night gave way to the first brush of dawn, those out on deck became aware of a huge sheer rock face to our starboard side, the moon suspended perfectly just above it. As the sun rose in the east, casting a pale yellow glow over the watery horizon, the rock face was illuminated to perfection, taking our breath away. This was the reason for our early start.



We were looking forward to stretching our legs again this morning and by 7 am, bathed in wonderful, warm sunshine, we were heading towards shore. Pulling into a small crevasse in the wave-cut platform, we stepped off the front of the skiffs onto a sedimentary shelf embedded with shells of all shapes and sizes. Strangely, two swimming goats were enjoying their morning ablutions but moved off abruptly at our arrival. Only in Baja! Most of the group set off for a walk up the arroyo with Tom and Tabata, to explore the now-dry water course and see what they could find. Two remained close to the bay, watching turkey vultures, osprey and magnificent frigatebirds fly by as a solitary goat now stood tall on a hill framed only by the azure sky. Western tanager and verdin made it onto the species list but a Xantu's hummingbird did not as it was only Helen who saw it.



Ferried back to Searcher at 9 am, we quickly changed into our snorkelling gear and half an hour later were back in the skiffs, travelling the short distance to our snorkelling spot. Disembarking directly off the sides of the skiffs, it seemed a little quiet initially but an hour later, we'd viewed balloonfish, Cortez round stingray, trumpet fish, Mexican goatfish, large shoals of small grey schooling fish and Panamic Sergeant Majors. Using ladders (or brute force - tres elegant - in one case!), we climbed back onto the skiffs, boarded Searcher, pulled up anchor and set off to spend the rest of the day

whale watching. Little did we know what was to come.

After an hour at sea, lunch was almost ready to serve when there was a hugely excited cry from the Captain of, "blue whale off the bow". You've never seen a bunch of people move with such speed! Sure enough, we raced to the front of the ship and saw the massive smooth, light grey back of a blue whale. Wow. Wow. Wow. It surfaced repeatedly and our grins split our faces, cheeks hurting as we embraced our good fortune. Then we saw another. And another! No way! If that wasn't enough, the crew also spotted the distinctive 45-degree angle blow of what appeared to be a gargantuan sperm whale, far, far off into the distance. But it wasn't just one, there were blows all around us. Resting on the surface, we could see their backs, as typically, they will spend a few minutes at the surface (a process called logging), preparing to dive to ridiculous depths of between one to two kilometres, on the search for their favoured squid prey.

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Lunch, needless to say, was forgotten as we followed our three blues, intending to try our luck with the sperm whales later. Three hours later, we were still still them, but now there were way more than three. As we circled the obvious food-rich bay, coming across more and more individuals, we watched them lunge feed, as we clocked up other sightings of green turtles, more mobulas, half a watermelon (!), a lone manta ray and a gorgeous mako shark that drifted past, stationary, and beautifully clear in the pristine water. We did manage to eventually squeeze in lunch a lunch of yellow-fin tuna salad with five grains, and it was well worth it. Beyond delicious.



By mid-afternoon, it was time to move towards the sperm whales. We slowly, slowly approached four logging individuals, managing to get close to them just as they prepared to dive. Three fluked in a row, two on the outside first and then a massive male in the middle. We cried out in awe. It was incredible and proved to be a firm favourite in terms of the highlights of the trip!

The wildlife Gods weren't done with us yet though. At 3.50 pm, a darker, smaller whale was seen with a very pointed dorsal fin. We had a Bryde's with us! Notoriously shy, it quickly disappeared but we'd all glimpsed our third whale species of the day. Why stop at three I hear you ask? We didn't. 20 minutes later, another whale caught our attention off the bow, clearly giving away its identity by raising one enormous white pectoral fin as if lazily waving at us. A humpback. This was getting ridiculous, and we LOVED it.



Not to be usurped, more and more blue whales kept on surfacing. We did not know where to look. We always use a clock face to notify of the presence of whales so if the bow is noon, at one point, we had visuals of blue whales at 11, 12, 1, 2 and 3 pm. We stopped counting as it became impossible to keep up with them all. Quite simply, this was magnificent. The sun shone off the water glinting like a myriad of diamonds and the sightings of blues continued until sundown. Their blows were beautifully illuminated in the dusk light, leaving us trying to digest the fact that we'd just spent,

somewhat impossibly, five hours in the presence of the largest creatures to have ever lived. The only fitting thing to do was to anchor, pour a large margarita (or two), dig into a sumptuous back deck BBQ, and embrace our good fortune at being here.

What a day. What a crew. What incredible wildlife, and what an extraordinary destination!

Day 10:

Weather: sunny and breezy, 25 degrees

Saturday 15 February 2025

Baja still had more to give and our last day in the Gulf of California proved to be another cracker. We'd sailed back down south through the night, waking up beside Los Islotes, a small island off the northern tip of Espiritu Santo in La Paz Bay. Uninhabited, apart from a colony of California sea lions, many youngsters formed the most wonderful welcome committee as they swan towards Searcher, holding their heads high out of the water and looking at us curiously. It was still dark as we donned our gear and it was fair to say that a little in-trepidation was being felt about getting into the water. The sun rose though and one skiff set off on an around the island for those not wishing to swim. This proved to be a fabulous experience taking in blue-footed boobies and great blue herons in the morning sunshine.

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

For the rest of us, accompanied by a cacophony of sea lion bellows, we boarded the two remaining skiffs at 6 am on the dot, for the short ride across to the island. Turkey vultures sat atop guano-stained rocky spires and rows of Brandt's cormorants flew low over us. As soon as we entered the water wearing our compulsory life jackets for swimming, tens and tens of our young pinniped friends were waiting for us, surrounding us, moving onto their sides and peering at us from bulbous inquisitive eyes. Copying us with a fluid, dexterous agility as we twisted and turned to try and match them, the experience elicited such joyous giggling, that the sound amplified and carried underwater, making us laugh out loud! Tropical fish were out in abundance, including Chancho surgeonfish, king angelfish and Panamic Sergeant Majors once again, but ultimately it was all about the sea lions. This was their moment. One glorious hour in their presence (90 minutes for some), culminated with one even trying to climb aboard a skiff and accompany us home!



Once all clients were present and correct back on Searcher, other vessels began to arrive and we appreciated the wisdom of the captain who had brought us here before the weekend crowds arrived. A hearty fried breakfast with pancakes was served and we set off once again to spend the day on a final quest for whales. At 9.20 am, our course changed swiftly and the reason was revealed when Captain Mike announced a whale up ahead. It turned out to be a positively huge male sperm whale logging on the surface. The crew rarely see sperm whales here so two sightings in two days had them hot under the collar. They were positively ecstatic! We watched the whale breathe and admired his brown wrinkly skin as

he readied himself for a dive. After he'd gone, we waited in the area for a while, knowing it may be some time before he returned to the surface. By 10.10 am, with still no sign of him, we continued on our way.

We relaxed in the sun on deck until three humpbacks were spotted at 11.45 am. We didn't stay with them for long as Tabata had spotted a line of dolphins coming towards us on the horizon. We'd been waiting for a super pod of dolphins and finally, they were here. Talk about packing an endorphin punch! Hundreds of them surrounded us, some bow riding, some porpoising parallel to us and some joining from the rear. There were adults, youngsters and newborns all moving through the waves like torpedos, stretching as far as the eye could see in every direction. Creating a dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin overload as the happy hormones kicked in, we ran around the decks laughing out loud, grinning and shrieking! For quite a few within the group, witnessing this was a dream come true and it felt simply sensational! For 90 minutes they stayed with us off Isla Cerralvo, and the memories that they created will stay with us for a lifetime.

When they finally drifted away, the last call for lunch saw many tucking into very tasty chicken, fish or veggie fajitas al fresco, and then the Searcher shop was officially opened. T-shirts, hoodies, caps and books were purchased and we were also encouraged to help ourselves to searcher mugs and fridge magnets from the lounge. Some of the group then started to think about packing but everyone collated back out on deck at the call of more humpbacks ahead. Feeding, they indulged in much tail slapping and a few flukes but one magnificent breach stole the show. What performers these stars of the ocean are!

As the sun began to set on our time in Baja, we gathered for a superb duck confit dinner served by Captain Mike no less, and then individually, went through our personal highlights from the voyage. With the great whales taking centre stage, this proved to be quite moving and emotional. To finish the evening, we indulged in birthday cake and sang our good wishes to an almost 70-year-old onboard. Sssh, no names are to be mentioned, but we hear he was travelling with his son!

Day 11:

Sunday 16 February 2025

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Depart Cabo San Lucas

Weather: sunny, 25 degrees

It was a case of mixed emotions as we helped ourselves to a DIY bagel breakfast and readied ourselves for departure at 7 am. Knowing that our incredible voyage was coming to an end was tough to swallow, but all good things and all that. Our main luggage was brought up onto the stern deck and as it was wheelbarrowed off to our waiting minibuses, we said our goodbyes to two members of the group flying back to the USA, and then to Tom and the crew. As we crossed the last jetty onto dry land, we committed diving pelicans and a lone guineafowl pufferfish to memory before setting off on the 40-minute drive to San Jose del Cabo.

With no less than seven whale blows seen out to sea during the transfer, we were discharged into a pretty Mexican square dominated by a beautiful church. We arranged to be picked up again at 10.30 am, so had a few hours here in which to relax before continuing to the airport. After getting a caffeine hit from a local coffee shop, the group split up to wander around the historic centre and partake in a little birding too. Characterful streets oozed wall art, sculpture gardens charmed, and souvenir shops were visited while the Gila woodpecker, hooded oriole, white-winged dove, house finch and house sparrow completed our species list.

Our party continued to diminish in numbers as we dropped off two more clients at their oceanfront hotel for a few days of R&R (why didn't the rest of us think to do that?!), and then the 'Final Fifteen' departed for Phoenix to connect to British Airways home.

We had the most marvellous time. Baja, you did us proud. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Day 12:

Monday 17 February 2025

Arrive in the UK

Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>

Photo credits: Helen Bryon, Tom Jefferson, Tracey Mason and Chris Shepherd.

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Checklist for Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11
	MAMMALS											
1	California sea lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>	✓	✓	✓						✓	
2	Common dolphin (long-beaked)	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>		✓				✓			✓	
3	Northern elephant seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>			✓							
4	Guadeloupe fur seal	<i>Arctocephalus townsendi</i>			✓							
5	Pacific white-sided dolphins	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>			✓							
6	Grey whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>				✓	✓		✓			
7	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				✓	✓					
8	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>					✓					
9	Humpback whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Blue whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>								✓		
11	Sperm whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>								✓	✓	
12	Bryde's whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>								✓		
	Birds											
1	Western gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Surf scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	✓			✓						
3	Western grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	✓									
4	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		
5	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓				✓					
6	Brandt's cormorant	<i>Urile penicillatus</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
7	Double-crested cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓									
9	Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓		✓		✓					
10	Lesser scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	✓									
11	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	✓									
12	Brown pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast trip](#) or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

13	Great blue heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓				✓				✓	
14	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓			✓	✓					
15	Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	✓									
16	Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓			
17	Marbled godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	✓				✓					
18	Heermann's gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓			
19	California gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	✓									
20	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓			✓						
21	Yellow-rumped warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	✓									
22	Spotted sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	✓									
23	Red-crowned parrot	<i>Amazona viridigenalis</i>	✓									
24	Ring-billed gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓									
25	American crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhncos</i>	✓		✓							
26	Black phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	✓									
27	American coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	✓									
28	Great-tailed grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>		✓								
29	Pied-billed grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		✓								
30	Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓								
31	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓		✓					
32	San Benito savannah sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>			✓							
33	Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓							
34	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓							
35	Forster's tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>			✓							
36	Turkey vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
37	White ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>				✓	✓					
38	White-faced ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>				✓						
39	Royal tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>				✓	✓					
40	Black skimmer	<i>Rynchops niger</i>				✓						
41	Little blue heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>					✓					
42	Tricoloured heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>					✓					
43	Reddish egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>					✓					
44	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					✓					
45	Willet	<i>Catotrophorus semipalmatus</i>					✓					
46	Belted kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>					✓					

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast trip](#) or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

47	Mangrove warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>						✓						
48	Vermillion flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>						✓						
49	Savannah sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>						✓						
50	Harris's hawk	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>						✓						
51	Pacific loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>						✓						
52	White-throated swift	<i>Aeronautics saxatalis</i>						✓						
53	Black-footed albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>							✓					
54	Black-vented shearwater	<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>							✓					
55	Magnificent frigate bird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Eared grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>								✓	✓			
57	Crested caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>								✓				
58	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>								✓				
59	Greater roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>								✓				
60	Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>								✓				
61	Northern mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>								✓	✓			
62	Pyrrhuloxia	<i>Cardinalis sinuatus</i>								✓				
63	Western tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>									✓			
64	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>									✓			
65	Blue-footed booby	<i>Sula nebouxii</i>										✓		
66	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>												✓
67	White-winged dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>												✓
68	House finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>												✓
69	Hooded oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>												✓
70	Gila woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>												✓

Find out more about our [Great Whales of Mexico's Pacific Coast trip](#) or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com