

Sailing Longboats in Mexico's Sea of Cortez

Baja California Sur, Mexico

March 1-8, 2026



Features

- Drascombe Longboat sailing
- Coastal piloting and navigation
- Beach camping
- Snorkeling and fishing
- Abundant marine and terrestrial wildlife
- Coastal and intertidal exploration

Cost: \$2,695

Minimum Age: 18

Historic Age Range: 22-72

MaxTrip size: 11 participants

3 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

In 1971, NOLS Mexico was founded in Coyote Bay inside of the Bay of Conception. You will spend a week sailing in the Bay of Conception, exploring the amazing coastline, beaches, cliffs, and desert terrain that were the inspiration for NOLS' home in Mexico.

We will sail aboard unique 22-foot Drascombe Longboats. These open-cockpit centerboard boats are versatile, seaworthy, and sail well in a variety of conditions. These boats are a great instrument for learning the elements of sailing and seamanship, which are transferable to sailing any vessel. The Drascombes have two oar stations that allow us to row when the wind drops off as well as to maneuver in tight quarters while anchoring. They are equipped with a small outboard motor as a backup, enhancing the safety and self-sufficiency of the expedition. There are also many different sail plans that can be set to sail efficiently in light airs or stronger breezes. These features allow us to travel at ease in the Sea of Cortez and also to navigate into tiny coves and semi-protected beaches to camp in places that are inaccessible to many others.

NOLS will organize your transportation from the airport or the town of Loreto to our campus south of Mulegé on the first day of the trip. From that evening, the trip will find an easy rhythm as the group settles into each other's company. Launching the Drascombes around midday on the second day will put us on track for a full 7 days of sailing opportunities and the associated learning.

This expedition travels with the rhythms of the natural world. Our schedule is dictated by the current wind patterns and sea state. We may rise bright and early to take advantage of a small weather window or we may sail late until dusk to take advantage of a favorable breeze. Some days we will make a passage to a new anchorage while other days may include a layover and skill building while day sailing. We will also seek opportunities to snorkel, fish, hike, and explore tide pools.

One of the many reasons our staff love this trip is that our camping setup is simple, comfortable, and uncrowded. Tents are not often used as you will sleep out on a ground cloth under the stars in a spot of your choosing. You will love falling asleep with a cool breeze across your face and your eyes connecting the ancient constellations in the night sky.

The week will blend moving days and layover days with sailing skill development that can be focused and optional. The NOLS Instructors will endeavor to make sure that everyone's learning goals are met while at the same time helping the team to cook, play, and laugh together.

As the trip draws to a close, you will return to NOLS Mexico. The group will unload and clean gear in the early afternoon and then have a banquet dinner provided by NOLS Mexico that evening. After one last night at NOLS Mexico, we will shuttle you back to the Loreto airport or your hotel the next morning after breakfast or lunch.

Participants tell us that a fantastic part of alumni trips is the group itself. NOLS alumni and their guests are an interesting crew, with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility on this trip.

Trip Environment

The coastline of the Baja California peninsula is rugged, often mountainous, and very arid—it is one of the driest regions of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem. Many of the plant and animal species found here are unique and highly specialized. The Sea of Cortez is rich with marine life, from intricate sea fans and colorful reef fishes to raucous sea lions and blowing whales. The longboats allow us to explore both environments.

The Bay of Conception is a diverse and visually stunning landscape. Rocky cliffs intermixed with arroyos (dry canyons) give way to sandy desert covered with Cardon Cactus, Elephant Bush, Pitaya Cactus, and much more. The desert ebbs gently into the ocean at the sandy beaches where we will be camping. Walking through this landscape you will see the small mammals and birds that make their homes in this arid environment. Reaching the ocean's edge, you enter a new type of ecosystem that thrives on the high saline and warm-water environment in the Bay. Snorkeling and sailing will allow us to explore this connected environment and understand the wide variety of life that is present.

The climate is part of what makes this area a staff favorite at NOLS. Days start with stunning sunrises and end with another spectacular color show as the sun sets. Rain is infrequent yet possible in Baja. Windstorms are common and can render sea conditions hazardous; at other times, we may need to row due to lack of wind. For the most part you can expect highs to be in the upper 70's and lows in the upper 50's with water temperatures close to 70 degrees.

The Gulf of California and the beautifully dramatic coast of the peninsula are not always easy environments through which to travel. Even the main highway is narrow, twisty, and used by some vehicles in poor condition and drivers of widely varying levels of skill and judgment. The remote areas in which we operate offer little access to advanced medical care, and evacuation could take as long as several days.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Our wake up times vary with the weather on this trip as we try to find the best wind for sailing. Many mornings will be a later start with a casual breakfast prepared by your cook groups. For early risers, there is often time in the morning for a snorkel or a swim.

After breakfast we will discuss the day's plan, pack up the boats, and set sail. Sailing days can vary dramatically in time depending on how strong our wind is. Typically, we set sail in late morning and aim to be in camp in the afternoon. This leaves time for you to go on a hike, swim, or fish after breakfast or before dinner. Evenings can sometimes have a campfire on the beach while Instructors talk about the land and sea that surrounds us and we plan for the next day.

Throughout the trip, we will cook in smaller cook groups but eat together in close proximity. Duties will rotate so that everyone has a chance to pitch in and also take time off to enjoy the desert.

Most nights you will simply choose a nice spot on the beach, throw down a ground cloth, a pad, your sleeping bag and sleep out under the stars. Tents are not commonly used but we will bring some tarps along for protection in case of rain.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies. In addition, we encourage folks to bring an adequate supply and means of making the coffee they prefer.

Curriculum

Throughout this trip we will learn or review and hone your knowledge of small boat sailing. Initially, we'll discuss the basics of the boats including equipment, hazards on board, safety, and basic maneuvering terminology. Before you know it, you will be taking the helm and managing the sheets, trimming the sails, and navigating our way to the next destination. Additional curriculum topics could include upwind and downwind sailing, passage planning and execution, crew overboard recovery, sail theory, steering forces, seamanship, light airs sailing and heavy weather tactics. We will learn how to sail together as a fleet and how to take care of the boats at anchor.

There will be ample time to explore the natural environment, which will lead to topics including marine and terrestrial wildlife, coastal ecology, conservation, preservation, and development of the region.

Beach camping is a skill that you will learn and perfect on this trip. Sand management, staying clean, where to sleep, tarp setup, desert LNT, and fauna precautions are all important elements of the curriculum in Baja. As with any NOLS expedition, mastering these details is what truly enables enjoyment and relaxation in a new environment.

About Baja California, Mexico:

The Baja peninsula is made up of two states, Baja California and Baja California Sur. Our time will be spent in Baja California Sur which literally means the South Territory below California. Baja Sur is the most recently designated Federal Entity that makes up the 32 states of the United Mexican States, gaining its status in 1974.

Baja Sur is commonly known to Americans for Cabo San Lucas; the tourist haven at the southernmost tip. La Paz is the biggest city and the capital with a population of about 200,000, a third of the population of Baja Sur. We will be in the vicinity of Mulegé, population 3,800, and experiencing a much more rural experience than most who visit the peninsula.

Crime in Mexico is commonly in the news but in the area of NOLS Mexico, it is much less common.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management, and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and some alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

March 1	You will be picked up in Loreto at either the airport or your hotel (tell us where you will be). The team shuttles to NOLS Mexico for dinner, trip orientation, and overnight at the campus. Accommodation at the campus is sleeping on cots or on sleeping pads at the beach or under one of the open air shelters on campus.
March 2	Gear issuing and packing takes up the morning with a goal of setting sail mid-day and spending the night in the backcountry.
March 3-7	These days are spent sailing around the Bay of Conception. We will be sleeping on beaches under the stars, hiking arroyos, and spending lots of time on the ocean.
March 8	We will return to NOLS Mexico, unload and clean our gear and wrap up our trip in the afternoon. Banquet dinner and overnight stay at the NOLS campus.
March 9	After breakfast, NOLS will shuttle everyone back to their Loreto hotel or the airport. Flights should be booked for this day or later.

Trip Logistics

Getting to Loreto

Most people coming to NOLS Mexico choose to fly in and out of Loreto International Airport (LTO). Alaska Air flies to Loreto. American has flights to Loreto from Phoenix. Once your arrival date has been confirmed, you will let NOLS Alumni know and we will coordinate pick-up times and locations. We can pick folks up at LTO airport, but there will be only one afternoon pick-up. Depending on your arrival time, your wait time at the airport may be a few hours. If you arrive early or want to explore the town of Loreto we will have a central pick-up location in Loreto. Post trip, NOLS Mexico will shuttle folks to Loreto in time for flight departure or hotel check-in. These times do change on occasion and our plan will change accordingly. It's important to fill out your Travel and Logistics form with sufficient detail so that we can best coordinate pick-ups and drop-offs.

Occasionally, people choose to fly into other airports and take a bus ride to Loreto or directly to NOLS. If you are interested in this option, please contact the alumni office directly for tips and advice.

Lodging (pre-trip and during trip)

If you choose to arrive early and explore the city of Loreto, you are responsible for your own hotel. Taxis from the airport to your hotel are readily available and cost about US\$30. We recommend [Hotel Oasis](#) in Loreto as a lovely place that is family run.

Lodging on the first and last night will be at NOLS Mexico. During the backcountry portion of the trip sleeping arrangements are casual. You will be able to spread out wherever you are comfortable.

There are no bedrooms at NOLS Mexico and no tents (but sometimes tarps) on the beach so your options are almost endless.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal baggage that doesn't go into the field with you can be stored at our NOLS Mexico Campus. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage.

Currency

Mexican Pesos are the local currency. While some places might accept dollars, you will get better exchange rates if you pay in Pesos. We recommend taking money out of an ATM in Mexico to get the best exchange rate; this is easy to do at the airport.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

Tipping in the service industry in Mexico is common but relatively small. 10%-15% would be the full range of average to exceptional service.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport

As a U.S. citizen all you need to enter into Mexico is a U.S. Passport that is valid for more than six months after your entry date. Please **check the expiration date** of your current passport and update

it as necessary. Participants from outside the United States will need to check on their specific visa requirements.

Bring your original passport and a photocopy of the identification page. You need to retain the Tourist Visa that you'll receive upon entering the country.

Phone Service

There is good cell service in Loreto. You may be able to get a global plan for your stay in Mexico but there is no cell service at NOLS Mexico or on the route. There is also no wi-fi at NOLS Mexico.

Electricity stuff

Most US plugs do not need adapters in Mexico. Some plugs in Mexico will only have 2 prongs and you will have to look around for another one if your plug has 3 prongs on it.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

Your tuition includes meals starting with dinner on the first day through breakfast on the day of departure, all group camping gear, safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation to and from your Loreto hotel or the airport. Any costs incurred by evacuations are the responsibility of trip participants.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Fishing

While not a focus of the course, students may have opportunities to fish. There is no license required to fish from shore using a hand line or a rod and reel (NOLS Mexico only has handlines). You may bring your own rod and reel if you choose. There is no boat-based fishing on NOLS sailing trips.

Suggested Readings

[The Log from the Sea of Cortez](#) by John Steinbeck

[Baja Legends](#) by Greg Niemann

[Start Sailing Right "The National Standard for Quality Sailing Instruction"](#) by Derrick Fries

Equipment List - available for rent "yes" Not available for rent "X"

Gear provided by NOLS

Cooking Gear/ Spice Kits/water treatment	First Aid kits	Stoves, Fuel, Fuel Bottles	Emergency Communication
PFD's	Maps & Compass	All food	Sun shelters

The following is a list of equipment that you will need for the course. We have most of these things available to purchase at NOLS Mexico and some available to rent. The items available to rent are noted.

Upper Body Clothing

Equipment	Rent	Notes
Base layer (1)	X	Long sleeve mid or lightweight top.
Middle layer (1)	yes	Mid-weight long-sleeved fleece or puff layer.
Top layer (synthetic jacket)	X	Synthetic insulated "puffy" jacket or heavy weight fleece.
Windbreaker or wind shirt	yes	Lightweight layer that fits over insulating layers.
Long Sleeved Sun shirt	X	Cotton or synthetic collared, button-down shirt.
T-shirts (1-2)	X	A lightweight synthetic or wool t-shirt.
Sports bra/ tank top (2)	X	Synthetic, cotton, or wool.
Rain jacket (optional)	X	It does rain in Baja! (sometimes)

Lower Body Clothing

Base layer (1)	X	Light and/or mid-weight layer.
Wind pants	yes	We recommend renting NOLS wind pants.
Synthetic shorts (1-2)	X	Comfortable, quick drying nylon or board shorts.
Underwear (2-4)	X	Some folks prefer nylon shorts with liners.
Pants	X	Comfortable pants for wearing in camp.
Swim suit	X	Shorts and sports bra can be worn.
Sarong (optional)	X	Used to air out, dry off, or as a changing room.

Head, Neck, and Hand Layers

Sun hat	X	To protect ears and face from the sun.
Wool or fleece hat	X	Wool or synthetic warm hat.
Neck gaiter/Buff (optional)	X	Helps cover neck or head from the sun

Footwear

Water shoes (required)	X	Closed toes are critical. Neoprene booties are great.
Light camp/hiking shoes	X	For day hikes, tennis or running shoes are great.
Beach shoes	X	Allow your feet to air out. Crocs are great.
Socks (1-2 pairs)	X	Synthetic or wool.

Sleeping Gear

Sleeping bag	X	Synthetic bag rated to 30°F.
Compression stuff sack	yes	For your sleeping bag.
Foam pad/ Inflatable pad	yes	Solid foam or inflatable pad. Foam pad is available for rent.
Ground cloth	yes	To protect you and your gear from sand, dust and dirt.
Bug & Bivy sack (optional)	yes	Occasionally desired as bug protection.

Packs and Bags

Large duffle - Beach bag	yes	Acts as a “closet” on camp. Extra large, lightweight, durable nylon bag that can get wet. We recommend that you rent this item from NOLS that is custom made at the base.
2 -Small zippered duffle or 10L dry bag	yes	This will act as your “day bag” while sailing. We recommend that you rent this item from NOLS.
Medium zippered duffle or 20-30L dry bag	yes	Lined with compactor plastic bags, these will be the storage bags for your clothing and other personal items. We recommend that you rent this item from NOLS.
Compactor plastic bags (4)	X	Used to waterproof your gear.
Waterproof case or dry bag	X	Useful for protecting a camera, binoculars, etc...

Sailing and Swimming Equipment

Foul weather gear (bibs and Jacket)	yes	We recommend that you rent this from NOLS unless you already have your own. Doubles as rain gear.
Mask and snorkel (opt)	X	For hygienic reasons we ask that you bring your own.

Miscellaneous Items

Bowl	X	A bowl with a screw-on lid. 500ml recommended.
Spoon	X	Should be sturdy. Knife and fork not needed.

Insulated mug	X	Insulated mugs with lids are preferred.
Water bottle	X	2 liter total capacity.
Lighter	X	Use for lighting your camp stove.
Cotton bandanas (2-3)	X	Always handy to have.
Sunscreen and Lip Balm	X	At least SPF 30, waterproof.
Sunglasses & retainers	X	With UV protection. Polarized glasses are great for on-water wear.
Headlamp	X	Hands-free use is essential.
Spare batteries	X	For your headlamp or camera.
Ziploc bags (2-3)	X	Waterproof organizers for books and other items.
Notebook and pen/pencil	X	Keep track of the adventure!
Toiletries	X	Toothbrush, toothpaste, tampons, brush/comb, etc...
Prescriptions	X	Any medications you may be taking in a waterproof container. For essential medications, we recommend you bring a reserve supply in a separate container.
Glasses or contacts	X	Bring a spare set. If your natural vision is significantly limited, bring prescription sunglasses.
Liquid soap	X	Concentrated, biodegradable soap in a travel-sized bottle.
Optional Items		
Camp chair	X	Chairs such as Crazy Creek are nice.
Camera	X	Waterproof cameras are great.
Pocket knife	X	A small can opener and knife blade are useful.
Thermos	X	Great if you like hot drinks all day.
Special foods/ snacks	X	If you drink coffee or tea, you can bring your own or purchase from NOLS Mexico. You might also consider bringing dietary supplements, vitamins, energy bars, jerky, chocolate bars, nut mixes, etc.