

Baja Sailing Instructor Course

Course Description

Features

- Duration: 24 days
- Route length: 180 nautical miles, in the Sea of Cortez, Baja California Sur
- Average group size: 11 participants / 3 instructors
- Average age: 31 / minimum age: 21
- Vessels used: 22-foot Drascombe longboats
- Emphasis on learning to manage groups in a wilderness setting while facilitating the NOLS core curriculum: leadership, wilderness skills, risk management, and environmental studies. Specific topics in seapersonship will include sail theory, maintenance and repair, coastal navigation, anchoring, and boat-handling under sail, oar, and motor.
- Activities while not on the boats will include skin diving and possibly day hiking in rugged terrain.
- Three-day in-town training that emphasizes inclusion, teaching, and debriefing
- Certificates of Completion: Leave No Trace Master Educator

Purpose and Expectations

The primary purpose of the Baja Instructor Course (BIC) is to train new instructors to facilitate exceptional experiences for students on NOLS sailing courses. As with any NOLS expedition, we strive to offer every IC student an opportunity for positive transformation. On this course, you will develop and refine leadership, wilderness travel, risk management, teaching and environmental studies skills needed to prepare you to work Drascombe sailing courses at NOLS.

NOLS instructors must be capable of fulfilling a broad range of leadership roles. They should be effective facilitators, teachers, and coaches, be competent living outdoors for extended periods (up to 30 days) in fair and inclement weather, be cooperative and adaptable expedition members, be open to learning and invested in the experience of others, and be able to assess hazards and manage risk within the context of NOLS risk management strategies. We look for self-awareness, a growth mindset, and student-focus in our wilderness educators. A NOLS instructor must be ready to provide care and compassion to their students and co-instructors by fostering an inclusive, equitable group culture, building meaningful relationships, and supporting growth and challenge.

The NOLS Instructor Course can be a rigorous learning experience. The course involves long, challenging days, attention to the expedition team, and skills practice. NOLS has a robust culture of feedback-sharing; you can expect to give and receive regular feedback to and from all members of your team. Please bring with you an openness to learning and growing, an attitude of care and support for your expedition mates, a curiosity about the world around you, and flexibility with the uncertainty of wilderness travel.

This course will provide you an opportunity to learn new techniques, exchange ideas, and experiment with teaching and leading styles. The IC is a mix of group expedition experience, training, and assessment. Occupying all three roles can feel challenging at times. There will be ongoing communication within the group, and between instructors and students to make the course a highly successful learning experience for everyone.

Course Overview

We conduct the sailing instructor course in Baja's Sea of Cortez, a beautiful and colorful region of rich human and geological history. The remoteness of this region makes a great classroom for teaching sailing techniques and outdoor living skills. The course begins with three days of intown curriculum and activities at the NOLS Mexico campus. We spend the three days exploring inclusion, teaching, and debriefing in a classroom setting. You'll spend ~19 days sailing before returning to NOLS Mexico where the course concludes.

The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of skills ranging from navigation and boat handling to leadership and teaching. As the course progresses, you may travel from 12 to 20 nautical miles per day and make open-water crossings of 10 nautical miles or more. The course will either anchor or move the boats onto land at night and then camp on shore. On some days, you will spend two nights at a camp location to allow time for class preparation and presentation, skill practice, fishing, and exploration. All activities are weather-dependent.

Normally, you will sail in a boat with an instructor and two or three other participants. Depending on factors such as route, weather, boat handling ability, course length, and curriculum progression, you may be able to sail in an all-participant boat during your course as part of the fleet with instructors monitoring. It is common for this to happen on instructor courses, but not guaranteed.

In-town Training

Your IC will begin with three days of classroom-based training. We will emphasize building an inclusive community that supports learning. Curriculum will focus on educational practices that prepare you to engage students in achieving NOLS learning goals and objectives. This includes developing cultural competency and exploring systems of oppression to support you in creating inclusive course cultures for students and co-instructors. Additionally, we will focus on developing effective debriefing skills and teaching practices.

Expedition Curriculum

Curriculum for this section will emphasize our four core areas: leadership, wilderness skills, risk management, and environmental studies. Instructors will frame this curriculum through the lens of preparing you to manage groups on sailing expeditions and facilitate learning. Therefore, wilderness education skills, debriefing, and inclusion will be important themes we will begin in town and then carry into this section. As we explore the four core curriculum themes on this sailing expedition, you will practice stepping into the role of facilitator, coach, and teacher. You will focus on applying and adapting previous sailing skills to expeditioning on the Drascombe Longboat. You'll also practice managing risk and first aid through expedition travel as well as first aid scenarios. (Note: prior to the course you must pass a WFR-level multiple choice test through an online module).

In most ways this training will look and feel like any other NOLS sailing expedition. The focus will be to integrate you into the role of facilitator and educator as you prepare to instruct sailing expeditions for NOLS. We hope this expedition provides a model of an exceptional student experience that as an instructor you will be able to emulate.

Facilitation and Teaching Expectations

We frame instructor courses like any other NOLS expedition. Our group will travel through the wilderness working as a team with the same learning goals and objectives of any other similar NOLS expedition. In this way, your IC will serve as a model for the first expedition you instruct. Additionally, we have education-specific learning objectives that will help prepare you to work as a field instructor.

As NOLS field instructors, we intentionally facilitate expeditions so that students achieve our desired learning goals and objectives. When we say “teaching” at NOLS, we mean a whole collection of mechanisms that, when used intentionally, help students learn.

Curriculum refers to both the content we teach as well as all the activities, experiences, and reflective practices that, combined, form a powerful learning experience. Quite often, day-to-day student experiences in the wilderness as part of a team result in the most impactful learning experiences.

To maximize the experiential learning model, we strive to take a student-centered approach to teaching. This requires us to craft educational experiences intentionally with desired learning in mind (the WHAT), and also give students equal power in their own learning as they make meaning from the experiences we craft (the HOW). We will challenge each of you to step into the role of educator and practice teaching using many learning mechanisms: direct instruction, briefing, debriefing, reflection, community building, scenarios, challenge, teaching expedition skills (sailing, rowing, travel, cooking, camping, etc.), and fun.

You can expect that your instructors will structure opportunities for you to teach your peers on your IC expedition. Some opportunities may look like traditional direct instruction, and some will be in the form of you intentionally facilitating the group or individuals less formally to support their learning. We will prioritize topics, skills, and mechanisms that will be most important for you as you move toward instructing your first course so that you'll be prepared to: conduct meaningful one-on-one feedback sessions with students, provide growth-oriented student feedback, lead fun activities, debrief challenging days or group dynamics and coach students on fundamental wilderness and leadership skills. We will challenge you to plan your teaching intentionally; then, you will receive growth-oriented feedback from peers and instructors.

Upon acceptance to an IC, additional information and expectations for your role in teaching on your course will follow.

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

Some desert wildlife, such as snakes and scorpions, are venomous. The undersea world is surprisingly lush compared to the land, but there, too, are hazards that you

must learn to identify and respect, including jellyfish or spined shellfish. Your instructors will teach you about scorpions, rattlesnakes, stingrays and other potential hazards so that they may be avoided.

Weather

Rain is possible but infrequent, though strong winds from the north are quite common, especially in mid-winter. These “nortes” can reach gale-force winds and 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 all a part of responsible wilderness travel.

Group dynamics

You will be living and working in a small community with a group of diverse individuals (be that in age, outdoor experience, occupation, or other measures of diversity). You will be living and working with this group around the clock in sometimes difficult conditions. This will require the utmost in cooperation, patience, and tolerance. Please consider the implications of this prior to committing to the expedition, and recognize that the success of the expedition as a whole is entirely dependent on the ability of its members to support one another in trying circumstances.

Evaluations and Future Employment

Instructors evaluate students in the following areas: leadership, expedition behavior, risk management, sailing and seapersonship, navigation, camping skills, wilderness education skills, and environmental studies.

At the conclusion of the course, each student will receive a written evaluation. Students are eligible to work in the NOLS Mexico sailing program upon successful completion of the IC. Full instructor certification is based on evaluation at the end of the first course the participant works as an instructor.

Fishing

While not a focus of the course, students may have various 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 boat might be possible. If you are interested in fishing from a boat, you will need to obtain a license, and should contact:

CONAPESCA/Oficina de Pesca

NOLS

2389 Fifth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92101
Tel: (619) 233 4324
Fax: (619) 233 0344
Or visit: <https://www.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx/>

Please bring a copy of your license with you to Mexico and read the regulations.

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.