JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE MEXICO: DISCOVER BAJA CALIFORNIA AND THE SEA OF CORTEZ

12 days from **£3,000pp**

MEXICO / MEXICO CITY / BAJA CALIFORNIA



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

- A passion for the region runs through all we do
- All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America
- Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

- Fully bonded and licensed
- ATOL-protected
- On your side when it matters
- Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

- Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks
- We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions
- Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

Explore the raw desert scenery of Baja Peninsula, its palm-sheltered oases, small colonial mission towns and secret white-sand beaches with the freedom guaranteed by a self-drive hire car.

DAY 1	**Arrive Mexico City, transfer to hotel in historic core.**
DAY 2	**Guided tour of Mexico City and Teotihuacan Pyramids.**
DAY 3	**Fly to La Paz, collect car, self-drive to Loreto.**
DAY 4	**At leisure in Loreto, blue-whale watching (late Jan-early April).**
DAY 5	**Self-drive from Loreto to San Ignacio.**
DAY 6	**Grey whale-watching (mid-Jan to mid-Apr)**
DAY 7	**Day at leisure, optional visits to cave paintings and El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve.**
DAY 8	**Self-drive back to Loreto.**
DAY 9	**Self-drive to La Paz.**
DAY 10	**Day at leisure to enjoy beach club.**
DAY 11	**Optional kayaking or visit to Todos Santos.**
DAY 12	**Drop off car at La Paz airport**

ITINERARY

The skeletal Baja Peninsula, separated from the Mexican mainland by the narrow Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) consists of the bare bones of crinkled mountains sliced through by parched canyons. This pitiless landscape, infused with an ethereal beauty, has always been a challenge to human settlement, from the indian hunters of millennia ago to the Jesuit colonists of the Spanish era. Farmers still scratch a living in miniscule oases and fishermen scour the seas off the bays and cliffs of the craggy coast.

In modern times development has centred on the southern coast which attracts millions of visitors every year lured by the luxury resorts of Cabo. However, away from the fleshpots, you can explore the real Baja, its exquisite, other-worldly interior, its quiet colonial towns, the uninhabited flour-white beaches and aquamarine bays. What better way than in by self-drive car-hire: travel the trans-peninsula Highway 1, completed only in 1973, and discover along it or within easy reach the lesser-known delights of Baja. You'll find prehistoric cave paintings, abandoned missions and national parks - home to a surprisingly robust wildlife. Stop off at the slow-paced towns San Ignacio and Loreto, both recalling the style and elegance of the Spanish era and from where, January to April, you can view whales and dolphins up close.

DAY 1

Arrive Mexico City, transfer to hotel in historic core.

Your hotel is centrally located right next to the Zócalo, the capital's massive main square dominated by the monumental Spanish cathedral. Mexico City, known by Mexicans simply as 'DF' (Distrito Federal), was built on the site of Tenochtitlan, the focal point of the Aztec empire, and it lies at 2,250m above sea level. Vast, chaotic and vibrant, this sprawling megalopolis of more than 20 million people has a multitude of attractions.



DAY 2

Guided tour of Mexico City and Teotihuacan Pyramids.



The arrival of the Spanish conquistadores was seismic event in the story of the Aztec people. Their magnificent causewayed city was razed, and the invading Spaniards rebuilt it in their own style; the development fuelled by silver mining. This is all reflected in the cultural vestiges apparent all over the modern-day city which you'll see during your guided tour. Visit the zócalo, or main square, monumental metropolitan cathedral and national palace with its murals by Diego Rivera.

Later, head into the countryside, driven towards the megalithic archaeological site Teotihuacan. Dating back over 2,000 years, it was once one of the largest cities in the world. It is hugely influential in the historical narrative of modern Mexico and, although abandoned by the time of the Aztecs, even this great empire held it in awe. Stroll along the imposing Avenue of the Dead, leading to the vast Pyramid of the Sun, and climb its vertiginous steps for a panorama of the ruins.

If you have time we suggest you visit the world-class Museum of Anthropology, exhibiting remarkable, well displayed Aztec artefacts alongside items from other ancient civilisations. It's a fantastic introduction to the superb and sometimes grisly artistic achievements of Mexico's early inhabitants.

DAY 3

Fly to La Paz, collect car, self-drive to Loreto.



Following a flight of around 2.5hrs from Mexico City airport to La Paz, the capital of the Baja Peninsula, you will collect your self-drive car. Head north to Loreto on the Trans-Peninsula Highway, you can't get lost as it is the only significant road to traverse the whole peninsula from Tijuana in the north to Cabo on the southern tip: over 1,800km. Immediately on leaving La Paz behind you the scenery is characteristically arid, featuring plains pitted with vigilante cacti on either side of the road while the mountains of Sierra Escondida to the right are an impressive backdrop.

At the junction town Cuidad Insurgentes you'll turn right to drive east along a solitary paved road which, with sharp curves and tight bends, descends through desolate copper-coloured mountains to the rugged coastline at Ensenada Blanca. With the sea and cliffs on one side and the towering gold-green escarpment of Sierra La Giganta on the other, the landscape becomes less relentlessly desolate as you view canyons and the cobalt sea lapping the coastline. There is still little vegetation though the cacti are ever-present.

Your 350km journey today to Loreto should take around five hours, including stops to take in the views, snap a few photos or just breathe in the pure desert air and enjoy the feeling of the sun on your face.

DAY 4

At leisure in Loreto, blue-whale watching (late Jan-early April).



Loreto is a lovely colonial town and port on a gorgeous stretch of the Gulf of California coast. It was the hub for the Spanish mission effort and the first capital of California (which then extended from Cabo to Oregon) until a hurricane in 1829 destroyed much of it and the capital was moved to La Paz, although Loreto retains some graceful Spanish-style buildings. A splendid paved promenade (malecón), guarded and shaded by palms, graces the shoreline and looks out over attractive hilly islands and headlands: at one end is a marshy cape great for bird-spotting.

Loreto Bay is also one of the best places to view the blue whale, at up to 30m long the largest animal ever known to have existed with an elegant slim shape and a blow-hole which spouts water straight up into the air. We've included a full day out at sea to hopefully locate and observe these magnificent creatures. Please note trips require a minimum of 4 participants and operate from late Jan to early April.

If visiting outside of the whale season (or if you just don't fancy a day on the ocean), you can easily spend your time here just enjoying the laid-back ambiance of the town, visiting the restored mission with its gilded altar and museum on the pretty plaza and strolling along the malecón at sunrise or sunset, or taking a boat out to one of the lovely beaches nearby (the town beach has brownish sand and no facilities). There are also several companies selling adventure tours such as hikes, visits to missions (such as the spectacularly sited Jan Javier), canyoning, scuba-diving, fishing and kayaking.

DAY 5

Self-drive from Loreto to San Ignacio.



Heading out of Loreto across the coastal plain peppered with beautiful beaches, you pass through a region of dry, knobbly hills which support a smattering of drought-resistant plants as well as the ubiquitous cactus. The undulating road here is paved and in good condition. You might decide to stop off for a swim at El Requison Bay, just short of the town Buenaventura, and continue on to Mulegé which has a Jesuit mission dating back to 1703. One of Baja's stunningly attractive oases, Mulegé has a view point over Santo Rosalia river which is lush and planted with citrus trees and date palms. The hilltop mission is worth a visit.

Further north is the port Santa Rosalia, built to export copper from the now exhausted mines (you can see abandoned mine paraphernalia scattered around) and now surviving on fishing. It has a central church constructed with the help of Eiffel (of Eiffel tower fame) and, unusually, houses built in French Caribbean style.

Approaching the Vizcaino Reserve, a scalding caldron of desert heat, you'll be exposed to uncompromising desert all the way until suddenly you hit on San Ignacio, by contrast a lush green and shady place filled with date groves. The town hosts a clutch of Baja's rare thatched colonial buildings, painted in pastel colours, bedecked with bougainvillea and sheltered by laurel trees. The striking mission here, completed by Dominicans in 1786, is probably the most ornate and interesting in Baja.

If you drive without stops it should take under 4 hours to cover the 275km distance but we are sure you will want to park up to enjoy some of the places of interest en route.

DAY 6

Grey whale-watching (mid-Jan to mid-Apr)



Join an organised tour through other-worldly salt pans as you head to the lagoon on the Pacific side of the peninsula. There, you embark a motorised launch to traverse the lagoon with an eye out for the whales, which come here to breed. Trusting and curious, these massive, barnacle-encrusted creatures will approach the boats with their young and you can also observe them spy-hopping (breaking surface to rise out of the water as if standing). The shallows act as a nursery or training ground for the young so mothers and babies alike feel protected from the predators of the open seas, such as killer whales. The experience of witnessing such natural magnificence at close quarters is a privilege and not to be missed. Please note a minimum of 4 participants is needed for this excursion to operate.

DAY 7

Day at leisure, optional visits to cave paintings and El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve.



You might consider just hanging out in San Ignacio, an agreeable little town with a timeless ambiance. Founded by the Jesuits but on a site inhabited for millennia by indigenous tribes, it is surrounded by bleak mountains pitted with caves adorned with prehistoric paintings. No one knows much about their authors, around which much has been constructed as myth and legend, but some of these works of art depict hunters over 2m tall. You'll need a local guide to find the art. They are set within the at first sight rather grim Vizcaino desert, Latin America's largest protected area which stretches from the Vizcaino Peninsula across to the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) and includes all the principal whale calving sites.

Close to town, the pretty green lagoon, dammed artificially to support the town's agricultural economy – mostly fruit plantations – has been richly planted with date trees making this a good place for spotting birds.

DAY 8

Self-drive back to Loreto.

Follow the main road back to La Paz. You'll get a different perspective on the scenery driving in the opposite direction! The 275km journey should take under 4 hours.



DAY 9

Self-drive to La Paz.

Return to La Paz in your rental car. La Paz is an easy-going port and very pleasant base from which to indulge in outdoor adventure activities such as diving, fishing or sea-kayaking. The town has a university and a lively cultural scene as well. The capital of Baja California, it's home to a quarter of a million inhabitants but still has a small town feel, and maintains a Mexican ambiance somewhat lacking in the other more US-influenced towns. Your hotel is well located so you should have time to explore the town and maybe take an evening stroll along the picturesque seaside promenade – although the town is on the eastern side of the peninsula the coastline wiggles incongruously here allowing for spectacular displays of purple and tangerine as the sun sets over the sea. There is a palm-fringed waterfront promenade (malecón) and there are some lovely unspoilt beaches not far away.

There's around 360km of driving today, continuing past the airport to your hotel for the next 3 nights.



DAY 10

Day at leisure to enjoy beach club.

You have a couple of days based in La Paz, with your car at your disposal. Having looked round the centre you may wish to explore a bit further afield. If relaxation is your aim, just a short taxi ride from La Paz is the Costa Baja Resort and Spa, where for a small fee you can enjoy the Beach Club, with cool bars, loungers, scatter cushions to relax on and a lovely infinity pool. Also within the complex is a marina surrounded by a good selection of restaurants, some with outdoor seating next to the bobbing boats. A golf club is adjacent too.



DAY 11

Optional kayaking or visit to Todos Santos.



If you fancy doing something on the water – and it is tempting – an optional guided kayaking trip from La Paz explores the pristine area along the coast arriving at tranquil, turquoise blue waters of Balandra Bay on a prominent headland. Here there are no less than seven powdery white sand beaches. This beautiful setting is framed by deep red volcanic mountains. In the afternoon, continue paddling, stopping several times to snorkel. One stop is in a small cave where only kayaks can beach, where you can swim between huge volcanic boulders. Other kayaking trips can be arranged in town or from the hotel.

Alternatively you might go for a cultural experience and visit the quaint town Todos Santos, an hour's drive away on the Pacific side of the peninsula. Beloved of bohemian US ex-pats of an arty persuasion, it's a quiet place; the hordes of tourists who visit Cabo don't make it here. Wander round the galleries and craft shops, admire the baroque colonial architecture, lunch in one of a plethora of restaurants or wander down the sandy lane towards the ocean to view a glorious deserted surf beach.

DAY 12

Drop off car at La Paz airport



Drop off your car at La Paz airport (flight not included). It's a 15km drive to the airport from the centre of city.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- Full-day guided tour of Mexico City and Teotihuacan pyramids
- Grey whale-watching from San Ignacio (in season)
- Blue whale-watching from Loreto (in season)

ESSENTIALS

One domestic flight (Mexico City-La Paz). Self-drive car: Standard (Vento or similar) with air-conditioning from day 3 to day 11.

We have chosen properties oozing with character and colonial references, with a real Mexican feel. The hotel in San Ignacio is basic but it is the nest available.

Breakfast daily; lunch days 2,6.

We carefully select our local partners, some of whom we have worked with for over 30 years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

12 days, 11 nights: Mexico City 2; Loreto 2, San Ignacio 3, Loreto 1, La Paz 3.

The unit of currency in Mexico is the Mexican peso.

HOW TO TAKE IT

Cash machines are available in all major cities and towns, and so taking a debit or credit card with a PIN number is the most convenient way of withdrawing money while on your trip, and in most shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds. We recommend that additionally you take a reasonable quantity of US dollars cash (no more than is covered by your insurance), which you can exchange into local currency. Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused. You can take sterling, but the exchange rate is not always competitive or even available, restricting the number of places where you can change money.

DAILY SPEND

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US$75 per person per day should cover food, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants and you may pay more.

TIPPING

Local guides and service workers will welcome a gratuity: they often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income. It is useful to have spare change for waiters, hotel porters, taxi drivers etc. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants. Tipping guidelines can be found in our Briefing Dossier.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

For the car, additional Liability and Loss Damage Waiver (CDW without excess and inclusion of theft protection) is included as well as Personal Accident and Third Party insurance.

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

AIRPORT TAXES

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TRIP SUITABILITY

This is a self-drive holiday, suitable for visitors with a sense of adventure. Our chosen route covers around 1300km, most of which is covered across 4 days of driving along paved Federal Highway Ruta 1, the Carretera Transpeninsular. Daily distances range from 270km-360km, with scope for additional stops and side trips and we suggest sharing the driving to allow for breaks and enjoyment of the scenery.

In Mexico City and the mountains towns the climate is temperate all year round and, because of the altitude it never gets too hot. Temperatures can drop to freezing in Mexico City over the winter months.

Baja California enjoys 300-360 days of sunshine a year, year round temperatures in the 20°s and 30°s C tempered by sea breezes, and little rain. The sea is colder on the Pacific side because of cold currents.

Bring practical, comfortable clothing and a light-weight jumper. If you plan to eat in smart restaurants in Mexico City, although clothing is not formal (no need for jacket and tie), something quite smart would be appropriate.

Strong, comfortable shoes or trainers are advisable and you should bring insect repellant, sun block, sun glasses, and swim wear.

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts.

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following; typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. For specific requirements you must consult your GP.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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