

# **Baja Sailing + Whale Watching - Adult Course Description**

Embark on an extraordinary 22-day adventure with NOLS Mexico, where you'll delve into the remarkable beauty and biodiversity of the Sea of Cortez (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Pacific Ocean. Witness the annual migration of Pacific gray whales as they journey approximately 10,000 miles round trip from their summer feeding grounds in the Arctic to the serene waters of Baja California Sur, Mexico.

Gain hands-on experience in sailing as you navigate the remote and rugged coastline of Baja aboard the Drascombe Longboat. This unique sailing expedition offers the perfect blend of technical sailing skills and essential wilderness knowledge, making it an unforgettable journey for the modern adventurer. Don't miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore the wonders of the Baja coast and create lasting memories with like-minded individuals.

## **Features**

- Duration: 22 days
- Route length: 50-70 miles
- Average group size: 14 students / 4 instructors
- Average age: 21 / minimum age: 17
- Watercraft used: Drascombe Longboats, 22-foot open yawl-rigged sailboat with outboard auxiliary motor and four oars
- Emphasis on outdoor skills, sailing skills, and leadership
- Experience life in the desert and marine environments
- Opportunities for day hikes in the coastal desert and snorkeling
- Culminate your course embarking on a captivating whale watching adventure on the Pacific side of the peninsula, spending quality time observing the awe-inspiring migration of gray whales, a truly unforgettable spectacle.
- Learn about gray whales' behavior, biology, and conservation efforts related to these magnificent marine mammals.
- Cultural exchange: Share stories and engage with coastal fishing communities you meet throughout your course. This is a great opportunity to practice Spanish language skills!

## **Overview**

The Baja California Peninsula and the Sea of Cortez are beautiful, dramatic environments. The land is rugged, dry, and mountainous, while the sea teems with marine life.

The 22-foot longboats you will learn to sail are versatile, open (without a cabin) boats. The skills you will learn sailing these boats can be applied to a wide variety of watercraft. You will learn to navigate sea hazards and explore the tiny coves and beaches inaccessible to larger yachts. As you sail, you'll have plenty of practice in each crew position, developing skills in leadership and seapersonship.

You will learn the basics of sailing including: terminology, wind awareness, points of sail, sailboat maneuvers, sail handling, sail trim, rowing, anchoring and wind, wave and weather theory. You'll also learn about the rich natural history of Baja California's desert and coast and practice Leave No Trace camping techniques, including cooking, sanitation, and shelter and stove use. You will be introduced to the NOLS Leadership Curriculum and will have practical opportunities to use your sailing and leadership skills.

For the first two weeks you will experience and travel in an expedition format, moving camps each night and sleeping under the stars. During the day you will be traveling along the beautiful, dramatic coastline of the Sea of Cortez. Then you will transition to the whale watching component, where you get to base camp on the Pacific Ocean, to one of the world's most important places for the reproduction of the once endangered Eastern subpopulation of the North Pacific Grey Whale.

## **Weather and Other Challenges**

### **Remoteness**

The Sea of Cortez and the Baja California Peninsula are environments of harsh beauty. The areas you visit are remote, and you will often be several days from medical facilities. At sea, strong winds may blow up suddenly, making conditions hazardous for travel.

### **Wildlife**

Your instructors will teach you about scorpions, rattlesnakes, stingrays and other potential hazards so that you can manage the risk they may present. The undersea world is surprisingly lush compared to the land, but there are hazards that you will learn to identify and manage, including jellyfish or spined shellfish.

## **Weather**

Rain is possible but infrequent, though strong winds from the north (“El Norte” winds) are quite common, especially in mid-winter. These winds can make sea conditions too hazardous for travel, often for a few days at a time. Watching the weather, judging wind and wave conditions, and learning about the strength and ability of the group and the equipment are what responsible wilderness travel is all about.

## **Seasonal Conditions**

Conditions vary by season. In February it is often cold, windy, and daytime temperatures are usually in the 70s (°F) but can get down to the low 40s at night. Water temperatures are in the low 60s. Late March and April have daytime temperatures up to the high 90s and nighttime lows in the 70s. The water warms up to the 70s and the winds are usually more variable, lighter and less frequent. In February and sometimes March, you will experience milder weather between these two extremes.

## **Fishing**

While not a focus of the course, students may have opportunities to fish during the sailing section. There is no license required to fish from shore. You do require a fishing license to fish from the boats. If you are interested, you will need to obtain a Sport Fishing License in advance at [www.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx](http://www.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx)

## **Learning Goals at NOLS**

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams and in communities; care for themselves and others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

*We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.*