

# GG

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# Baja California Sur: Beauty Beyond Compare

Exotic and mainly untouched, the biodiverse UNESCO-protected Sea of Cortez awaits adventurers keen on exploring waters that Jacques Cousteau described as the “World’s Aquarium”. Swim amid whales and sea turtles, unearth history at tranquil La Paz, and party at celebrity magnet Cabo San Lucas.

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### 1. *La Paz*

Your journey starts at La Paz, the entrance to the marine life-filled Sea of Cortez. From October through to April, plankton-grazing whale sharks ply the balmy waters of the Bay of La Paz. Baja California Sur's low-key capital boasts a cool boardwalk, beachside restaurants and an historic center with various attractions.

### 2. *Bahia Balandra*

Set your eyes on the aquamarine waters and pristine white sands of Bahia Balandra and you'll understand why it ranks among Mexico's most extraordinary beaches. Shallow, crystalline and wave-free, it feels more like a natural lake. More than a pretty face, it is a conservation zone whose mangroves attract an abundance of fish and birdlife.

### 3. *Isla Espiritu Santo*

Isla Espiritu Santo counts among the 244 uninhabited islands in the Gulf of California Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognised for its global marine conservation significance. Divers can expect to see Mexican goatfish, parrotfish, moray eels, manta rays and even hammerhead sharks. To reach its remote seashell-covered beaches, jump in a kayak.

### 4. *Los Islotes*

If Baja California Sur is the "Galapagos of North America", Los Islotes is the prime location to observe its playful, curious California sea lions. A healthy 400-strong colony presides over the craggy rock islets, the males barking incessantly to establish territory while females fight to safeguard pups. Between June and August, it's closed for mating season.

### 5. *Isla San Francisco*

Arriving at Isla San Francisco and stepping foot on its sand and shingle shores will make you feel like a contemporary Robinson Crusoe. The island features a gorgeous half-moon sweep of sheltered bay perfect for a refreshing dip. A beachcomber's delight, there are countless shells of all shapes, sizes and colours.

### 6. *Bahia Amortajada*

Explore the vast mangrove lagoon

for which exceedingly peaceful Bahia Amortajada is renowned. Forests of cardon cacti lie at the foot of soaring red mountains, contrasting with the deep-green mangrove foliage. Snorkel or kayak along the reef and watch pelicans swoop for the day's catch.

### 7. *Isla San José*

Wild and out of the way, Isla San José receives few visitors. It's blessed with sandy beaches and calm blue-green seas populated with sea birds, damselfish and butterfly fish. Natural pathways, known as arroyos, slice through sharp peaks and allow hikers access to the unique Sonoran desert.

### 8. *Del Carmen Island*

The most attractive of the five main islands that make up the Loreto Bay National Park, this petite patch of land is proof that good things come in small packages. Think swimming in azure seas, canyon trekking and wildlife-spotting. Bighorn sheep are the real bosses of this rocky landscape though.

### 9. *Isla Monserrate*

Low-lying Isla Monserrate draws few cruisers as it's vulnerable to changing winds. That only makes it even more attractive, considering it has beaches you need to see to believe. At Yellowstone beach, bathe in translucent waters, explore reefs and inspect sandstone cliffs.

### 10. *San Evaristo*

Back on the mainland, an insider secret awaits. This tiny, far-flung fishing hamlet looks out over a sprawling, sheltered bay enveloped in fine golden sand beach and interspersed with jagged outcrops. Its humble community works salt flats and supplies shrimps, clams and fish to La Paz using time-honored methods.

### 11. *Cabo San Lucas*

Lying at the peninsula's southern tip, this former fishing town has transformed into a celebrity haunt thanks to fabulous beaches, fine seafood restaurants, upscale boutiques and bustling bars. Beyond the glitz, there are art galleries, thermal springs and waterfalls to explore.

## THE BEST ADDRESSES

### *La Paz*

#### La Paz Cultural Centre

Take a guided tour of the former palace that now hosts art exhibitions and plays

#### Dive with whale sharks

PADI 5-Star Dive Centre Cortez Expeditions organizes dives off La Paz. Aim to visit in October or November

#### Bismarkcito

Join savvy locals who flock to this spot for exceptional seafood

### *Bahia Balandra*

#### El Hongo de Balandra

Check out this unusual, mushroom-shaped rock

Scale rust-hued cliffs and hillsides surrounding the beach

### *Isla Espiritu Santo*

#### Ensenada Grande beach

One of Mexico's most spectacular beaches

#### Birdwatching

Spot turkey vultures, great blue herons and frigate birds

### *Los Islotes*

#### Admire tropical flora and fauna

Dive beneath a natural arch in search of golden cup corals, king angelfish and seahorses

#### Beach picnic

Take the tender to a private cove for a late afternoon beach picnic

### *Isla San Francisco*

#### Views from above

Scale the island's ridge for views of the bay below

#### Paddleboard in heaven

Paddleboard at sunset and look out for bottlenose dolphins

### *Bahia Amortajada*

#### Isla Coyote

Mingle with friendly fishermen who inhabit the island

### *Isla San José*

#### Whale-watching

Keep your eyes peeled for breaching whales

#### Catch dinner

Go clam-collecting at low tide or test your angling skills

### *Del Carmen Island*

#### Beach-hop all day

Choose between Norte Beach, San Julian Beach and Tortugueros Beach

#### Whale-spotting

Humpbacks, grays and even blue whales pass through these waters

### *Isla Monserrate*

#### Sierra de la Giganta

These impressive mountains form the backbone of southern and central Baja California

#### Snorkel undersea caves

Don't miss out on snorkelling the island's undersea caves

### *San Evaristo*

#### Overnight on the beach

Pitch a tent on San Evaristo's beach and wake up to the sound of waves

#### Lupe Sierra's & Maggi Mae

Lupe and his wife Maggi serve fine fish tacos at this beachfront shack

### *Cabo San Lucas*

#### El Triunfo

Sample craft beer, wine and artisanal cheeses at the former silver mining town of El Triunfo

#### Tres Sirenas

Edith Jimenez's Tres Sirenas is a must-do for seafood aficionados