



The Whales of Laguna Ojo de Liebre

Description



At one of my first jobs in a travel agency in Miami I saw a photo of someone in a kayak next to a whale. I love wildlife and whales are one of my favorites and I

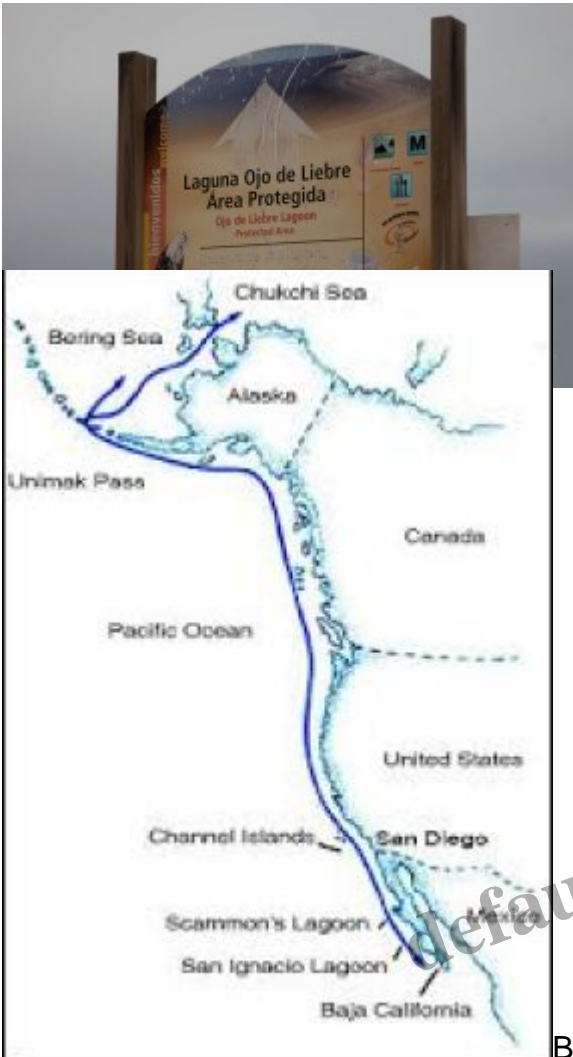
thought then how sweet it would be to get that close to a whale.



Hector and I have been on whale watching tours about 20

times in three U.S. States and three Canadian provinces. In kayaks, small fishing boats, zodiac boats and big boats. We've been fortunate enough to see about nine different types of whales, some pretty close up.





But not long ago, I read about the gray whales who migrate to

Baja California from the Bering Sea in the winter. While they're up north, they spend their time feeding and gorging, preparing their bodies for the long migration south. It is one of the longest migrations of any animal on earth.

Once they reach Baja California, they congregate in three lagoons on the Pacific side of the peninsula. Whales that mated the previous year will give birth to their calves (their gestation period is about 13 months) and others will mate. In these lagoons the calves are protected from their two predators: sharks and killer whales.



We set off in the morning on our tour to see the whales. I tried to set realistic expectations and told myself that seeing the whales would be enough but had my hopes up for more.

There were eight of us in the boat, from France, Belgium, Australia and us. A second boat from our tour company had a group of Mexicans. Excitement was high.



immediately saw our first whale, then another and another. The boat inched a bit closer. They have rules that restrict them from getting too close to the whales, approaching them from behind or too directly.

The whales did not approach the boat and we moved on. There were lots of whales around and we could see spouts in the distance. Everyone was enjoying seeing so many whales. There are about 800 in the lagoon at this point, but in other years there have been as many as 2500. Apparently, El Niño changes their migration patterns.





Each cow has one calf and trains them for about five

months prior to their migration north. One of the things the cows do to build the calves' strength for the journey north is to have them swim against the strong tidal current at the entrance to the lagoon.

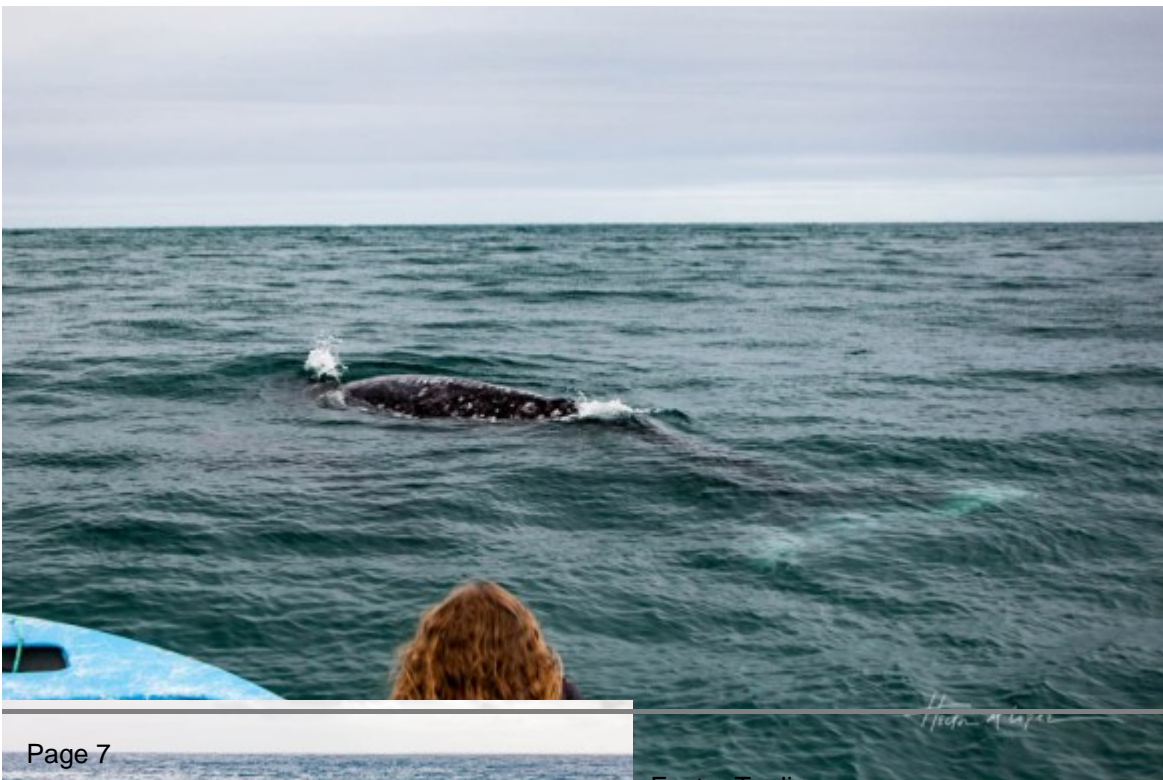




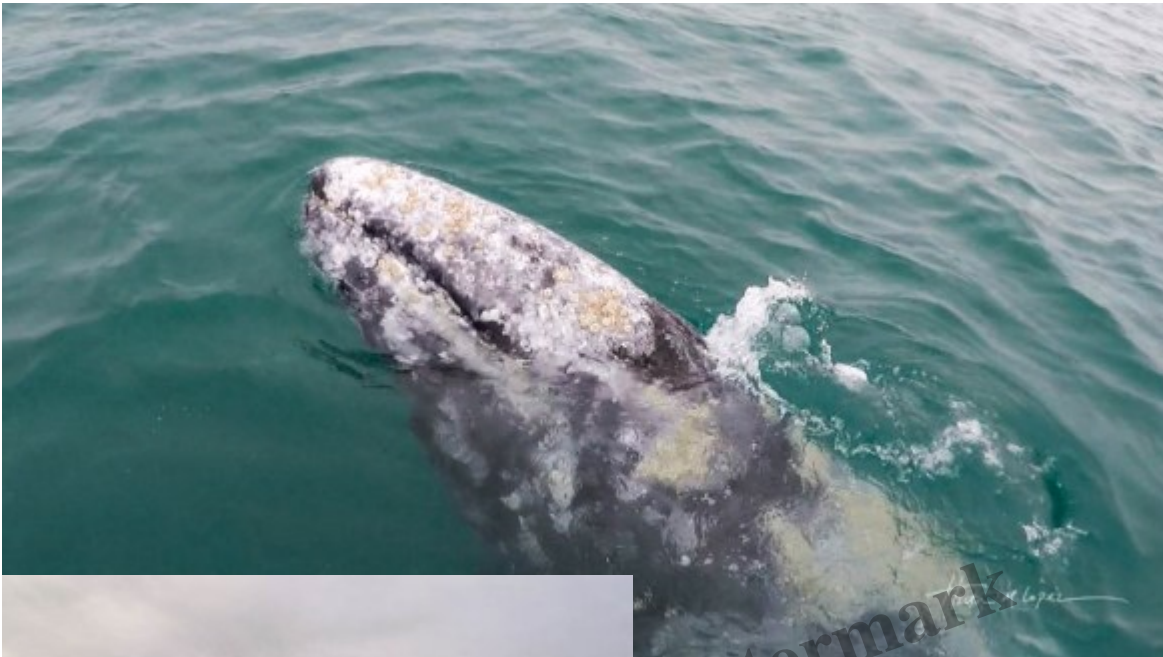
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For some unknown reason, even though humans

slaughtered them to near extinction, the whales now seem to enjoy human contact while in these lagoons. They will swim up to the small boats that go out into the lagoons to get "petted".



When the calves are a bit grown they will also bring their babies and lift them up at the side of tour boats, presumably to get petted also. The lagoons of Baja are the only place in the world where they do this.



The captain said that a whale was coming towards us

from the right side (my side). He had an uncanny way of knowing when they were approaching even though they were underwater. Once they were pretty close, we could all see them underwater.



The whale came to the boat and then went under. Several times whales came to our boat and swam under it from one side to the other.



A little while later another whale swam over, this time coming right up to my side of the boat and surfacing. I barely reached it and gave it a light stroke but it kept swimming and went underwater.

It was a surreal moment, never did I think I would actually touch a whale.



Several other whales swam up to the boat on



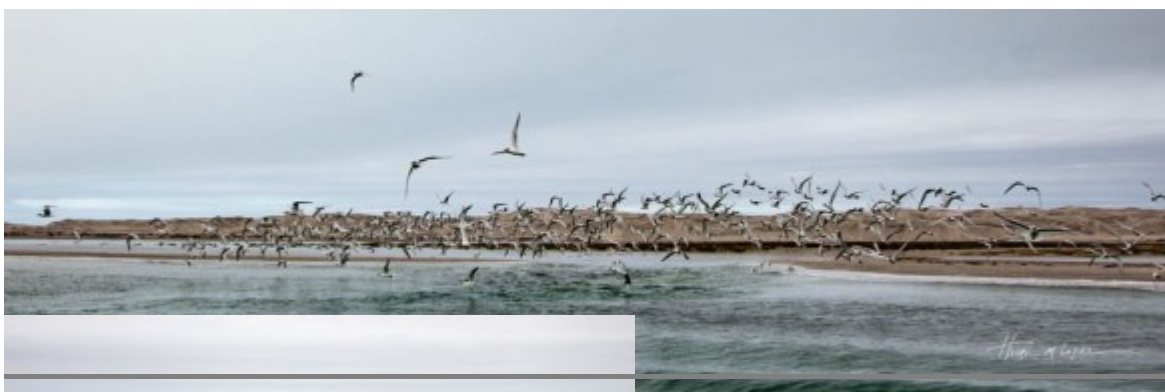
One gentleman

screamed so loudly when he touched this one whale that it immediately went underwater, I think he must have scared it. But everyone on the boat got a close up look and all were happy.



Hector and I just bought a GoPro and used it for the first

time. We captured some of the whale encounters, as well as some shots of whales underwater, but our internet connectivity in this area is not good enough to post. However, the video allowed us to capture a few still photos. Hopefully we can post videos later.



On our way back to shore the boat cruised by a vast expanse of sand dunes that border the north of the lagoon. Spectacular!

And as a last treat we had a few more glimpses of marine life: some dolphins, sea lions and lots of



We arrived back on

land with big smiles on all of our faces from this magical experience.

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Category

1. Mexico

Tags

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4. wildlife

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