



TRIP DESCRIPTION
NOLS ALUMNI BAJA SEA
KAYAKING & WHALE WATCHING
FEBRUARY 29 – MARCH 9, 2008

Trip Description:

On this alumni trip, you will have the opportunity to explore the magnificent coast of the Sea of Cortez. From our base in Coyote Bay, you will prepare to embark on a wonderful trip of discovery in Baja California. A typical paddling day involves rising with the sun and checking the sea and sky conditions to decide if travel is safe. It is common for strong diurnal afternoon winds to arise and early starts are the norm for sea kayakers in Baja. There will be time for classes if desired or lots of impromptu teaching and review of NOLS-style travel. Often times you will paddle along a coastline but there will also be crossings of more open water. Daily mileage may vary greatly depending on wind conditions. There will be time in the afternoons to work on kayak skills, go snorkeling, or walk up into arroyos seeking hidden Native American rock paintings. After a week of paddling the group will return to our base and drive to Laguna San Ignacio for some whale watching from motorized “pangas,” Mexico’s traditional fishing skiff. On the drive, you will see what life on the Baja Peninsula is like, as we pass through small villages. You will stay in cabins while at Laguna San Ignacio. Evenings are spent enjoying the camaraderie of beach life in Mexico.

Cost: \$1550

Group Size: 12 participants, 3 instructors

Environment

The coastline of the Baja California peninsula is rugged, often mountainous and very dry: 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 is rich with marine life, from intricate sea fans and colorful reef fishes to raucous sea lions and blowing whales. The sea kayaks allow us to explore both environments, although there are no guarantees as to what you might see.

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

Rain is infrequent yet possible in Baja. Windstorms are quite common, however, and sometimes for several days at a time they can make sea conditions too hazardous for safe travel. Watching the weather, judging sea conditions, and learning about the capabilities of the group and equipment are what safe coastal kayaking is all about. There may be some days when we decide against paddling because of the weather—tides and currents may influence our travel as well. For the most part you can expect highs to be in the 80’s and lows in the upper 50’s with water temperatures close to 75.

Trip Progression

On February 29, you will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Hotel Oasis in Loreto and take a shuttle to the NOLS branch on Coyote Bay. Upon arrival we will check and issue equipment, get to know each other and have introductory classes. A fabulous home-cooked lunch with local flavor will break up the business of the day and we’ll enjoy the views of Coyote Island as we eat out on the patio. Tasks will continue after lunch and we will learn a little about how we’ll be traveling for the next week. We’ll be sleeping under the stars beginning that very first night. Depending on the tides and weather, we will leave the branch that afternoon or the following morning.

For the next 8 days we will paddle in single and tandem sea kayaks to our selected sites, unload our gear onto the beach and camp. We will cook our meals on small, white gas burning camp stoves and sleep on the sand or cobble shore. We will carry open shelters in case the weather turns sour, but most nights are comfortably spent under the blanket of stars alone. We will arise early in the morning, check the weather and either pack up and move or spend a day onshore filled with classes and exploration. The classes on this trip will range from paddle strokes, self-rescue and navigation, to local ecology and ethics.

On day eight we will return to the base, clean up, and drive to Laguna San Ignacio for some whale watching. The day-long drive will be an opportunity to see more of the Baja peninsula, the Mexican people and their culture. There may be opportunities along the way to pick up a souvenir or sample some local food. While at Laguna San Ignacio we will stay in small cabins for the last two nights out. The whale watching is done from the beach and from Mexican “Pangas” a motorized, open skiff with a Mexican naturalist/guide. The whale watching is heavily regulated and monitored to insure the wellbeing and safety of the whales and the people observing them.

On the final day we’ll drive from Laguna San Ignacio to Loreto to have dinner that evening as a group. You will be responsible for arranging your own lodging that last night

Curriculum

We’ll review many of the basic NOLS outdoor living skills and techniques (cooking, sanitation, stove use, camping, etc.). We’ll teach basic sea kayak strokes, self rescue and travel skills in addition to the practical use of these new or rusty skills. Once underway the participants will paddle along the coast and in some open waters.

Alumni trips are more relaxed than a typical NOLS course; however, it is not a vacation or a guided trip. Trips are self-reliant through remote wilderness areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Throughout the trip, you will live outdoors, prepare your own meals, and care for yourself. The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and application of new skills in a variety of situations. Participants have the freedom to bring equipment that is necessary for their comfort and enjoyment of the trip and are expected to take responsibility for this aspect. If you have any further questions about this trip, please contact the alumni office at (800) 332-4280

Registration and Payment

Call the NOLS alumni office at (800) 332-4280. A non-refundable deposit of \$200 will reserve your space on the trip. Your enrollment will be complete upon receipt of your final payment of \$1350 and your completed application forms; these are due no later than 30 days prior to the trip start date.

The price of the trip includes all meals starting with lunch on the first day, through dinner on the last, all group equipment, instruction and shuttles from the Hotel Oasis in Loreto to the branch in Coyote Bay on February 29, from Coyote Bay to Laguna San Ignacio on March 7th, and from Laguna San Ignacio to Loreto on March 9th.

Accommodations the night before the trip and the last night of the trip, meals not indicated, any personal equipment that is rented or purchased and any costs incurred by evacuations are the responsibility of trip participants.

If you have any questions or concerns about trip costs, please call the NOLS alumni office at (800) 332-4280.