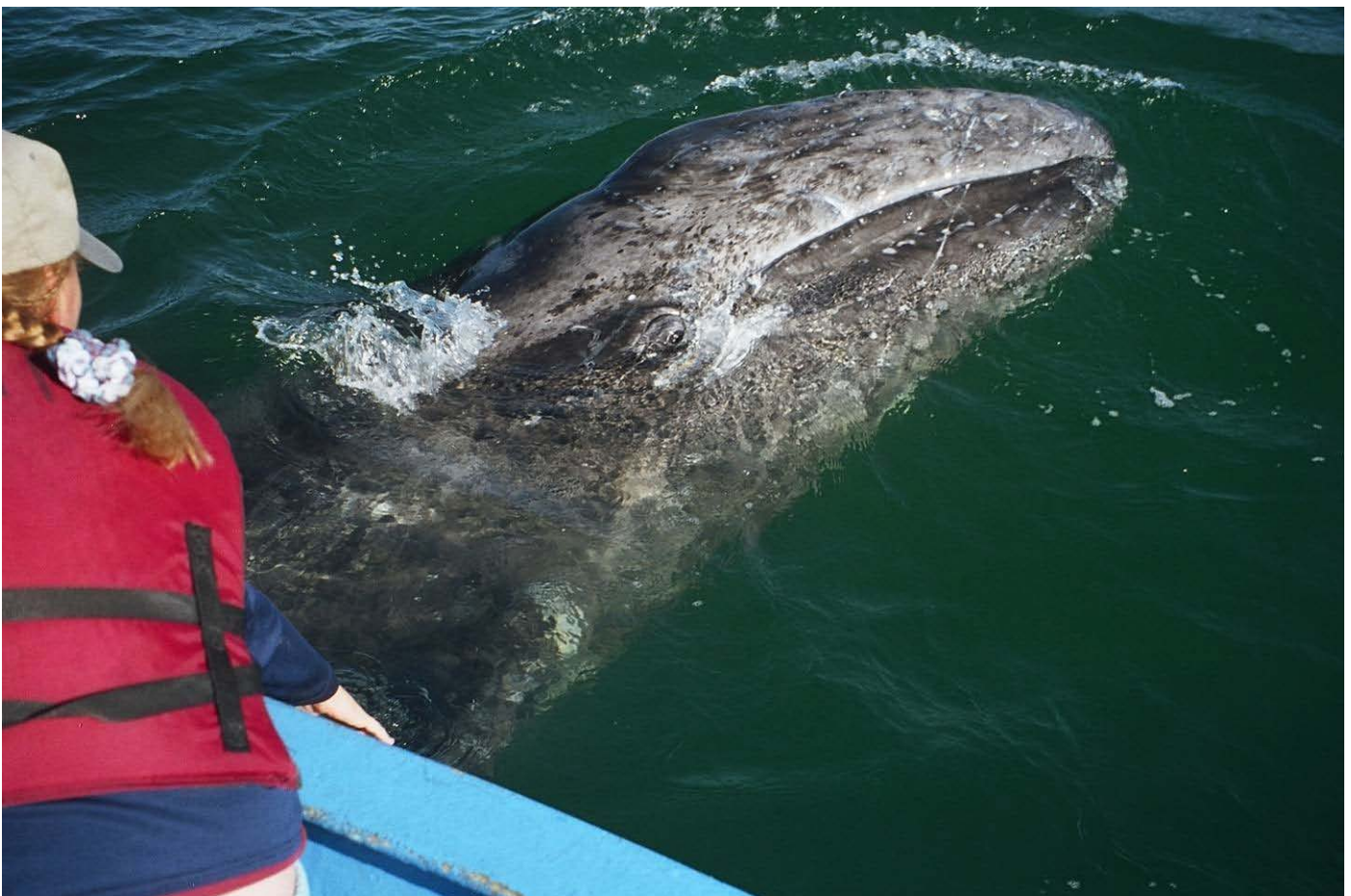


Baja Mexico

IN-DEPTH BAJA WHALE WATCHING CRUISE

Why join this Voyage?

- An extended twelve day voyage offering unrivalled whale watching, with chance to see up to 12 different species of whale including the blue whale, as well as vast numbers of dolphins and sea lions
- Incorporates extended time in both the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Coast lagoons where you have very good chances to encounter grey whales at very close quarters
- Travel aboard *The Searcher*, one of very few small boats (max. 24 passengers) with special permits to enter the marine reserves, accompanied by outstanding naturalist guides



Trip Overview

This exclusive marine safari is an exhilarating combination of some of the world's best whale watching and whale interaction together with a fascinating insight into Mexican wilderness and wildlife. Steppes Travel has teamed up with one of the very few boats which hold special permits from the Mexican government to enter the ecological reserves and national parks of Baja California and the Sea of Cortez. Using *The Searcher* as your floating base, you will be guided by a highly experienced crew and your captain, Art Taylor, who is passionate and hugely knowledgeable about the cetaceans and wildlife that inhabit this immensely rich area.

Itinerary



Please note: You must arrive in San Diego at least one day in advance to ensure you have time to join the boat - it must depart on time to ensure the itinerary is maintained.

Day 1 San Diego/ Embarkation

Day of leisure to explore San Diego independently. In the evening board your boat at Fisherman's Landing and depart.

Day 2 Islas Todos Santos

Early morning stop at Ensenada Harbour for Mexican Customs and Immigration clearance. Cruise along Todos Santos Islands to view nesting sea birds, rocky reef and cliff life, and harbour seal adults and pups. Afternoon whale watching for migrating Grey whales heading southwards to the lagoons, dolphins and sea birds.



Day 3 Islas San Benito

Hike to an old lighthouse and observe elephant seals crowded in each cove. Its early breeding season and jousting males, nursing pups and resting females make for wonderful photography. Observe nesting birds, such as osprey and ravens, as well as the unique desert plants.

Days 4-5 Laguna San Ignacio

Here you anchor among the Grey whales who have arrived first! In smaller boats, called 'pangas', come eye-to-eye at close quarters with Grey Whales, at this stage in particular mating groups and females caring for their young. You will spend two whole days in this area with these amazing animals.

Day 6 Bahía Magdalena

Spend time observing blue and humpback whales, herds of common dolphins, sea turtles and pelagic seabirds with the peninsula as a truly scenic backdrop for photography.



Day 7 Cabo San Lucas & Los Frailes

This area is famous for groups of humpbacks that spend time at Gorda Banks. Humpback whales are the most acrobatic of whales - breaching, spy hopping, and lunging - and thus spectacular to observe and photograph. Stop at the Los Frailes area for a snorkelling session and walk along the beautiful beach.

Day 8 Isla San José

Arrive at the spectacular red sandstone cliffs of Punta Colorado in time to photograph the sunrise. Take a skiff ride into a cave and along the cliffs for close views of nesting Brown and Blue-Footed Boobies, Pelicans, Yellow-Footed Gulls, Osprey and White-Throated Swifts. Afternoon whale watching for Blue, Fin and Sperm Whales hopefully, as well as the large pods of Bottlenose Dolphin that frequent this area.



Day 9 Isla Santa Catalina

An early morning walk is a great way to enjoy this island, famous for its 12-foot "wavy" barrel cactus and other desert plants that grow along the canyon. Birdlife is abundant and you should see and hear cardinals, Gila woodpeckers, ravens, and verdin. Other famous residents are the rare endemic Santa Catalina rattle-less rattlesnake and the abundant emerald-tailed lizards. There will be snorkelling opportunities at this island, where the shallow reefs are home to many species of fish, sea stars, sea fans and more marine life.



Day 10 Bahía Agua Verde

Stop at this beautiful bay on the peninsula to bird watch and snorkel among giant sea fans, with time to whale watch for blue, fin, or other whales.



Day 11 Nopol and Islas Los Islotes

Bird watch in the early morning at one of Baja's best locations then travel to Los Islotes, two islets and underwater rocky reefs used by sea lions as haul-out sites. Skiff rides around the islets give great views of the sea lions, fish and invertebrates along the reefs, nesting boobies and other birds. Or dive in for some great snorkelling!

Day 12 Cabo San Lucas/ Disembarkation

Disembark Searcher boat in Cabo San Lucas at 9 a.m. Van style taxis are available for transport to Los Cabos (also called San Jose del Cabo) airport.

Itineraries and schedules subject to change based on weather conditions, And the Captain's discretion.

Your Boat

Searcher

Capacity: 25 passengers

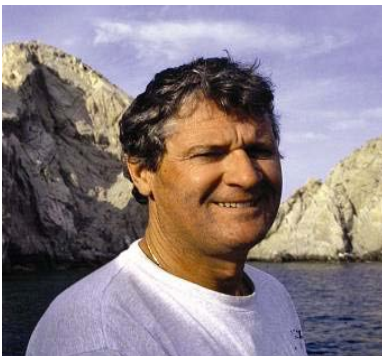
The 95-foot long Searcher was built in 1970 in the US as a sports-fishing vessel. She has been operating in the Baja Peninsula region for 30 years and is one of the very few to have permits to enter some of the marine parks and lagoons. Although facilities are a little more basic than on some larger vessels she offers excellent wildlife viewing itineraries.



There are 14 air-conditioned cabins, 12 are double-occupancy and three are triple-occupancy, each with fresh-water sink, AC electrical outlets, reading lights and a mirror. Each cabin has sleeping bunks, storage shelves, and hammocks for gear storage. There are four bathrooms on the main deck, two with showers and two located near the observation deck in the stern. There are wildlife observation decks on the stern, upper deck, and in the bow area. The library in the salon is available for all to use. There is also a TV and VCR with a selection of natural history videos to view. There is seating for all at meals and the salon is also an indoor relaxation area. Beverages and snacks are available 24 hours per day, in addition to the three meals each day.

With 3 aluminium skiffs aboard for shore excursions and wildlife viewing, these small group cruises ensures unparalleled opportunities for observing wildlife and quality time with crew and naturalists. The Searcher carries 1,500 gallons of fresh water and the ability to make fresh water during travel ideal for extended exploratory cruising.

Your Expert



Art Taylor

Art has owned *Searcher* since 1985 and has been guiding vessels in Baja's waters for over 20 years. He is intensely dedicated to the people and wildlife conservation of Baja California and receives immense enjoyment sharing that with his passengers.

Your crew is specially selected for their knowledge of the Baja California waters and its inhabitants. They are licensed captains, experienced skiff operators, and trained in safety manoeuvres, while the boat also carries a professional cooking team.

2012 Departure Dates

23rd January - 3rd February
7th - 18th February
7th - 18th April

Guide Prices for 2012

Cabin Type

(from guide price quoted per person)

Twin or Triple cabin £2,695

Includes

- 12-day voyage on full board basis
- Twin or Triple cabin with shared bathroom facilities
- Knowledgeable onboard naturalist guide
- All guided zodiac cruises, landings and excursions while on board
- Access to the marine reserves and lagoon excursions by *panga*

Excludes

- All flights into San Diego and out of Cabo San Lucas on Baja
- Hotel accommodation in San Diego
- Visas, vaccinations & travel insurance,
- Optional San Diego sightseeing
- Alcoholic drinks, gratuities and items of a personal nature while onboard

Please note that these prices are a **guide only** and are subject to exchange rate fluctuations and possible fuel surcharges.

Visa Information

Please note that under recently introduced legislation you will need to apply for advance authorisation to travel to the US through the Visa Waiver Program. This is straightforward and can be completed online.

Extensions

For those travellers wishing to take the opportunity to explore more of mainland Mexico, we can certainly arrange pre and post voyage extensions on a tailor-made basis to see the Monarch butterflies of Michoacan state, the Copper Canyon or the colonial cities of Mexico.

Want to discuss this trip?



Please call Sue on 01285 880981 for more details or to check availability

Having spent the best part of 5 years on my "gap year" working in travel seemed the natural progression. I am most at home travelling to remote wilderness areas of the globe. With a life-long passion for wildlife I love to get up close either by kayak or on foot and learn the local bushcraft skills. My travels have taken me to all seven continents. Most recently travelling to Antarctica, Spitsbergen, the Canadian High Arctic on expedition vessels, voyaging the Amazon Basin and paddling down the Yukon. I hope to go whale watching in Baja California next.

Sue is Country Director for Steppes Voyages
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