

The Small Cruise Ship Collection

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BAJA CALIFORNIA AND THE SEA OF CORTEZ: AMONG THE GREAT WHALES

Each year California gray whales pause during their migrations to birth and nurse their calves in the lagoons on the Pacific side of Baja California. In the morning, head out in local pangas with naturalists and local guides for rare opportunities to observe them at water level. Not only are we often rewarded with a close encounter of calves and watchful mothers, mere feet away, but often we'll experience heart-touching eye contact with playful calves surfacing to interact with us. In the evening, hang out on deck under the stars, or depending on the calendar, a full moon, and listen to the whales breathing and moving around the ship. Encounters with these marvelous creatures don't end there as we head into the Sea of Cortez, where magical moments continue with possible sightings of other whale species and dolphins. Discover some of the wild Sea of Cortez islands we've been exploring for 30+ years, mapping out biodiverse hotspots that teem with life on land and under the sea.



ITINERARY

DAY 1: Loreto / San Carlos / Embark

Upon arrival in Loreto, transfer to San Carlos and embark National Geographic Venture. Tonight, we'll anchor off the coast of Isla Santa Margarita. (D)

DAY 2: Bahía Almejas / Rehusa Channel / Isla Magdalena

Awake anchored in Bahía Almejas, the southernmost part of the bay. We'll observe a large frigatebird colony en route to the spectacular whale grounds of Bahía Almejas. Whales in this part of the bay tend to be very active, seemingly oblivious to our presence, so settle in for some great experiences. During lunch, the ship will reposition to Isla Magdalena, where we'll head to shore to explore the ever-shifting sand dunes on a cross-island

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walk to one of the most pristine beaches in the Pacific. Bird watching can be excellent here with abundant seabirds in action and shorebirds patrolling the beaches as they fatten up and prepare for long journeys to Arctic breeding grounds. (B,L,D)

DAY 3: Boca de Soledad

Each winter, during their long migration, gray whales travel south from their Arctic feeding grounds to breed and give birth and raise their calves in these sheltered waters. We'll transfer by motorcoach to López Mateos and spend the full day observing, and with luck, interacting with these majestic creatures. Together with savvy local Mexican fishermen we've known for years, we'll board local boats to view the numerous mother-calf pairs that thrive in this sheltering region. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before heading back to the ship in late afternoon. (B,L,D)

DAY 4: Magdalena Bay / Cruising

Kickstart your day with morning stretch hosted by our onboard wellness specialist on the sun deck. After breakfast, if conditions permit, we'll explore the bay's vast mangrove system via kayak, standup paddleboard, and Zodiac, and learn how these ecosystems support their surroundings. This afternoon, we'll sail out through "La Entrada" as we leave Magdalena Bay behind. Traveling south along the coast of the peninsula, there is a chance of seeing a wide variety of marine life, including the largest animal on Earth, the blue whale. Hear naturalist talks and learn photography basics. (B,L,D)

DAY 5: Gorda Banks and Cabo Pulmo

Ease into the day with a majestic sunrise over the iconic Friars Rocks at Land's End. We'll spend the rest of the morning searching the seas of Gorda Banks seamount, a renowned

gathering place for whales, especially humpbacks, dolphins, and other sea life. Following lunch, we'll set out to snorkel the pristine reefs of Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, one of the most successful national marine parks in the world, and chat with locals about their advocacy to protect this unique place. (B,L,D)

DAY 6: Los Islotes and La Paz

Awake this morning off the rocky island of Los Islotes, where we'll don flippers, a mask, and snorkel (which we provide) and swim with curious sea lions. Then we'll reposition to the colorful city of La Paz to garner insight into the culture of Mexico, soak in the vibrant street art, and stroll the lively "Malecon." Dinner will be an unforgettable cultural experience, complete with local cuisine, dancing, and folklore. (B,L,D)

DAY 7: Exploring the Sea of Cortez

Our plan is flexible as we explore some of the Sea's many uninhabited islands. Our captain and Expedition Leader will choose the perfect combination of activities for the day. We may go ashore at Isla San Francisco, where a sweeping arc of white sand beach beckons you to kayak or stand-up paddleboard. Or hike with your naturalist to the nearby ridge for unparalleled views over Isla Danzante. You may also visit the abandoned salt works on Isla Carmen. You'll get a chance to see the great diversity offered in the Sea of Cortez, and with some luck, spot the amazing wildlife. (B,L,D)

DAY 8: Loreto / Disembark

Disembark in Loreto after breakfast and transfer to the city center. Here you can choose to visit the first mission in Baja California, as well as the nearby museum to learn more about what makes this town so special. Enjoy free time to explore the

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quaint shops and vibrant side streets. After lunch, transfer to Loreto Airport for flights home. (B,L)

Please Note:

Itineraries are subject to change.



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YOUR SHIP: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VENTURE

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VESSEL TYPE:

LENGTH:

PASSENGER CAPACITY:

BUILT/REFURBISHED:

Launched 2018 Designed with over 50 years of expedition heritage, National Geographic Venture is able to explore the same remote locations as National Geographic have sought out for decades while setting a new standard in comfort and style. She will follow National Geographic Quest in featuring step-out balconies (available in 22 of the 50 spacious cabins), plus 6 sets of connecting cabins for families and groups; a Sun Deck bar, and a designated mudroom for expedition gear. Comfortably accommodating 100 guests, Venture has a shallow draft depth, allowing us to navigate the same inner reaches and provide the same intimate experiences of the charismatic regions we explore. Her twin expedition craft landing platforms allow you to get on and off the ship quickly to take advantage of wildlife sightings and to ensure we maximize our time off the ship exploring. Designed with decades of expedition experience in the region, the purpose-built vessel also features open decks, generous windows, and specialty tools for exploration--the ideal platform for sailing into the fast-moving channels and shallow coves of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest and for exploring the tropical waterways of Central America. Remotely Operated Vehicle Capable of reaching 1,000 feet, far beyond the range of

any Scuba diver, the ROV allows you to literally view parts of the undersea that are as unexplored as the moon. Chances are you, like many of our guests, will be struck by how surprisingly colorful undersea life is in these unlikely places. And this glimpse may fundamentally change how you view the ocean. Kayaks National Geographic Venture is equipped with 24 two-person kayaks--a fleet large enough to ensure everyone who wants to can paddle at every opportunity. Consequently, prior kayaking experience isn't necessary--many of our guests have their first kayaking experience in extraordinary locations. Our custom-designed floating platform lets us deploy kayaks from the ship, or any location we want--including far from shore. Kayakers are usually free to explore where they want within boundaries set by the undersea specialist and officer of the watch. Underwater camera Our undersea specialist will dive often during your expedition, even in Alaska, with cold-water gear, to shoot high-definition, Cousteau-like footage of the deep. Colorful nudibranchs, swimming, plant-like crinoids, and mysterious fish with antifreeze blood that thrive in the frigid sea will give you an entirely new appreciation of the marine environment. Video microscope Naturalists will use the video microscope to help explain all elements of the environment, including tiny organisms that are the building block of the marine ecosystem. Spellbinding live views of krill at 80x magnification fills the high-definition screens in the lounge with vivid detail, and fills every onlooker with a sense of wonder at the importance of otherwise unobservable creatures. Hydrophone This underwater microphone is deployed to listen to the vocalizations of marine mammals. Real time transmissions

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of their eerie, haunting sounds can be broadcast through the ship or recorded for later playback. Few experiences in nature are as captivating as watching humpback whales feed close to the ship as their vocalizations play through the ship's PA system. Electronic chartsAn electronic chart showing the ship's location, course, and speed is almost always on display in the lounge. Open bridgeYou'll find our captains are engaged, knowledgeable members of your expedition who are eager to share their passion with you. Venture's open bridge features comfortable spaces to sit, enjoy the view, drink your morning coffee, or simply chat with the officers. Snorkeling gear & wetsuitsOn warm weather itineraries where there will be snorkeling, you'll select a mask, snorkel, fins, and wetsuit that remain yours for the duration of the expedition. There's no need to pack and tote your own gear, although guests who prefer to are welcome to bring



their own.



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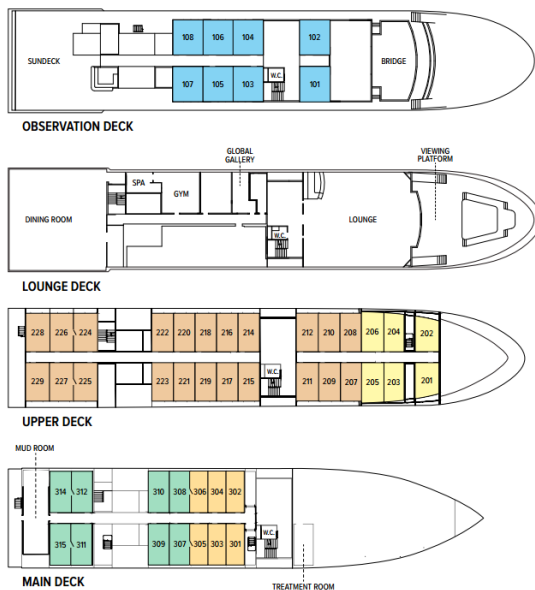
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INSIDE YOUR SHIP



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