

SPECIAL
OFFER – SAVE
£300
PER PERSON

BAJA CALIFORNIA AMONG THE GREAT WHALES

A CRUISE ALONG THE COAST OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR
ABOARD THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VENTURE
INCLUDING A FOUR NIGHT STAY IN MEXICO CITY

16TH TO 28TH JANUARY 2025



NOBLE CALEDONIA



Playa Balandra, La Paz

Just south of California lies an inland sea known as the Gulf of California, Sea of Cortez, or Sea of Cortés. A birder's paradise, this rich archipelago serves as an important bird refuge and migration corridor. It is a place author John Steinbeck found "ferocious with life" and described by Jacques Cousteau as "the aquarium of the world" and we tend to agree. UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, noting it as one of the most biologically diverse marine environments on Earth.

Each winter, thousands of gray whales migrate south from their Arctic feeding grounds to Baja California Sur's sheltered Pacific coastal lagoon. Their migration is the longest of any animal, covering more than 10,000 miles. Join us aboard the National Geographic Venture and discover a world of breathtaking beauty on a journey through these wildlife rich waters and to islands that are home to both plants and animals found nowhere else. Baja is an inexhaustibly rich place to explore and during our expedition we hope to observe grays during their breeding, calving and nurturing cycle and see fins, blues, orcas and humpbacks.

Baja is one of those rare geographies where the desert meets the sea. Its topography is stunning; there is literally something to see everywhere. Our ethos of using small ships to deliver big experiences comes into its own in this region and especially when using a vessel as small and as well-equipped as the National Geographic Venture. Board local panga boats and the onboard Zodiacs and enter pristine lagoons for up-close wildlife encounters, witness an undersea wonderland and experience the most beautiful sunsets on Earth. Swim with playful sea lions, watch whales, and discover a centuries-old mission town. Hike nearby shores, rimmed with white-sand beaches and cactus-clad ridges, then cool off in impossibly brilliant turquoise waters. Coastal mangroves and dunes, along with desert scrub and red rock cliffs provide the backdrop. To explore this extraordinary place is to know firsthand how small the human presence here truly is.

In addition, we have time before and after our cruise to explore Mexico City which is more than just a large, busy metropolis and well worth a few days of exploration. With a magnificent backdrop of the Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl volcanoes, this fascinating city is an eclectic mix of ancient ruins, colonial buildings and modern high rises and highlights will include our visits to the world-renowned Anthropological Museum, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and the vibrant Coyocan neighbourhood which was home to Frida Kahlo.

Why Lindblad Expeditions & the National Geographic Venture

For this exploration of Baja California, we have chosen to work with Lindblad Expeditions with whom we have a long association. Lindblad's legacy of exploration in Baja California runs deep: for over 40 years, they have been taking travellers to this mesmerising region which is one of the world's best places to observe majestic California gray whales and their newborn calves close up. We believe the small ship experience is far preferable to cruising on a larger vessel and have therefore selected the 100 passenger National Geographic Venture for our expedition. This nimble expedition ship is able to explore remote bays and inlets, inaccessible to other ships and for a real close up experience we will use the onboard Zodiacs. For those who really wish to experience the magic of the wilderness, to come close to nature and enjoy the serenity of the beautiful landscape, the National Geographic Venture is the perfect vessel.

Joining You On Board

One of the most important aspects of expedition cruising is the knowledge of the expert expedition team that accompanies you on board and for the forays ashore. Joining you on board the National Geographic Venture will be a team of naturalists, one expert per 10 guests who provide talks, guidance ashore, and daily camaraderie. The staff will greatly enhance your experience, sharing special insights and searching out pods of dolphins, flying mobula rays, boisterous sea lions, and much more. Each member of the team is not only an expert in their field but passionate about sharing their knowledge and dedicated to seeing that you get the most out of your experience.

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

- Travel with a maximum of just 100 fellow passengers and an expert expedition team.
- Board local panga boats to encounter California gray whales and their newborn calves up close in lagoons, and witness breaching humpbacks from the bow of our ship, or on Zodiac excursions.
- Hike desert islands and sculpted sand dunes and look for a variety of wildlife.
- Snorkel with sea lions (conditions permitting) and search for superpods of dolphins amid the pristine coral reefs of Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park.
- In La Paz, enjoy a special outdoor dinner featuring local cuisine, music, and dance, as well as an opportunity to view and purchase work by local artisans.
- Discover vibrant Mexico City and the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan.



Mangroves, Magdalena Bay

What to Expect

No two expeditions are the same in Baja California and the itinerary is amended based on weather conditions and wildlife sightings. Below are extracts from logs of previous expeditions in the region with Lindblad Expeditions.

Los Isoltes & La Paz, February 2023: Our day aboard National Geographic Venture started with the rising of the sun. Standing at the bow of the ship we witnessed the sun paint a palette of colours on the horizon. After breakfast, we jumped into Zodiacs. We toured around a tiny island, Los Isoltes. This white-capped rock in the sea is home to a colony of sea lions. These curious and playful pinnipeds swam around our Zodiacs, showing off by leaping out of the water. Flying above us were blue-footed boobies, frigate birds, and brown pelicans. Our vessel then docked at the nearby town of La Paz where we had the chance to walk around the Malecon boardwalk and stop at our favourite ice cream spot in town, Fuente. We then took a short bus ride to Rancho San Lorenzo where we were greeted with musicians, horses, and margaritas. At our tables we were able to enjoy folk dancers and authentic Mexican dishes. The big surprise of the evening was a concert from a world-famous opera singer and pianist. This will be a day and night to remember for quite a long time.

Bahia de Almejas, March 2023: Moderate seas and wind along with clear skies and sun greeted us as we journeyed by pangas to Bahia Almejas after breakfast. The bahia is where gray whales mate (earlier in the season), and immature males and females 'hang out.' This morning, the whales put on a 'whale' of a show! Many were spotted: some spyhopping, others rolling over each other, still others just swimming. We were very fortunate in that a few curious immature whales approached the pangas, allowing some of us to get the coveted 'touch' while others were sprayed with the whale's exhalant 'kiss.' On the way back to the vessel for lunch, we passed by a large concentration of seabirds on a sand spit. Surprisingly, we spotted an immature bald eagle regally standing on the sand. A visit to the frigatebird colony rounded out the morning. After lunch, we did it again, as did the whales. Our afternoon in Bahia Almejas provided another opportunity to view several spyhopping whales, along with two spectacular breaches. A few whales swam back and forth under the pangas, giving unique views of their tremendous length and girth. And of course, some surfaced alongside the pangas to permit more touching and 'kisses.' Following a presentation about gray whales and recaps, we enjoyed traditional Mexican cuisine as part of the Mexican Festival Night. The evening was capped off by a classic piñata ceremony on the sun deck.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VENTURE



Purpose-built to explore the North American coast, the National Geographic Venture accommodates just 100 guests in 50 outside cabins. The design and engineering of the National Geographic Venture were informed by nearly 40 years of experience of expedition cruising. Her twin boarding platforms, for example, enable the expedition team to load two Zodiacs at once, meaning guests can disembark the ship quickly to take advantage of wildlife sightings and maximise time spent exploring ashore. The vessel features a shallow draft, allowing the Captain to navigate the inner reaches and the onboard Zodiacs offer opportunities to get even closer to the action and land in remote locations. There are also kayaks, paddleboards and snorkelling equipment on board.



Category 4 Cabin



Dining Room



Lounge

Your Cabin

Cabins aboard the National Geographic Venture are an inviting place to end your day of activity. There are a total of 50 outside cabins on board and each one features either two portholes, large windows or step-out balcony. In each cabin, beds can be twin or converted to a Queen. Cabins range in size from 12.6 to 17.3 square metres and feature modern bathrooms, climate controls, hairdryer, Wi-Fi connections and USB ports for mobile devices. You will find organic botanical products in the bathroom.

Your Dining

Meals are served in the dining room at a single seating with unassigned tables, meaning you can dine with whomever you wish. The expedition team will dine alongside guests allowing for opportunities to discuss the highlights of the day and what is to come. The onboard chefs use fresh, local ingredients whenever possible, including locally grown produce, sustainably caught fish, and other local products. An array of fresh fruits and delicious fresh juices are key components of the breakfast buffet, as are fresh vegetables and fish at lunch and dinner. When conditions allow, lighter options may be served outside on the Observation Deck. A selection of drinks including beer and wine are served with lunch and dinner and there is a 24-hour self service beverage station available for tea, coffee and soft drinks.

Your Space

The spacious public areas include the main dining room and the comfortable lounge which features wrap-around windows for optimal views, a full-service bar and state-of-the-art presentation facilities. The lounge is where guests gather daily for talks and recaps. There is also a small reference library with board games. The vessel features a specially designed open bow and the outside deck has been designed as the perfect wildlife viewing platform which is in close proximity to the lounge allowing for instant access to spontaneous wildlife sightings. Outside there is also a partially covered and furnished sundeck with tables, chairs and lounge chairs for relaxing. To ease the embarkation and disembarkations for the daily activities, the vessel features a mudroom with lockers to store expedition gear. Another feature of the ship is the spa and fitness centre staffed by the wellness specialist. There is a shop on board stocked with local artisan products. Internet access, laundry service and a medical professional are available on board, and there is a lift which serves all decks.

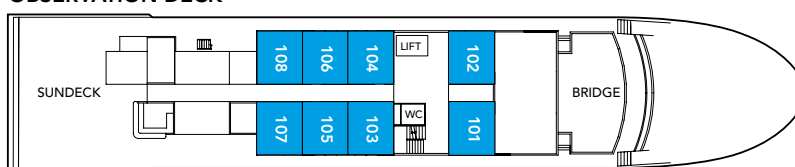
Life On Board

The atmosphere on board is relaxed and informal and focused on the marvellous scenery and wildlife we will be experiencing. Whilst sailing, you can relax on deck with a good book, spend time with the onboard experts looking for wildlife, relax with a massage in the spa, take part in some morning stretches on deck with the wellness specialist or scan the horizon from the open Bridge with the binoculars provided on board. The vessel carries expedition equipment including eight Zodiac landing craft, kayaks, and an underwater video camera. There is a high ratio of crew to passengers and after a day ashore you will return to the comfort and peace of an exceedingly comfortable ship.

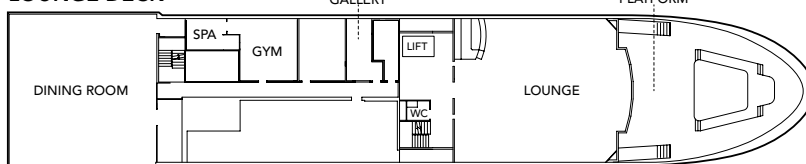


NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VENTURE DECK PLAN

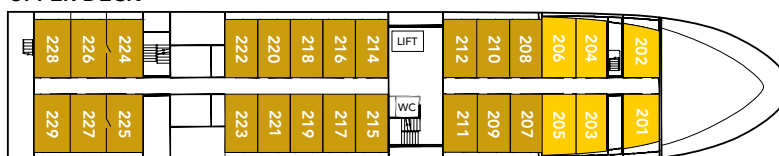
OBSERVATION DECK



LOUNGE DECK



UPPER DECK



MAIN DECK



MUD ROOM

- Cat 1 – Main Deck with two portholes
- Cat 2 – Main Deck with two portholes
- Cat 3 – Upper Deck with large window
- Cat 4 – Upper Deck with sliding door & small balcony
- Cat 5 – Observation Deck Suite with large windows



During this voyage you will be visiting out of the way destinations and will be accompanied by an expedition team. Landings and excursions will be made by Zodiac landing craft. This cruise will appeal to the more adventurous and those who enjoy the natural world.

Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan



Cacti

The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Mexico City, Mexico. Fly by scheduled indirect flight to Mexico City. Arrive in the evening and transfer to the Marriott Reforma Hotel where we will stay for the next three nights. Enjoy a light dinner at the hotel this evening.

Day 2 Mexico City. Mexico City was built by the Spanish in the 16th century on the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the old Aztec capital, and is now one of the largest cities in the world. It is a city of many contrasts from lively streets to tranquil squares, from ancient ruins to modern shiny high rises and is filled with a vibrant culture and delicious food. Today we will start to peel away the layers of this historic city with a walking tour through the historic centre. We will pass by the presidential palace, and through the main square, Zocalo, which prior to the colonial period was the main ceremonial centre of the Aztec city. We will also visit the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City, the oldest and largest cathedral in the Americas. Afterwards there will be a visit to the impressive National Museum of Anthropology. It is the most visited museum in Mexico and holds a wealth of treasures from the country's long history. Learn about the Aztecs, Mexico City and Mexico as a whole. After lunch at a local restaurant we will explore Chapultepec Park, a huge park that is filled with a palace, manmade lakes, museums and botanical gardens. As you explore the park and its manicured lawns and ponds it is hard to imagine this was once a dense forest that was sacred to the Aztecs. Return to the hotel in the late afternoon. Dinner this evening will be at a local restaurant.

Day 3 Mexico City. This morning we will head to the pyramid complex of Teotihuacan. It was the first city in the 'New World' built between 250 BC and 700 AD and its population at its height was approximately 250,000 people. However, its origins are a mystery. The city was built a thousand years before the Aztecs arrived in central Mexico and named it Teotihuacan. The site itself shows a patch work of pre-Colombian cultures including Maya, Mixtec and Zapotec. Exploring the archaeological site, we will walk the one kilometre 'Avenue of the Dead' taking in the sheer size of the site and wonder at how it was built by hand. The temple of Quetzalcoatl is considered one of the most beautiful structures of pre-Hispanic Mexico due to its distinctive decoration. It is adorned with 365 reliefs of serpent heads and sculptures of the 'feathered serpent'. After lunch we return to central Mexico City to visit the Basilica of Guadalupe. A cult developed around the site after a Christian convert claimed in 1531 that the Virgin Mary appeared to him. After numerous sightings the lady's image was miraculously emblazoned on his cloak causing a bishop to believe the story and build a shrine in her honour. To this day the basilica

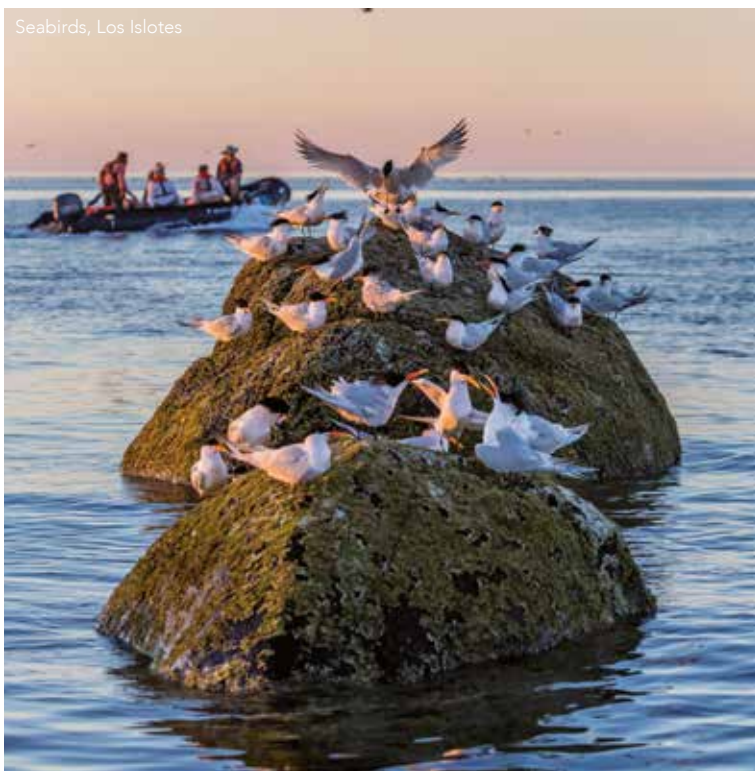


remains a place of pilgrimage and worship. The original basilica built in around 1700 was unable to cope with the number of pilgrims and visitors so in the 1970s a new basilica was built next to it and has capacity for 40,000 people. Return to the hotel for an evening at leisure.

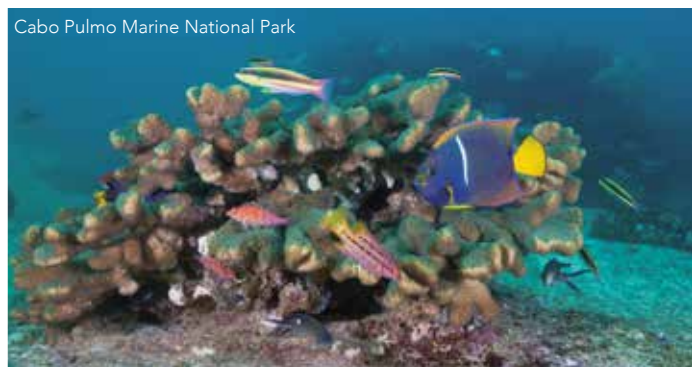
Day 4 Mexico City to Loreto. After breakfast we will transfer to Mexico City airport for the direct flight to La Paz in Baja California Sur. From here we will drive up the peninsula, taking in the mountainous desert scenery and stopping along the way for lunch before reaching Loreto where we will embark the National Geographic Venture. Dinner will be on board this evening along with welcome drinks.

Day 5 Exploring the Gulf of California. The Gulf of California is home to great biological diversity and comprises of 244 islands, islets and coastal areas. The site not only contains 39% of the world's total number of species of marine mammals but is also an area of natural beauty formed by rugged islands with high cliffs and sandy beaches. Today, with some luck we hope to see sightings of whales, dolphins and other sea life on our journey through the Gulf. Our plan is flexible as we explore some of the uninhabited islands sprinkled through the waters. The Captain and Expedition Leader will collaborate to choose the perfect combination of activities for the day. We may go ashore at Isla San Francisco, where a sweeping white sand beach fringes waters perfect for kayaking. Or perhaps we will visit Bahia de Los Muertos to snorkel among the coral.

Day 6 Los Islotes & La Paz. Weather conditions permitting, we will awake this morning off the rock island of Los Islotes where we can snorkel and swim



Seabirds, Los Islotes



Cabo Pulmo Marine National Park



Sea lions

with curious sea lions. Later we will sail to the colourful city of La Paz where we will explore and gain insight into the culture of Mexico. The city was founded by Cortez in 1535 but did not become a permanent Spanish colony until 1811. Its deep harbour was a haven for Spanish galleons while the coves around its bay were hiding places for pirates like Sir Frances Drake. This evening we will have a dinner of local cuisine with dancing and folklore.

Day 7 Cabo Pulmo & Gorda Banks. Today we will start with the option of snorkelling in the pristine reefs of Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, one of the most successful national marine parks in the world. The reef of Cabo Pulmo is estimated to be around 20,000 years old with over 800 species of marine life. There will also be a chance to speak to locals about their advocacy to protect this unique place. We will spend the afternoon searching the seas of the Gorda Banks seamount, a renowned gathering place for whales, especially humpbacks, dolphins and other sea life. Capping off the day will be a majestic sunset over the iconic Friars Rocks at Lands End.

Day 8 Bahia Magdalena & At Sea. This morning if conditions permit, we will explore Magdalena Bay's vast mangrove system via kayak and Zodiac and learn about how these ecosystems support their surroundings. The bay is 50 kilometres long and has about 200 kilometres of lagoons and channels. The mangrove system is the longest in the whole of the Baja California peninsula. The contrast between the vast blue ocean, lush mangroves and sandy desert dunes creates a mesmerising view of colours and textures.

Day 9 Boca de Soledad. Each winter gray whales travel south from their Arctic feeding grounds to breed and raise their calves in these sheltered waters. After breakfast, we will transfer by coach to Puerto Lopez Mateos to spend the full day observing, and with luck interacting, with these majestic creatures. Working together with local fishermen, we board boats to view the numerous mother calf pairs that thrive in this sheltering region. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before returning to the ship in the afternoon.

Day 10 Bahia de Almejas, Rehusa Channel & Isla Magdalena. This morning we will take a bus to Bahia de Almejas, where we will enter the lagoons aboard local pangas. Whales tend to be very active here, seemingly oblivious to our presence and sometimes rather curious and playful. Later we will head to the shore at Isla Magdalena to explore the ever-shifting sand dunes with a cross island walk to its pristine beaches. Birdwatching can be excellent here due to the abundance of seabirds in action.

Day 11 San Carlos to Mexico City. After breakfast we will disembark in San Carlos and transfer to La Paz for the flight back to Mexico City. On arrival in Mexico City we will transfer to the Marriott Reforma Hotel for our overnight stay. There will be a farewell dinner this evening.

Day 12 Mexico City to London. Today we will explore the more contemporary history of Mexico City with a visit to the colourful neighbourhood of Coyocan. Coyocan is known for its cobbled streets, art galleries, colourful buildings and markets. It is filled with leafy parks that gives a village feel and it was also the home of Frida Kahlo. Explore Coyoacan with a visit to the Church of Coyocan, the Fonitca National with its lovely garden and the Jardin Centenario. After lunch we will transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight back to London.

Day 13 London. Arrive today.

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

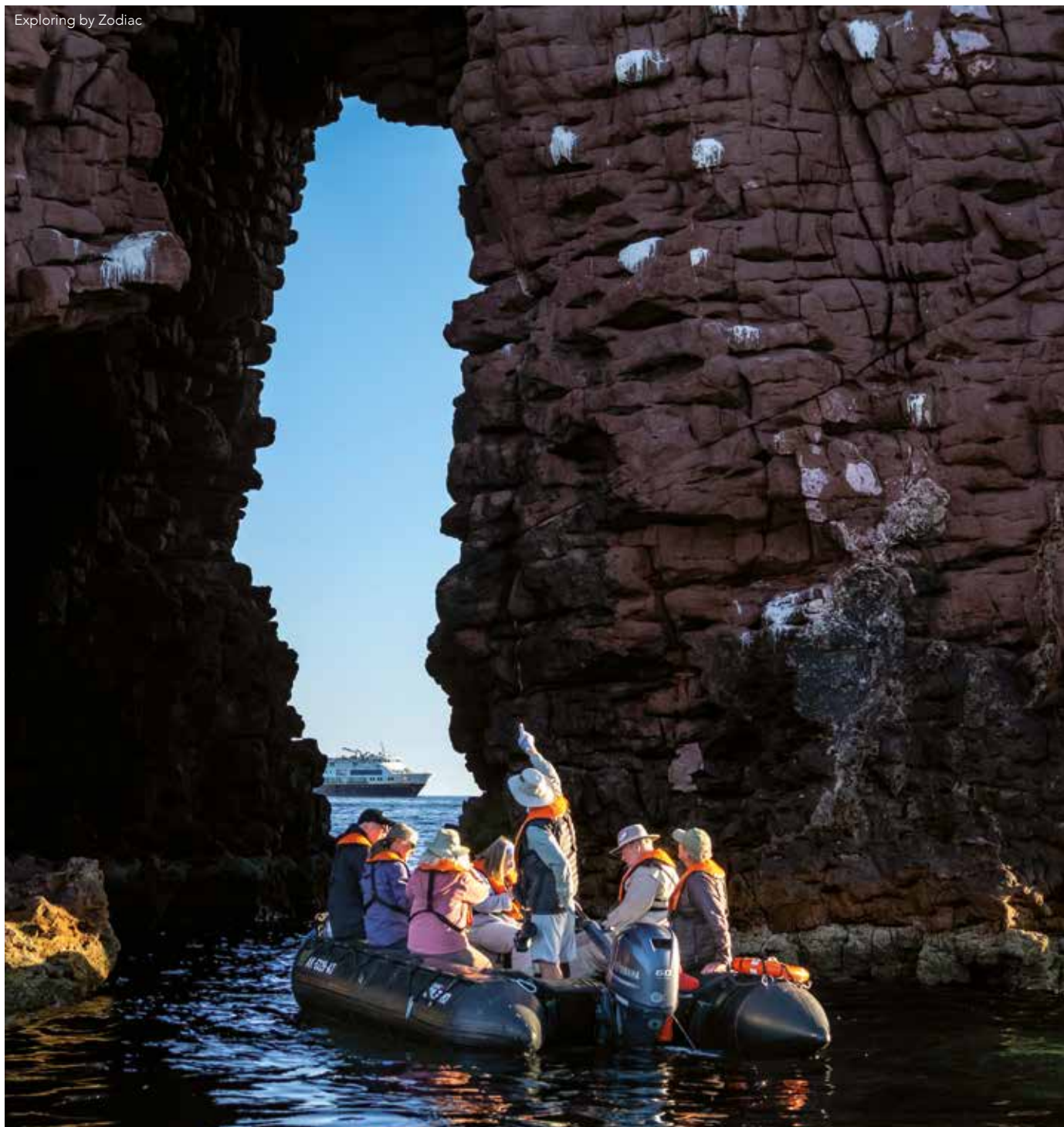
SPECIAL OFFER – SAVE £300 PER PERSON FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY			
Cat	Cabin Description	Brochure Price	Special Offer Price
1	Main Deck with two portholes	£10295	£9995
2	Main Deck with two portholes	£10795	£10495
3	Upper Deck with large window	£11295	£10995
4	Upper Deck with sliding door & small balcony	£11795	£11495
5	Observation Deck Suite with large windows	£12295	£11995
1	Main Deck with two portholes for sole use	£14295	£13995
2	Main Deck with two portholes for sole use	£14795	£14495

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • Four nights accommodation at the Marriott Reforma Hotel, Mexico City • All meals in Mexico City (except dinner on day 3) inclusive of drinks • Seven nights aboard the National Geographic Venture on a full board basis • All alcoholic and soft drinks on board (except certain super-premium brands) • Shore excursions • Onboard expedition team • English speaking local guides • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Gratuities • Transfers • Airport taxes • Port taxes.

Not Included: Travel insurance, premium drinks, dinner on day 3.

NB: Flight schedules are yet to be released and the itinerary is subject to the domestic flight schedules from Mexico City to La Paz and La Paz to Mexico City. Wildlife sightings are a natural phenomenon and cannot be guaranteed.

Exploring by Zodiac



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All special offers are subject to availability. Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request.
Cover image: Grey whale breaching, Baja California.