

Whale Watching - Cabo Style

The gleaming twin hulls race through the winter waters of the Pacific, less than a kilometer from Land's End in Cabo San Lucas. The sailing catamaran cuts smoothly and quietly through the 75° water where the Sea of Cortez meets the Pacific. Someone exclaims, "There!" and guests and crew alike, turn to watch as a 20 ton Gray Whale pirouettes effortlessly, then slams gracefully back into the sea.



Every year Los Cabos receives an influx of winter visitors. Some wander the tiendas and shop while others are content to sit in the sun and sip Margaritas on Médano Beach. Yet some of our other annual visitors prefer to spout off, dine on amphipod crustaceans and swim the relatively tranquil waters where the Pacific meets the Sea of Cortez. I am of course referring to Grey Whales which can be seen just a few kilometers off

shore of Land's End.

Grey whales migrate to Baja each season to enjoy the food rich warm waters and give birth to the next generation. Although places like San Ignacio may be more famous for their whale watching, it is likely that more people actually SEE whales in Los Cabos than any other place in Baja. The whale watching season in Cabo runs from about the end of December to the end of March.



Whales are air breathing mammals, their young are a live birth and are fed on mother's milk. The whale is mottled grey with numerous white, yellow or orange patches of barnacles and parasites around the blowhole, on top of the head, and on the fore part of the back. Males are 35-50 feet, 28-38 tons; females

42-50 feet, 34-38 tons. The barnacles begin to form at birth and it seems the amount of grown and pattern seem directly related to that of the mother.

Almost all adult grey whales have evidence of scarring from encounters with Killer Whales and have patches of white where barnacle growth has been scraped off. The scars and growth markings serve to help researchers tell one whale from another. The scientific name for the species is ***eschrictius robustus***.



Grey Whales are the only bottom feeding whale; they scoop and filters amphipod crustaceans from the mud. A single calf is born every other year. Primarily a bottom feeder, the Gray will dive to 120m,

but prefers much shallower water. While feeding, it stirs up clouds of mud from the seabed and filters out food through the baleen in its mouth. While migrating the Gray will feed at the surface on small fish and shrimp-like mysids. There are more than 25 000 gray whales; once nearly extinct, they are now fully recovered and have been removed off of the Endangered Species List.

There are several ways to get out and see the whales in Cabo San Lucas. Boats of varying capacity and propulsion carry the thousands of Baja Whale Watches out to see these marine mammals as they visit our peninsula in their annual migration. One of my favorite ways to see and photograph the whales is from the stable decks of a sailing catamaran.



Spin Doctor is 46'x28' custom built catamaran with room to move about the decks for the best views of the whales or the Baja coastline. Captain Ismail has been sailing these waters for 8 years and says; "I see them almost every trip at this time of year, but every time it's the same, they are amazing." Although no trip can guarantee whales, the odds are in your favor between the end of December and the first of April. This year is expected to be a [particularly good year for sightings](#), as the gray whale population in this area continues to rebound.

The newest addition to the La Princesa Sailing Charters, *Spin Doctor* sports a winged mast and state-of-the-art composite material hulls that add the thrill of sailing to your whale watching expedition. The one hour and fifty minute trip includes open bar, guacamole and chips and music and shaded comfort for up to 48 guests. The scheduled trips are morning, mid-day and sunset and cost \$39 per person. But, you should call ahead for reservations as *Spin Doctor* also does private charters for parties and corporate travel and the daily schedule may vary.



The sunset sail also gives you the opportunity to see Land's End and the famous Arch Rock as the sun dips into the Pacific. The evenings get just a little cool out on the water, so you might want to bring a light jacket with you. If you forget, the crew of *Spin Doctor* can provide you with a Mexican blanket and another Margarita to fend off the chill.



Snorkeling trips are another great way to have an opportunity to see the Gray Whales and dolphin that visit the waters around Los Cabos. The three to three and a half hour trip takes you 6 miles east along the coast toward San Jose del Cabo to Santa Maria Bay. Although this trip doesn't actually seek out the whales, we saw four or five of them and several dozen Pacific Common dolphin on that route last weekend. Again, Whale watching and snorkeling tours alternate the mid-day trip in conjunction with cruise ship visits. Calling ahead will get you the trip you want, when you want to take it.

What ever trip you choose I sure you will have a delightful time aboard the *Spin Doctor* and please remember to say hello to the crew from their friends at the Bajalnsider!

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