

Sea Kayaking in Baja

Explore Bahia Concepcion

Baja, Mexico

November 16-22, 2025



Features

- Five nights camping in the backcountry of Baja
- Two nights at the NOLS campus
- Six days of kayaking
- Day hikes into a coastal desert paradise
- Opportunities to snorkel and swim in warm ocean water
- Novice to advanced paddlers welcome

Cost: \$2,595

Minimum Age: 18

Historic Age Range: 23-71

Max group size: 15 Participants

3 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

The trip starts with an arranged afternoon shuttle (~90-minutes) from Loreto, Mexico to the NOLS campus near Mulegé on the first evening. Once you arrive, there will be a campus tour, dinner, orientation, and probably some time to hop in the ocean! It might sound like a lot, but life moves at a relaxed pace here prioritizing settling into the experience over getting things done.

At the NOLS Mexico campus, there are a variety of sleeping options available, but open air will be the theme whether you choose to sleep under the stars or in our second floor *pagoda*, Campo Noche. You can settle into a spot that suits you for the first night knowing that beach camping will be in your near future.

The first paddling day will start with gear issuing and getting our kayak equipment in order. Instructors will spend some time focusing on basic paddle skills, packing, and launching before leaving the campus and paddling to the first beach camp.

In camp, you will learn or at least practice the high art of NOLS tarpitecture. Tarpitecture has a special importance in Mexico for NOLS because you will not be bringing tents with you but rather relying on custom tarps for protection from the sun and (very occasionally) the rain.

Throughout the week you will kayak and hike all around Bahia Concepcion. This incredible bay is a nursery for the Sea of Cortez, home to marine and terrestrial life alike. You will certainly get to see turkey vultures stretching their wings while perched on giant Cardon cactuses, Magnificent Frigate birds circling overhead, and Brown Pelicans floating in the water. With outstanding fortune, you might even get to see a whale shark calmly filter feeding near the surface.

In addition to the fauna, the desert is home to incredible fauna to learn about and explore. You will have the opportunity to understand why cactus have adapted in different manners and see blooms at different times of the day from fall flowers. What looks arid and lifeless from an airplane will open up before you into a web of vibrant life.

The human history of this peninsula is another component worth exploring. Your instructors will be able to tell you about the relatively modern history and if the weather cooperates you will be able to visit some ancient petroglyphs, painted by ancestors of the local people. The legends say that the painters were in fact giants that lived in the canyons.

Your trip will build a paddle plan based on the weather you are given and the group's goals. There are boundless possibilities to cover mileage, build skills, and explore the area. Each location will bring a new opportunity to settle in and observe how the desert and sea come together.

On the last day of the trip you will likely be paddling back into the NOLS Mexico Campus. Emerging from the water onto the steps of NOLS once again. You will clean up and celebrate the end of another expedition with the campus staff who have prepared a banquet for you. This final night you will spend at the campus, one last night under the stars before heading home or on to other adventures.

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.

On the last night of the trip, you'll celebrate a week of hard work with a banquet dinner. This is a great time to thank the NOLS Mexico staff and reflect back on the learnings of the week. The next day at the campus will be cleaning up, returning gear, and a celebration dinner. Departure the next morning will be an early morning with a cold breakfast so that you can get on the road onward.

About NOLS Mexico

In 1971, NOLS Mexico was founded in Coyote Bay inside of the larger Bay of Conception. Since then, NOLS Mexico has evolved into one of our most iconic campuses. As NOLS grew we incorporated sustainable design, solar power, composting toilets, and an extensive gray water system. The campus is located right on the water, making it a perfect home for 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. There is no better craft to explore the unique environment where the sea meets the land than a sea kayak.

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 and rocky shoreline. 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 sea kayaking will allow us to explore this connected environment and understand the wide variety of life that is present in this area.

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. Expect highs in the upper 70s and lows in the upper 50s 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

Every morning starts with a simple breakfast before we get on the water or possibly start on land for group instruction. Group instruction runs through lunch when we join the NOLS Mexico staff for a hot meal on the patio overlooking Conception Bay.

Afternoons include one-on-one classes with an instructor. This could be working on any kayak skill you want! Whether you want to understand the mechanics of a forward stroke or perfect that back deck sweep roll, our staff are there to help you reach your goals.

Optional afternoon activities vary day to day but might include things like fishing lessons, cooking class, Spanish language lessons, Baja history discussions, snorkeling, hiking, etc. The schedule for these will be based on the team’s interests.

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.

Curriculum

This trip is skills focused with kayaking and kayak expeditioning as the primary topics. The warm water of Baja will allow for lots of skill development and play throughout the week. Participants who want to work and develop specific things will be best served by outlining those goals at the beginning so that instructors can build a progression for them.

In addition to kayaking, immersion in the Baja desert is a unique and special element of this trip. Learning about the flora and fauna that makeup the rich ecosystem will help anyone develop a sense of place and connection to the area. Our staff are passionate naturalists and excited to engage with anyone who is interested in learning more.

If you are particularly interested in fishing, please ask for further information regarding licenses needed for fishing in the Sea of Cortez.

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 the tourist destination, Cabo San Lucas, 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 course; however, it is not a guided trip—we call it an educational, participatory vacation. Alumni trips are self-reliant adventures through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Throughout the course, you will travel outdoors, help to prepare some meals and care for yourself.

Different from our standard expeditions, alumni trips do allow electronics and alcohol for those that are of legal age in the country of the trip. We believe that these luxuries can add to a course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Nov 15	Depending on connections and pre-trip plans, some participants might depart their home cities on this day.
Nov 16	NOLS' shuttle service (Desert and Sea) will pick you up in Loreto at either the airport (3:00 p.m.) or your hotel (2:30 p.m.— tell us where you will be). The team shuttles to NOLS Mexico for dinner, a trip orientation and overnight at the campus.
Nov 17	We'll have a gradual start to the day, practicing kayak skills and packing before launching from the NOLS campus into Bahia Concepcion. The paddle mileage for today will be mild as there is a lot to do but you will get to celebrate your first Baja camp this night.
Nov 18-21	These days will be spent kayaking and hiking around Bahia Concepcion. You will visit petroglyphs, hike into rarely seen canyons, learn kayaking skills, and play in the water.
Nov 22	This day will be spent paddling back to the NOLS Mexico campus, washing yourself and your gear, and getting packed up. It will end with a celebratory dinner prepared by the outstanding crew at NOLS Mexico.
Nov 23	After breakfast, NOLS will shuttle everyone back to their Loreto hotel or the airport. Flights are typically scheduled at either 1:15 pm or 3:25 pm.

Trip Logistics

Getting to Loreto

Most people coming to NOLS Mexico choose to fly in and out of Loreto International Airport (LTO). Flights to Loreto arrive around 12:30 pm or 2:15 pm and our shuttle from the airport will be at 3:00 p.m. On your return, flights normally depart Loreto at either 1:13 pm or 3:25 p.m. and we will get you there in time. These times do change on occasion and our plan will change accordingly.

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.

At NOLS Mexico sleeping arrangements are casual. There are no bedrooms at NOLS Mexico, just shared communal space, bathrooms, and showers. You will have options of where you would like to sleep while at the campus.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal bags can be kept with you or in your sleeping area at all times on this trip. If you would like to store valuables elsewhere, secure storage can be made available at the 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. On this trip it is unlikely you will be able to use pesos to purchase anything except for a few things at the NOLS campus.

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 paddling route.

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 night through lunch on the last day, any 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, participants may have opportunities to fish. There is no license required to fish from shore using a hand line or a rod and reel. Depending on factors such as weather

and risk management, fishing from your kayak might be possible. If you are interested, you will need to obtain a Sport Fishing License in advance:

Purchase your license online: www.bajasursportfishing.com/

Please read the instructions on the license application request and regulations, and remember to bring your original fishing license with you to Mexico.

Suggested Readings

[The Complete Sea Kayakers Handbook](#) by Shelley Johnson.

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

[Baja Legends](#) by Greg Niemann

Equipment List - available for rent “yes” Not available for rent “X”

We will provide all the kayaking gear you need. If you want to bring your own PFD, paddle, or something not on this list, please feel welcome to do so. NOLS also has a gear room that will be open throughout the course in case you forget anything.

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)	X	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/ Halter 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 around campus.
Swim suit	X	Shorts and sports bra can be worn.
Sarong (optional)	X	Used to air out, dry off, or just casual attire.
Head, Neck, and Hand Layers		
Sun hat	X	To protect ears and face from the sun.
Wool or fleece hat (optional)	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, flip flops are ok.
Socks (1-2 pairs)	X	Synthetic or wool.
Sleeping Gear		
Sleeping bag	X	Synthetic bag rated to around 30°F.
Sleeping pad	X	Foam pads are available to rent, not inflatable ones
Ground cloth	X	Nylon sheet about 6'x 6', easy to just rent these
Miscellaneous Items		
Insulated mug	X	Insulated mugs with lids are preferred.
Water bottle	X	2 liter total capacity.
Bowl and spoon	X	A bowl with a lid (screw or snap) is nice for left-overs
Sunscreen and Lip Balm	X	At least SPF 30, waterproof.
Toothpaste and Toothbrush	X	Small versions if possible.
Sunglasses & retainers	X	With UV protection. Polarized glasses are great on the water.
Headlamp	X	Hands-free use is helpful.
Notebook and pen/pencil	X	Keep track of the adventure!
Feminine hygiene items	X	Make yourself a small stuff sack with tampons/pads and plastic bags for disposal.

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.
Soap	X	Biodegradable soap in a travel-sized bottle or bar.
Mask and Snorkel (optional)	X	Bringing your own mask and snorkel is a great idea.
Optional Items		
Camera	X	Waterproof cameras are great.
Special foods/ snacks	X	If you drink special coffee or tea, you can bring your own. You might also consider bringing dietary supplements, vitamins, energy bars, jerky, chocolate bars, nut mixes, etc.
Umbrella	X	Great for sun, rain, or maybe kayak sailing!