

Kayak and Whale Watch in Baja Sur, Mexico
February 1 - 13, 2023
Trip #2314



Camping and Kayaking at Espiritu Santo Island – The Jewel of the Sea of Cortez

Immerse in the natural paradise of the Sea of Cortez, [a UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) known as “the aquarium of the world,” and the Baja California peninsula on the northwest coast of Mexico.

Kayak in turquoise waters while circumnavigating [Espiritu Santo Island](#), a national park with its coastal arches and other naturally carved rock formations. We will camp for 1 night in a canyon with hot springs and 7 nights on white sand beaches watching pastel sunsets and sunrises over the Sea of Cortez. While on the island journey we will snorkel with sea lion pups and whale sharks, the largest fish in the sea. There will be plenty of time each day for additional snorkeling with tropical fish, hiking, and exploring the island.

The trip’s highlight is when we respectfully observe gray whales from a small motorboat as they play and eat in Magdalena Bay, where they gave birth and raised their young, just before beginning their spring journey of over 6000 miles to the Bering Sea in the Arctic waters of Alaska. Every year gray whales make their annual migration from the Chirikof Basin in Alaska to Magdalena Bay, a round trip of some 12,400

miles making it the longest migration by any mammal. During the whales' winter visit in Mexico, they calve and nurse in these shallow lagoons. These amazing gray whale nursing grounds are protected by strict Mexican environmental and ecological legislation. We are careful to observe these regulations by exclusively working with licensed cooperatives that have trained boat drivers. Reach over the edge of our boat and you might even touch the back of a whale as it comes alongside and wish it good luck.

According to the World Heritage website, the Sea of Cortez has striking natural beauty in a dramatic setting formed by rugged islands with high cliffs and sandy beaches which contrast with the brilliant reflection from the desert and the surrounding turquoise waters. The Sea of Cortez and its islands are known as a natural laboratory for the investigation of speciation, which is the formation of new and distinct species through the process of evolution. The Sea is thought to be one of the most diverse seas on the planet and is home to more than 5,000 species of macroinvertebrates, which are organisms that lack a spine and are large enough to be seen with the naked eye. Baja California itself is the second longest and most isolated peninsula in the world.

We will start our trip with a soak in natural hot springs and a night camping in the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna mountain range, a [UNESCO designated biosphere reserve](#) recognized for its distinctive flora and fauna.

We will end our trip in the city of La Paz, "peace" in Spanish, which is the state capital of Baja California Sur with a population of around 300,000. As the region's commercial, cultural and political center, La Paz is still a tranquil and very Mexican port town. Through the years it has preserved a sort of nostalgic "old Baja" atmosphere. Though the area has fine beaches, La Paz is not known as a beach resort in the traditional Mexican resort sense. It lies on a deep inlet on the Sea of Cortez therefore sunsets in La Paz are some of the area's most spectacular in Baja.



Surrounded by Sonoran Desert, La Paz is set amid ancient laurel trees and coconut and date palms. The city is laid out in the classic grid pattern with streets radiating from the city's northwest facing the lovely waterfront promenade, which is locally known as the malecón. A few blocks inland we'll find the main plaza, Plaza Constitución, with its pink quartz gazebo, tiled walkways, and 19th century cathedral. Today it is a thriving regional center and conduit for nearly all trade between Baja and the Mexican

mainland. Hand-painted pottery and natural-dyed weavings are some of the local specialties, and you may have an opportunity to see artisans at work.

The trip dates are February 1 to February 13, 2023. We begin and end the trip in Baja Sur, Mexico.

Trip Difficulty and Safety

In February the sun is almost always shining on Baja, so protection is important. A hat with visor, sunscreen, long sleeves, and lip protection will help prevent sunburn. Drink plenty of water every day to avoid dehydration.



It is the participant's responsibility to have adequate skills in swimming, kayaking, and snorkeling before participating in any activities. This trip is rated 4-5, Easy to Moderate, based on sequential kayaking days and distance. We will be kayaking 6 days in a row with a duration of 2-5 hours each day. While kayaking we may encounter unexpected challenges such as waves, wind, and weather. Participants should have experience kayaking, the endurance to kayak 3 hours at a time, and be comfortable kayaking up to 5 hours with breaks. Participants are expected to be comfortable recovering from an overturned kayak (a "wet exit") while wearing a seaspray skirt. The ability to swim is essential. Prior experience with snorkeling will enable you to swim with the sea lions and enhance your trip. We will review safety skills on-site for everyone's benefit, including wet exits, two-kayak rescues, and paddle float re-entries.

At many of the campsites on the island there are opportunities for hiking into canyon areas or hills to see vistas from above and learn about environmental issues, local plants, birds, and other animals. Participants will need to be able to hike 2 miles at a moderate pace on dirt paths and uneven terrain, up and down hills with a gradual incline.

The AMC Trip Rating system for Sea Kayaking (scroll down the page a bit) is explained at [this link](#).



Daily Itinerary

Day 1 Wednesday, February 1: Fly into Los Cabos International Airport (SJD) in San Jose del Cabo then transfer by private van to the foothills and canyons of the Sierra de la Laguna mountain range. As the sun slides behind the 7000 ft mountain range, we set up our tents in our remote campsite and take a soak in pristine, fresh water rock pools fed by hot springs - the perfect temperature to relax in as the evening chill arrives. Dinner will be cooked over hot coals and our camp for the night is under a wild fig tree. Dinner is included.



Day 2 Thursday, February 2: Following breakfast we will pack up and visit one of the ranches in the area where we meet local farmers and learn about small-scale farming to produce cheese and honey, including a tasting, of course. Next on our drive we visit the Tropic of Cancer monument for a photo and then continue to the Sea of Cortez coast and the National Park of Cabo Pulmo. This tiny village boasts the most successful national marine park in the world and the only coral reef in the Sea of Cortez that offers incredible snorkeling and diving. Here we'll set up our camp on one of the lovely beaches to the south of the village of Cabo Pulmo and spend the night under the stars. B, L, D included.

Day 3 Friday, February 3: After breakfast on the beach, we'll put on snorkel gear and explore the underwater rock gardens, then put on dry clothes and enjoy a coastal hike to a spectacular headland with perfectly round granite boulders. Following lunch, we will drive north to La Paz and check into our hotel for one night. Take a walk and have dinner at one of the local restaurants of your choice. B, L included; D on your own.

Day 4 Saturday, February 4: Transfer from our hotel in La Paz to Espiritu Santo Island in our private high-speed motorboat. Our bilingual guides will discuss points on safety, share techniques for sea kayaking, and review the correct use of gear and kayaks. In the afternoon we embark on our first paddle beneath spectacular volcanic cliffs and arrive at the first of many beautiful beaches to set up camp. B, L, D included.



Day 5 Sunday, February 5: Continue in our kayaks exploring a new section of coastline with small offshore islands where numerous sea birds have their nests. Paddle farther north to an intriguing canyon with a dry waterfall and a fresh water well where we can enjoy a refreshing rinse and camp on a new beach. B, L, D included.

Day 6 Monday, February 6: Today we will kayak to the north end of the island crossing over to Isla Partida and set up base camp for two days in Ensenada Grande. B, L, D included.



Day 7 Tuesday, February 7: This is our layover day - time to relax those paddling muscles! We will take a boat ride out to an exquisite offshore islet that is home to a large sea lion colony. Here you can experience the amazing thrill of swimming with sea lion pups and snorkeling among thousands of tropical fish. B, L, D included.

Day 8 Wednesday, February 8: Continue around the north end of the island for our first paddle along the east coast, a sharp contrast in scenery with spectacular towering cliffs. We will paddle through a narrow channel between Espiritu Santo and Isla Partida to discover a perfect setting: a natural turquoise "swimming pool" and the location of our next camping beach. B, L, D included.

Day 9 Thursday, February 9: Experience a dramatic day as we paddle beneath towering cliffs that rise more than 2000 ft. There are also two natural caves that skillful navigators can paddle right through. In the afternoon we arrive at a favorite camp spot, for a final night of camping on a magnificent 2-mile stretch of superb sweeping white sand beach. B, L, D included.



Day 10 Friday, February 10: Pack up after breakfast and take our fast motorboat into the La Paz Bay in search of whale sharks. We will spend the morning looking for various sharks with the objective of swimming with the world's largest fish! After lunch, we will return by motorboat to La Paz. Check into our hotel in La Paz and have a hot shower. Tonight, enjoy one of the excellent restaurants in this charming seaside town. B, L included; D on your own.

Day 11 Saturday, February 11: Ride in an air-conditioned private van about 3.5 hours to the shores of the Pacific Lagoons at Lopez Mateos, considered to be the finest whale watching area in the region. Typically, within minutes of getting aboard our motor skiffs we are out in Magdalena Bay surrounded by whales. The spectacle is quite amazing and several close-up encounters are practically guaranteed. Returning to the shore it is just a two-minute stroll to our rustic cabins. Relax and freshen up before dining in our restaurant with a fresh seafood meal. B, L, D included.

Day 12 Sunday, February 12: Arise to a Mexican breakfast before our morning whale watching trip. We will venture out into Magdalena Bay again for a visit with the gray whales. We may be thrilled by a whale swimming right alongside the boat giving us the extraordinary opportunity to possibly touch its back. We will return to Lopez Mateos for a delicious lunch and then transfer by van back to La Paz, arriving at around 4:00pm, which gives us time for souvenir shopping before our farewell dinner together in a La Paz restaurant. We will spend our final night at our hotel in La Paz. B, L, D included.

Day 13 Monday, February 13: After breakfast take our group shuttle transport to Los Cabos International Airport (SJD) or continue your travels on your own. B included.

Note: As with all our expeditions, AMC's and our in-country partner's priority is the safety and comfort of our participants. In the event of inclement weather, on-site conditions, and/or according to the group's sea kayaking ability, the guides and leaders may make unexpected deviations from the above plan.



Accommodations, Meals and Transportation

We will travel as a group with 12-14 participants. Ground transportation is in private vans. A high-speed motorboat will deliver our group to the first beach on Espiritu Santo Island, where we will find our kayaks waiting for us. Small, motorized boats called skiffs, driven by licensed local captains, will be used for whale watching.

Our accommodations are 2 nights in a comfortable hotel in La Paz, 1 night at a small rustic cabin near Magdalena Bay, 1 night tent camping in a canyon, and 7 nights camping in tents on soft sandy beaches. Hotel and cabin rooms are double occupancy with a single supplement of \$200 US. Tents can be shared or single for the same price; we will ask for your preference after acceptance on the trip.

We will eat most meals together as a group. The trip cost includes 12 breakfasts, 11 lunches and 10 dinners. Three plentiful meals plus snacks are provided each day with an emphasis on Mexican cuisine, but not too spicy. Two dinners in La Paz are not included; this gives everyone a chance to eat in smaller groups or explore local cuisine on your own. All food and drinking water during our camping on Espiritu Santos Island will be transported by participants in our kayaks. Meals on the 6 paddling days are all freshly prepared using local produce. Non-meat eaters are easily accommodated.



A typical kayaking day includes breakfast, packing all our gear into our boats (including food and water, which will be split among participants), then kayaking 2-5 hours with a break for lunch. On most days, after lunch we will kayak to our next campsite, set up camp and prepare dinner. We will enjoy spectacular sunsets from our beach chairs overlooking the Sea of Cortez.

We will follow conservation policies as we practice “Leave No Trace” camping. At the beginning of the trip our guides will explain how to efficiently pack the sea kayaks. It will become a group task each day to load all the gear (camping equipment, kitchen, food, and water) into the kayaks before paddling to the next camping beach. The group will all help set up camp, cook meals and clean dishes. We have a pre-set meal plan. The guides take overall responsibility for the meals, but everyone will take turns helping with the food prep and cleanup. We find this shared catering enhances the feeling of comradery and brings the group together to discuss the day’s experiences and the next days’ plans. Mid-way through the kayaking journey we will receive a re-provision of food and other supplies so the most we will carry is 3 days of food and water. While the motorboat is available, we will use it to go out to the sea lion colony and swim with the sea lion pups, weather permitting.

Weather

During the month of February in Baja Sur Mexico, you are most likely to experience good weather with pleasant average temperatures between 68°F and 77°F. As February is the last month of the dry season, we will not expect much in the way of rain or storms.

Trip Price

The AMC Member price is \$3230.
The non-member price is \$3330.
To join the AMC for \$50 individual or \$75 family, click [here](#).



The expedition includes:

- swimming in hot spring pools and camping 1 night in a canyon in the foothills of the Sierra de la Laguna mountains
- tasting honey and cheese at a family ranch
- snorkeling in Cabo Pulmo National Park with camping 1 night on a beach
- kayaking 6 days and camping 6 nights on Espiritu Santos Island
- swimming with whale sharks in the Sea of Cortez
- whale watching 1 afternoon and 1 morning in lagoons on the Pacific coast
- hotels in La Paz for 3 nights and at Magdalena Bay for 1 night
- emergency medical (limited) and evacuation insurance

- certified bilingual naturalist guides
- single or double kayak (your choice)
- all kayaking gear and camping equipment (except sleeping bag, see below)
- all transportation associated with this itinerary
- all food and beverages during the kayaking expedition, and breakfasts in all hotels
- tips for the guides and drivers at 8%; you may want to add to this if you enjoyed the service
- farewell dinner in La Paz

Participants are responsible for:

- flights to and from Los Cabos International Airport (SJD) in San Jose del Cabo, Baja California Sur
- 2 dinners at restaurants in La Paz mid-way through the trip
- supplemental medical, evacuation and cancellation insurance (leaders will provide an option)
- some water and other beverages, as well as alcoholic drinks
- available for rent: sleeping bag (\$30 US), snorkel/mask (\$30 US), wetsuit (\$40 US)



Cost, Application and Cancellation

To register for this trip, [apply online](#) and also mail a deposit check of \$1,000 (\$1100 for non-AMC members), payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club, to Robin Melavalin, 48 Pattee Road, East Falmouth MA 02536. The balance of \$2230 is due on October 1, 2022.

After your application and deposit check are submitted, one of the leaders will talk with you via telephone or zoom to be sure you and the trip are a good match. You will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us and we will answer any questions you may have. We will also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities. Upon acceptance on the trip, we will deposit your \$1000 check.

Please read carefully the [Adventure Travel Standard Terms and Conditions](#).

Trip Leadership



Robin Melavalin has been involved with educational travel for over 25 years working with college students and faculty. She has led a variety of AMC Adventure Travel trips including kayaking in the Sea of Cortez in Mexico and trekking in Nepal, Morocco, Patagonia, Bavarian Alps, and to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro (19,341 feet) in Tanzania. Her research and personal travels include Cuba, Kenya, Cabo Verde, Nicaragua, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Bali, Costa Rica, Azores, Ecuador, and the Galapagos Islands. She has certifications in Wilderness First Responder and CPR. Photography, kayaking and conservation are some of her special interests. Contact Robin at robinoutdoors@gmail.com or 617-780-5362.



Dee Dice is a new Adventure Travel Associate leader who recently has led local trips in Western MA and Maine. She has been leading hikes, weekend trips and paddling trips with the AMC Western Mass and Worcester Chapters since 2018. Her passion is hiking and kayaking which has brought her around the world, traveling extensively to Nepal, New Zealand, South America and Europe. Dee has paddled in Costa Rica, Mexico, Newfoundland and is especially happy kayaking through the islands of Maine and Nantucket Sound. She has current certifications in CPR, SOLO Advanced Wilderness First Aid and ACA Kayak Leader Level 1. Contact Dee at dee@dicehome.com or 508-566-9565.

Photos are generously supplied by Baja Outdoor Adventures.