

Baja Coastal Sailing

Course Description

Learn to sail and explore the remote and rugged Baja coast aboard the Drascombe Longboat. This is a unique sailing experience where you will learn both technical sailing skills and coastal expedition skills, including boat handling under sail, motor and oars; hazard evaluation; navigation; anchorage assessment; beach landing/launching procedures and desert camping. Discover tide pools and snorkel in the underwater world of the Sea of Cortez in tiny coves only reachable by sailboat. If you're looking for a way to explore the coast and experience a marine and desert environment that few people get to visit, this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 22 days
- Route length: 75-150 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
- Hand line fishing usually available
- 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. On some days, you may take hikes along the coast to learn about the environment or explore tide pools. You'll walk away from this course with leadership and outdoor experience that you can use for the rest of your life.

Independent Student Group Travel

Most days, you will sail in a boat with an instructor and three or four other students. Depending on factors such as route, weather, group competence, course length, and curriculum progression, you may be able to sail in an all-student boat near the end of your course. This boat would sail as part of a fleet with instructors monitoring it. Please note that this does not take place on all sailing courses.

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 will learn to identify and manage, including jellyfish or spined shellfish. Your instructors will teach you about scorpions, rattlesnakes, stingrays and other potential hazards so that you can manage the risk they may present.

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 October and November, the desert is still hot and you can expect to encounter high temperatures. In December and January, 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, you will experience milder weather between these two extremes.

Fishing

While not a focus of the course, students may have opportunities to fish. 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. You can purchase your license online at www.sportfishingbcs.gob.mx

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

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.