



**Oregon State University**  
Marine Mammal  
Institute

# BAJA GRAY WHALE EXPEDITION

**MARCH 9–17, 2022**



For more information:  
[mmi.oregonstate.edu](http://mmi.oregonstate.edu) | 541-867-0202 | [minda.stiles@oregonstate.edu](mailto:minda.stiles@oregonstate.edu)



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# ITINERARY

## Wednesday, March 9

### USA to Loreto, Baja California, Mexico

Your trip will begin in Loreto, Mexico, at our hotel, which will be our comfortable and quiet base for the next three nights. At 5:30 pm, we meet in the hotel lobby for happy hour, introductions, and briefing on our trip. We will dine as a group in the hotel restaurant, featuring new Baja cuisine.

## Thursday, March 10

### Coronado Island: Marine Mammals, Seabirds, Desert, & Sea

This morning, we meet at 6:30 am for breakfast at the hotel, followed by a short walk to the harbor. At 7:30 am, we depart in “super pangas” — open boats with an outboard motor and a sun canopy — piloted by experienced local guides. Conditions early morning are typically excellent with calm water and beautiful lighting. We will look for marine mammals and hope to see California sea lions and bottlenose and common dolphins. If we are lucky, we may see pilot whales, false killer whales, fin whales, and even blue whales. There are also plenty of seabirds, shore birds, leaping mobula rays on occasion, and gorgeous scenery.

Depending on conditions, we plan a wet landing on a white sand beach on Isla Coronado midday for lunch and exploration of surrounding flora. We return to Loreto mid-afternoon where you have free time to explore this small mission town, rest, or swim. Ocean temperatures in March average 68 °F — refreshing!

At 5:30 pm, we meet again in the hotel lobby for a happy hour and presentation by MMI Director Dr. Lisa Ballance before dinner as a group at a restaurant specializing in Baja Californian cuisine.

## Friday, March 11

### Parque Nacional Bahía de Loreto: Marine Mammals, Seabirds, Desert, & Sea

We start early again this morning on super-pangas with our local guides, traveling from Loreto to the clear waters of a marine park well known for blue whales March, and possibly fin, humpback, and even sperm whales. We have a similar schedule to yesterday. Depending on ocean conditions, we hope to disembark at Puerto Escondido, returning to the hotel by van mid-afternoon. Join our naturalist for an optional late afternoon easy stroll for birdwatching (including Xantus’ hummingbird, found only in southern Baja), or spend time on your own. We convene for happy hour and a presentation by naturalist Eric Horvath at the hotel, followed by dinner as a group at another fine Loreto restaurant.



Photo by Robert L. Pitman

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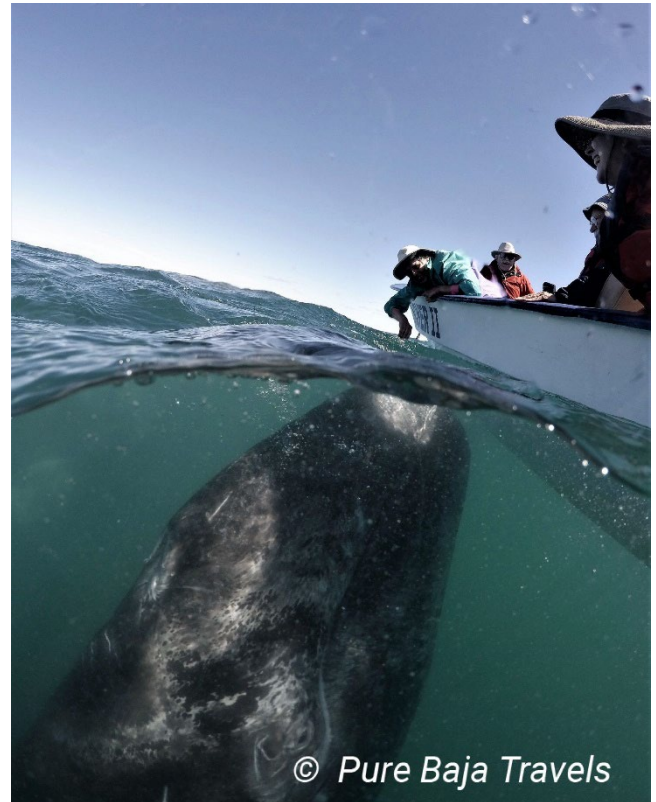


## Saturday, March 12

### Loreto to San Ignacio Lagoon

We watch the sunrise during breakfast, then load our gear into vans and head north on Highway 1. Our day of travel will be leisurely, with stops along the route to see cardón cactus and the fascinating elephant tree. We will stop in the mission town of San Ignacio for a visit to its colonial church, established in 1728. We may have time to search for Belding's yellowthroat, a warbler endemic to Baja, in the nearby reed beds and palm oasis. We are on the road for another couple of hours (some of it unpaved) before we reach our camp at the pristine and tranquil Laguna de San Ignacio, a protected desert park that has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Our destination is Campo Ramón on the shore of the lagoon — the perfect base for our stay. We can see gray whales swimming, blowing, and spy-hopping from our camp, and on calm evenings, the sounds of the whale blows come across the water. Camp manager José Sanchez and his staff will receive us and provide an orientation upon our arrival. After settling into our tents, we will enjoy happy hour, a home-cooked meal, and watch the stars.



At Campo Ramón, the typical daily schedule will be:

6:30 am — Coffee, tea, fruit, and cereal available for the early risers.

7:30 am — Full cooked breakfast served. All meals will be buffet style.

9 am — Board the pangas for morning whale watching and natural history excursion.

1 pm — Lunch served at camp.

2 pm — Afternoon whale watching excursions.

5:30 pm — Happy hour with hors d'oeuvres, cocktails, beer, and other beverages. Presentations from MMI Director Dr. Lisa Ballance and naturalist Eric Horvath.

6:45 pm — Dinner. Mexican cuisine, served with Baja California wines.

## Sunday, March 13, through Tuesday, March 15

### San Ignacio Lagoon

At San Ignacio Lagoon, our main focus will be gray whales, including plenty of time on the water with them watching from *pangas*, small open boats. Weather permitting, we hope to offer two trips each day to everyone. Here, the gray whales are in charge, choosing when, where, and how close to approach us. Our pangas are piloted

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by highly experienced experts in driving in the lagoon around whales, knowledgeable of safety, regulations, and the animals. We can expect plenty of close views, and an occasional “shower” when a whale exhales! Mother-and-calf pairs approach our little boats, and on past trips most participants have been able to touch a whale — an extraordinary and deeply moving experience. Spy hops are frequent, breaches are also seen, and some participants are privileged to see surface mating activity. We typically see small groups of bottlenose dolphins in the lagoon every day, and we will be watching for birds and sea turtles too.

In addition to whale watching, we will offer optional excursions to explore mangrove and desert ecology. These may include beach walks and a panga ride through quiet mangrove marsh channels. There is plenty to see! Many shorebirds winter in the lagoon, including flocks of long-billed curlews, marbled godwits, and black-bellied plovers (our naturalist has a superb spotting scope!). Yellow-crowned night-herons, willets, mangrove warbler, and several species of egrets are regular inhabitants of mangroves and with luck, we may spot a Ridgway's rail. Saltbush habitat in sandy dunes along the lagoon shores are home to side-blotched lizards and littered with a diversity of shells.

And there is always an option to relax at camp and enjoy the scenery and sounds for those wanting a slower pace.

## Wednesday, March 16

### San Ignacio Lagoon to Loreto

Today is our final morning at San Ignacio Lagoon. We have breakfast at 7 am, load into our vans, and drive through the desert of Baja back to Loreto, stopping along the way at selected sites for short walks and to enjoy our field lunch. We arrive at our hotel in Loreto late in the afternoon, settle into our rooms, and gather for a final happy hour and trip re-cap, followed by a farewell dinner at our hotel.

## Thursday, March 17

We wake up in our Loreto hotel, then we each depart for home with our fresh memories and new friendships.



Photo copyright Michael S Nolan

**REGISTER ONLINE AT**

**[HTTPS://MMI.OREGONSTATE.EDU/BAJA-EXPEDITION](https://mmi.oregonstate.edu/baja-expedition)**

*PLEASE SEE TRIP COST DETAILS AND CANCELLATION POLICY ON LAST PAGE*

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# EXPEDITION LEADERS

## Lisa Ballance



Dr. Lisa T. Ballance is the Director of Oregon State University's Marine Mammal Institute, Endowed Chair of Marine Mammal Research, and Professor of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences. She has studied the ecology and conservation biology of whales, dolphins, and porpoises (and seabirds) for over 30 years around the world, including the tropical Pacific and Indian Oceans, Antarctica, the Bering Sea, Cambodia's Mekong River, and Mexico's Gulf of California and San Ignacio Lagoon!

Prior to joining OSU's Marine Mammal Institute, Dr. Ballance was a scientist with NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), where she directed NOAA's Marine Mammal and Turtle Research Division in La Jolla, CA, providing scientific leadership and oversight of a division consisting of 70 scientists with a \$9M annual budget, and was Chief Scientist of NOAA's Eastern Tropical Pacific Dolphin and Ecosystem Assessment Surveys, which provided the scientific basis for the "Dolphin Safe" label found on tuna cans in supermarkets all over this country.

Dr. Ballance holds a PhD in marine ecology, an MS in marine science, and a BS in biology. She has published more than 100 peer-reviewed papers, working papers, and technical reports; given invited scientific presentations at scientific conferences, universities, public lectures, and congressional briefings; been awarded research funding from a wide variety of sources including National Science Foundation, US Navy, and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management; and is recipient of the Department of Commerce Bronze and Silver Medals, NOAA Fisheries' Supervisor of the Year, and cover feature of the Association for Women in Science.

## Eric Horvath

Eric Horvath holds a degree in zoology from Oregon State University and has written scientific research papers on birds and mammals. He has conducted ornithological research in Oregon, Arizona, Mexico, and Panama, and has guided natural history/birding tours since 1990 throughout the USA, and to Africa and South America. He has been the trip naturalist on this OSU Baja trip for three years. Eric's interests also include photography, botany, and geology.



## Claire Smith

Claire Smith will be taking care of logistics and the day-to-day needs for our group. This will be her fourth expedition to Laguna San Ignacio with the Marine Mammal Institute. She has worked with husband Eric Horvath for 30 years, developing travel itineraries, and ensuring that trips go smoothly and all guests have a truly rewarding experience.





# THINGS TO KNOW

## Lodging, Transportation, & Meals

**Loreto:** Our lodging will be a comfortable, modern hotel with bar and restaurant.

**Campo Ramón:** Our camp is a perfect combination of wilderness and comforts of home. We sleep in spacious, walk-in, geodome tents, each double occupancy with two substantial cots and bedding. Each tent has lighting, and the common area offers 110V electricity and USB charging stations. Each “neighborhood” of three tents shares a composting toilet (four toilets total for the group.) Our camp has three centrally located hot showers with sufficient water for all guests to shower daily. A few portable battery power units are available if required for CPAP machines (these should be set up for 12V.) We will gather for happy hours, presentations, and meals in a central pavilion.

**Transportation:** Transportation will be in three 15-passenger vans with local professional drivers.

**Meals:** All meals and nonalcoholic beverages are included. Complimentary beer, wine, and cocktails are provided while staying at Campo Ramón. All other alcoholic drinks must be paid for on an individual basis. Dress is casual.

## Preparation

March is dry and cool in Baja, California. Be prepared for plenty of sun and wind. Dressing in layers is the best strategy, including rain gear for whale watching.

Water temperature in the Gulf of California at Loreto is typically 68° F, so swimmers will find they want a “shortie” wetsuit. Swimming at San Ignacio Lagoon is not allowed by park regulations.

Guests will receive further trip information by email prior to the trip.



Photo by Robert L. Pitman

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# TRIP COST

By joining us on the Baja Gray Whale Expedition, you will visit remarkable natural habitats first-hand, learn about the animals and plants that inhabit them, and directly support the marine mammal research, education, and public outreach work of the Marine Mammal Institute.

The Baja Gray Whale Expedition fees are as follows:

**\$1,000 per person deposit (NONREFUNDABLE)**

**\$4,000 per person final payment (DUE BY NOVEMBER 1, 2021)**

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**\$5,000 total trip fee per person**

**Register online at [MMI.OREGONSTATE.EDU/BAJA-EXPEDITION](http://MMI.OREGONSTATE.EDU/BAJA-EXPEDITION).** *Your deposit, or full payment at the time of registration, secures your reservation.* Your \$1,000 deposit is a nonrefundable, tax-deductible donation to the Marine Mammal Institute Fellowship Fund and directly supports our graduate students. You will receive an emailed confirmation immediately after payment of your deposit or trip fee.

## The trip price includes:

- Nine-day, 8-night expedition in Baja Mexico, with activities as described and modifications subject to weather and daily conditions
- All meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 9
- Alcoholic beverages at Campo Ramón and one alcoholic beverage at happy hour and dinner at Loreto
- All accommodation from Day 1 through the evening of Day 8, double occupancy. *(Single occupancy while in Loreto can be arranged for payment of an additional \$700. Single occupancy while at both Campo Ramón and Loreto can be arranged for an additional \$5000.)*

## The trip price *does not* include:

- Travel between your home and Loreto, Mexico
- Travel between Loreto airport and hotel
- Incidentals and items of a personal nature (laundry, telephone calls, etc)
- Personal insurance and trip protection insurance. *Guests are required to secure medical evacuation insurance for this trip.*
- Gratuities. (Guests will receive suggested amount in follow-up information.)

# Cancellation Policy

Per-person cancellations are subject to the following:

- The deposit of \$1,000 per person is a tax-deductible donation to the Marine Mammal Institute via the Oregon State University Foundation and as such is *nonrefundable*, even if you cancel your registration for any reason.
- If you cancel your registration for any reason before January 1, 2022, your \$4,000 per person fee will be refunded.
- If you cancel your registration for any reason on or after January 1, 2022, your \$4,000 per person fee will not be refunded.

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