



Oregon State University
**Marine Mammal
Institute**

BAJA GRAY WHALE EXPEDITION

PREPARATION PACKET

What to Expect

Packing List

Health & Safety

Suggested Reading



For more information:
beav.es/baja | 541-867-0202



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WHAT TO EXPECT

Lodging

In Loreto, we stay at [La Misión](#) (pictured at right), a beautiful seaside hotel with a bar, restaurant, and modern conveniences. The hotel is situated along the oceanfront walkway known as the Malecón.

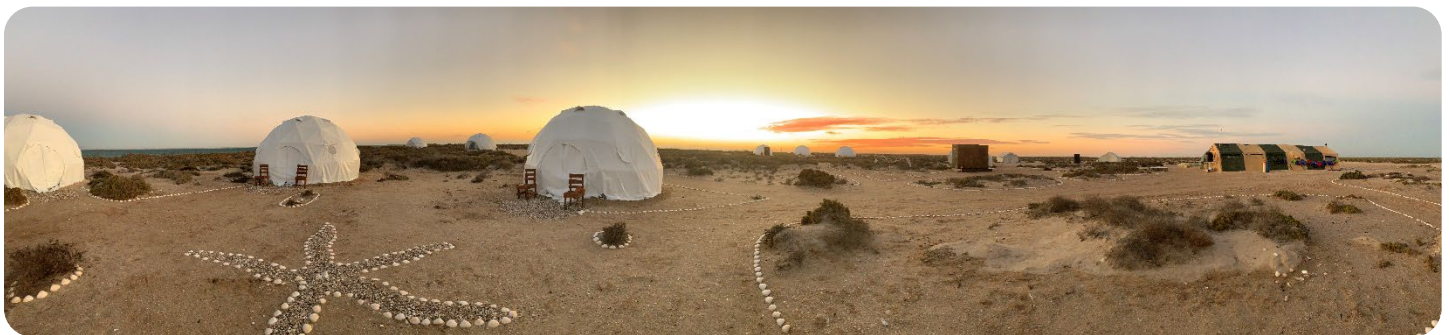
At San Ignacio Lagoon, we stay at **Campo Ramón** (pictured below) — sustainable, rugged luxury. We sleep in walk-in geodome tents. Each spacious tent is double occupancy with two sturdy cots, warm sleeping bags, pillows with laundered pillowcase, and blankets.

Tents are arranged into “neighborhoods,” which share a composting toilet. (The entire camp has four toilets.) There are three centrally located hot showers with sufficient water for all guests to shower daily.

The central dining/gathering area offers 110V electricity and USB charging stations. Each tent has solar lighting. A limited number of portable battery power units are available for CPAP machines (your machine should be set up for 12V.) *Please let MMI know in advance if you would like to reserve one of these battery units.*

Currency

Many businesses in Loreto and elsewhere take US dollars, and higher-end shops and restaurants take credit cards. Because of this, changing your dollars to pesos is optional. Most guests find it helpful to bring small bills for minor purchases and tips.



Phones & Internet

Loreto has strong and reliable cellular coverage (check with your carrier about the cost of an international plan).

La Misión Hotel offers good WiFi. Once we leave Loreto, plan to enjoy being off the grid. Cell phone coverage is spotty at best, and typically non-existent, at the lagoon.

Emergency messages can be relayed through MMI Administrative Manager Minda Stiles at (541) 867-0202 (office) or (541) 270-3721 (mobile).

Meals & Beverages

All meals and nonalcoholic beverages are included from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 9.

In Loreto, one alcoholic beverage at happy hour and one at dinner is complimentary. Additional alcoholic drinks may be paid for on an individual basis. At Campo Ramón, complimentary beer, wine, and cocktails are provided.

Guests will have the opportunity to request accommodations for dietary restrictions in forms to come later.

Ground Transportation

Guests are responsible for their own ground transportation between the Loreto airport and La Misión Hotel. We recommend taxis, which are easily hired upon arrival at the airport as well as arranged through the hotel at the end of our trip. Drivers prefer cash. (US dollars are accepted.)

We travel together between Loreto and San Ignacio Lagoon in 15-passenger vans with local professional drivers. This allows us to enjoy the spectacular desert of Baja California Sur. Lunch is provided en route.



Weather & Clothing

Dress is casual. February and March are typically cool and dry, but be prepared for a range of temperatures and conditions, including prolonged sun exposure, strong wind, and cold nights. Dressing in layers is the best strategy. (In 2023, the weather was colder than usual.)

Everyone will get wet at some point, from rain, wave chop, or whale spray, so lightweight rain gear is recommended. Around the whales, you'll be putting your hands in the water, so wear sleeves you can roll up or a sleeveless vest for warmth. The bottom of the boats will get wet; keep that in mind when you select your shoes and daypack.

Please note that we do *not* have scheduled swimming or snorkeling activities, but you may want to bring a swimsuit for the pool at La Misión Hotel or for a possible quick dip in the Gulf during one of our outings. Water temperature in the Gulf of California at Loreto is typically 68°F, so if you plan to swim in the Gulf, be prepared for a brisk event. Swimming at San Ignacio Lagoon is not allowed by park regulations.

Please see the Packing List on the next page for specific recommendations.



Gratuities

Pure Baja Travels' excellent local naturalists, guides, and staff are with us the entire trip, working hard to ensure that we have an exceptional experience. On the last day of our stay at Campo Ramón, we will collect gratuities from each guest and pass them to Pure Baja Travels owner José Sanchez, who will distribute them equitably among his staff and contractors. For this, we suggest US\$20 per day (US\$160 cash total) per guest. We will provide you with an envelope for your gratuities.

Gratuities for hotel breakfasts and group meals are included in the price of the trip. At your discretion, you may wish to leave tips for other La Misión hotel staff. US dollars are welcome.



PACKING LIST

You may wish to pack necessities — including travel documents, money, and medications — in your carry-on bag rather than in your checked luggage. We recommend that you also include a change of clothing and TSA-acceptable travel-sized toiletries in your carry-on bag. Keep cash in more than one place. Should something happen, not all will be lost.

Essentials

- Passport
- Cash
- Reusable water bottle
- Sun protection
 - Sunglasses: polarized are best for seeing whales through the water; wraparound style is more effective for cutting sun glare
 - Sunhat(s): a reinforced brim holds up best in windy conditions without obscuring your view; don't forget the back of your neck
 - Plenty of high-SPF waterproof sunscreen and lip balm
- Water shoes or sandals for wet landings
- Shower towel and washcloth for Campo Ramón (smaller, synthetic towels will dry faster)
- Headlamp or small flashlight for Campo Ramón
- Motion sickness medication (consult your physician)

Clothing

We may experience a wide range of temperatures during our trip. We recommend clothes made of quick-drying material. Comfort and protection are the name of the game!

- Casual, easily layered clothing for exploring Loreto
- Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts for sun protection
- Long pants such as travel pants or jeans
- Comfortable clothing for windy mornings and cool evenings (sweatpants, warm jacket, fleece, warm hat, etc.)
- Rain gear (lightweight pants and jacket)
- Windbreaker
- Sneakers/sports sandals comfortable for walking
- A sun protection “buff” or gaiter for covering the face when we are on boat trips
- Robe for walking to shower at camp and for cool nights in the hotel
- Slippers for hotel room (tile floors)



Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Camera, including batteries and memory cards
- Waterproof phone or camera case with lanyard or strap
- Day pack, ideally water resistant or waterproof for use in boats
- Heavy Ziploc or dry bag to keep items dry while in boats
- Portable phone battery charger
- Trekking poles or walking stick
- Personal medications and toiletries
- Medical devices such as CPAP machine with extra batteries
- Prescription glasses/contact lenses plus spares
- Small medical kit
- Insect repellent
- Ginger candies for mild motion sickness
- Small towel for wiping off sunglasses and camera in the boats
- Gloves: warm/waterproof
- Sleeping bag liner — "Sea to Summit" online has a good range of liners. You can also make a simple liner by sewing a bedsheet together.
- Personal snacks (We will have plenty of food but if you have favorite items for in between meals, you are welcome to bring them. Note that fresh food, such as fruit and cheese, will be confiscated at airport customs upon arrival.)
- Swimsuit or swim trunks
- Evening clothing for restaurant dinners in Loreto (sundress, casual dress shirt, etc.)



HEALTH & SAFETY

Motion Sickness

We may experience choppy sea conditions during our day trips. Please plan in advance and talk to your physician for recommendations if you are susceptible to motion sickness.

Traveler's Diarrhea

Stomach upsets and diarrhea are not uncommon when traveling outside of one's local community. Symptoms are typically not serious and resolve with time. Pepto Bismol and Imodium are over-the-counter remedies that can be helpful for mild stomach upsets, but please talk to your physician about what is appropriate for you.

We recommend that you avoid tap water. Use only bottled or purified water for drinking and for brushing your teeth. Unless our local guides indicate otherwise, avoid tap water and ice in restaurants, and raw or uncooked foods (vegetables, unpeeled fruit, raw seafood). Bottled or purified water will be available at all times during this trip, so please bring a reusable water bottle.

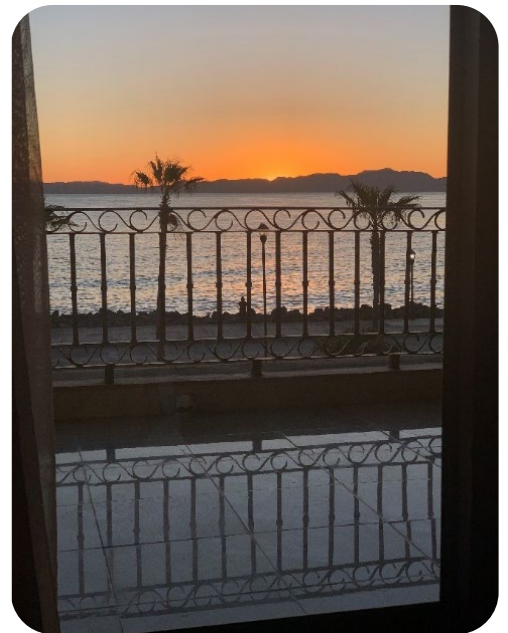
Medical Evacuation Insurance

We require that guests purchase emergency medical evacuation insurance.

Please note that we do not require guests to purchase travel insurance, which is more comprehensive coverage than medical evacuation coverage.

A few companies that are suggested by experienced travelers include:

- [Divers Alert Network](#) (membership includes emergency medical evacuation coverage)
- Global Guardian Air Ambulance (Baja Gray Whale Expedition guests use promo code **MMI25%** for a 25% discount off your membership)
- AIG Travel Guard
- Medjet



Travel Planning

Flights to Loreto can be limited. For assistance making your travel arrangements, securing insurance, or exploring activities for before or after the expedition, we recommend using a professional travel agent. Pam Davis at Willamette International Travel (Portland, OR) is familiar with the Baja Gray Whale Expedition and has been helpful for many of our previous guests and staff. She can be reached at PamD@WitTravel.com, (503) 224-0180.

Feedback from our past guests indicate that many wished they had stayed an extra day in Loreto to explore.



SUGGESTED READING

You can also find a link to this [Suggested Reading](https://mmi.oregonstate.edu/baja-reading) list on our website at mmi.oregonstate.edu/baja-reading.

An excellent primer on gray whales:

“Gray Whale: From Devilfish to Gentle Giants,” *Whalewatcher, Journal of the American Cetacean Society*, Fall 2013
Volume 42, Number 1, 72 pp

From the MMI Geospatial Ecology of Marine Megafauna Laboratory blog:

- [Do gray whales count calories? New GEMM Lab publication compares energetic values of prey available to gray whales on two feeding grounds in the eastern North Pacific](#)
- [Makah Gray Whale Hunt Waiver — a long-time coming, but still premature?](#)
- [What are the ecological impacts of gray whale benthic feeding?](#)
- [Rock-solid GRANITE: Scaling the disturbance response of individual whales up to population level impacts](#)

Introductions to themes discussed during the trip:

- [“Save the Seal!”](#) Robert L. Pitman and John W. Durban, *Natural History* magazine, November 2009, p. 48
- [“How Now, Little Cow?”](#) Robert L. Pitman and Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, *Natural History* magazine, July/August 2007, pp. 28–32

And, for the ambitious:

- *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, John Steinbeck, 1951
- *The Marine Mammals of the North-Western Coast of North America: Described and Illustrated, Together With an Account of the American Whale-Fishery*, Charles M. Scammon, 1874 (reprint)
- *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, Jon L. Dunn & Jonathan Alderfer. (There is now a 7th Edition of this book.)
- *Baja California Plant Field Guide*, Jon P. Rebman & Norman C. Roberts
- *Lagoon Time: A Guide to Gray Whales and the Natural History of San Ignacio Lagoon*, Steven L. Swartz
- *E. Robustus: The Biology and Human History of Gray Whales*, James Sumich