

'Big Animals' in the Sea of Cortez

Hunting and shooting safari with Alex Mustard



California Sealion pup (Andy Hirst)



Manta Ray (Cortez Club)



Scalloped Hammerhead (Cortez Club)

“One of the primary focuses of this trip is to spend several days diving with the famously friendly California Sealions in the waters around Los Islotes off La Paz. Our trip is planned to coincide with the young sealions making their first unsupervised dives, catching them at their most curious, cute and mischievous. Over 350 sealions of all ages live here and they are used to divers. They love to demonstrate their in-water superiority and tend to hang around for extended encounters!”

Friday 1st October – Sunday 10th October 2010 (10 days)
Leader: Alex Mustard
Group size limit: 12 divers plus leader

Reaching down into the Pacific Ocean, the unspoiled peninsula of Baja California curls protectively around the Sea of Cortez. The wonderful secrets of Baja are as yet known to relatively few people. Baja is a land of deserts, ancient Spanish missions, remote beaches, superb seafood and long sun-filled days. The Sea of Cortez, studded with rugged islands surrounded by stunning, almost deserted white sand beaches, is one of the biologically richest bodies of water on our planet and has over 800 vertebrate species and 2,000 invertebrates. Here hammerhead sharks school in groups of up to 200 or even an amazing 2,000, colonies of sealions live undisturbed and Grey Whales come to mate, give birth and make their winter home. Few European divers have, as yet, had the opportunity to discover for themselves the amazing, unusual and adventurous diving that the Sea of Cortez has to offer. This unique destination provides excellent opportunities for those interested in marine wildlife, underwater photography or simply the chance to be amongst the first divers to explore a new destination.

The Sea of Cortez, enclosed by Baja California, but open in the south to the Eastern Pacific, has long attracted underwater photographers to its dramatic underwater topography, wrecks and particularly the abundant and charismatic marine life.

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The Sea of Cortez offers much more than sealions. This is just one of those places where anything can and often does show up. With luck the Whale Sharks and Manta Rays will be visiting the Sea of Cortez at the same time as you will be. Manta Rays can be very friendly in the Sea of Cortez as they

are quite used to diver. As we drop down on to some reefs, the mantas may well find us and treat divers to a personal acrobatic display. Check out the patterns on the undersides of the mantas as this will help in identification and you will know if a particular Manta Ray joins you on another dive.

Large pods of dolphins can often be seen from the boat and our boat operators will encourage the dolphins to bow ride. It is usually Bottle-nosed Dolphins that form these groups, but sadly they tend to disappear when you divers or snorkelers get into the water, though they do offer excellent above-water photo opportunities while travelling to and from the dive sites.

Swanne Reef is an excellent spot for fish photography and macro, the Salvaterria ferry wreck is particularly photogenic, while sea mounts provide chances of seeing Scalloped Hammerheads not too deep down and, more reliably, multiple moray eels packed into crevices in the rock! Many of the dive sites are home to large schools of fish and of course Eastern Pacific endemics such the Giant Hawkfish (which can grow to half a metre), the Cortez Angelfish and the attractive Mexican Hogfish. All are species that will provide truly spectacular and original subjects.

The attractions of the Sea of Cortez are the larger animals and unusual fish species that one does not encounter in other regions. This special group trip will give participants the opportunity to have three boat dives daily. In addition opportunities for snorkelling

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California Sealion playing with Manta Ray (Cortez Club)



Whale Shark and diver (Cortez Club)

or diving with Whale Sharks will be offered when and if any of these wonderful creatures are located.

Boats will leave the Cortez Club each morning for a three-tank dive. Lunch will be taken on a deserted beach or small island. For those interested in land photography the enormous cacti found in this area (remember the ones on those old western movies?) make a superb subject for interesting images.

Perched on the southeast edge of the district of Baja Sur, the small colonial town of La Paz with its tree-lined boulevards and friendly people offers divers direct access to the semi-tropical waters of the Sea of Cortez. Here you will find a town of glorious landscapes and numerous bars and restaurants serving good seafood or spicy Mexican dishes that can be washed down with excellent local beer and tequila-based cocktails. Splendidly clean and well cared for, La Paz's rather ramshackle waterfront buildings are surrounded by palm trees and aloes. Scrub desert surrounds the town and in the distance tall mountain ranges form a sun-washed backdrop. From time to time the huge cacti, their 'fingers' pointing skywards, blossom with yellow and red flowers.

Underwater photographer and marine biologist, Alex Mustard, will lead this trip and although there will be no formal teaching he will be happy to give advice throughout the trip. The pleasant, beach-side location of the Cortez Club and La Concha Beach Resort means that non-divers may be happy to accompany their diving

partners, but it should be remembered that divers are likely to be out and diving all day!

OUTLINE ITINERARY

Friday 1st October: Virgin Atlantic morning flight from London (Heathrow) bound for Los Angeles, arriving in the afternoon. Overnight at the Sheraton Four Points, Los Angeles Hotel.

Saturday 2nd October: Alaska Airlines morning flight from Los Angeles to La Paz. Transfer to La Concha Beach Resort for a 7 nights stay.

Sunday 3rd October – Friday 8th October: 6 days of boat diving in the Sea of Cortez, with additional Whale Shark snorkeling, if possible.

Saturday 9th October: Transfer to La Paz Airport for a mid-afternoon Alaska Airlines flight to Los Angeles where you connect with an evening Virgin Atlantic flight bound for London (Heathrow).

Sunday 10th October: Afternoon arrival at London (Heathrow).

£1324 La Paz/La Paz

Includes:

- Airport transfers in La Paz.
- 7 nights room only accommodation at La Concha Beach Resort.
- 6 days diving (3 boat dives daily), including lunch on diving days, and to include snorkeling encounters with Whale Sharks where possible.
- Services of Alex Mustard as group leader.

Room Upgrade: La Concha Beach Resort also has one-bedroom condominiums which may be available on request. Please call us

if you are interested in booking a condominium.

Single Occupancy Supplement:

£246. Please note that, while we will endeavour to find a room-mate for those on the tour who are single travellers and would prefer to share accommodation, in the event of a room-mate not being available the single occupancy supplement will apply. Room-mates will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

Deposit: £400 (for La Paz/La Paz arrangements)

For more details of the diving and accommodation, please see our Sea of Cortez holiday description.

Note: Should two people travelling together apply for the last place on the tour, we may, at our discretion, increase the group size by one.

Flights: From about £825 to La Paz.

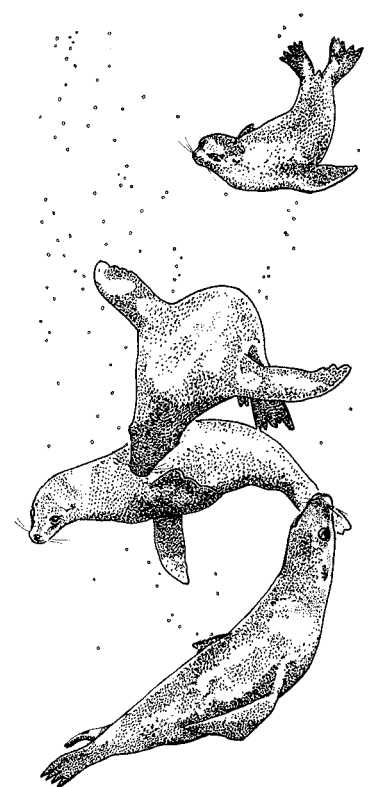
Accommodation en route to La Paz:

The cost is not included. We will book you a room if your flight arrangements require an overnight stay in Los Angeles or elsewhere, payable locally.

HOLIDAY COMBINATIONS, STOP-OVERS AND ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS:

There are daily flights between London and Los Angeles so it is quite simple to stop-over in Los Angeles or take some extra time to explore the wonders of California. To the north lies Yosemite National Park, the wine trails of California and San Francisco. Closer to Los Angeles is San Diego with all

its attractions. Alternatively, why not add another 'Big Animal' to your list and 'shoot' Great White Sharks from Nautilus Explorer or Solmar V off Guadalupe Island in northern Baja California? Talk to us about the possibilities.



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California Seals (Mark Andrews)