

IN THE U.S. ALONE THERE ARE
79.5 MILLION BABY BOOMERS.
REACH THE BOOMER BUYER.
ADVERTISE HERE.



November, 2013 Issue

Boom^{watch}.

Mon, November 04, 2013

Travel for Boomers.

From the **best** travel writing team in the business.

Each month,
www.WatchBoom.com is at the
fingertips of more than
116,000 Baby Boomers.

Sign up for a **FREE** monthly subscription to WatchBoom.

[Travel](#) [Archive](#) [Contact Us](#)

[Sign In](#)

[AddThis](#)

[Privacy](#)



SAILING THE SEA OF CORTES

By Anne Z. Cooke; Photos by Steve Haggerty



The Safari Endeavour at anchor in Bahia Aqua Verde, Sea of Cortes, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

On this particular February day in the Sea of Cortes, with clouds moving in, tonight's safe harbor could be anywhere: a hidden cove near Espiritu Santo or the lee shore of Isla San Francisco. Anywhere you look along Mexico's Baja peninsula, secluded coves abound.

One thing is for sure. The 86-passenger Endeavour with Captain Jill Russell at the helm is unlikely to encounter another cruise ship. Why should she when there's nothing slick about this magnificently lonely wilderness. A spectacle of arid hills, rocky cliffs and blue waters so clear they seem electric, it can be off-putting. Whales, porpoises, sea birds and some people thrill to the freedom that wilderness demands. But not everyone.

Going off schedule tends to baffle cruise veterans expecting the orderly progression of ports. But the officers on the bridge, watching the whitecaps smacking against the bow, aren't surprised. Captain Jill, as they call her, likes to keep her options open.



Holland America and Carnival each position a ship here in winter, but they stick to port calls at the largest towns: La Paz and San Jose del Cabo on the Peninsula and Guaymas on the Mexican mainland. Lindblad Expedition's 62-passenger Sea Bird goes off the grid in January and February, exploring the coastline's virgin beaches. But only Un-Cruise Adventures does it year around.

Going ashore at Bonanza Beach, Sea of Cortes, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

We'd expected to spend that February day on the beach, snorkeling for angelfish, emerald wrasse, sea horses, even sea turtles. Some passengers hoped to kayak; others planned to hike through the brush-and cactus forest" that looks like a desert but isn't. "We'll be exploring what scientists call a "low elevation deciduously-treed jungle," promised Naturalist and hike leader Paulino Perez during the previous evening's slide show. But with choppy seas and heavy surf, beach landings were put on hold.



Guide and Boatswain Aron Nelson pilots the launch from the beach to the Safari Endeavour, Sea of Cortes, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

So I stood by rail instead, searching for the airy water spouts that announce a whale. Sperm whales and grey whales, humpbacks and blues, even fin whales and giant whale sharks frolic in these blue waters, "the world's aquarium," as marine biologist and diver Jacques Cousteau, whose high profile attention led to the area's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Idling near the rocky pinnacles called Los Islotes we spotted pods of dolphins, sea lion colonies sunning and mobula rays splashing at the surface. Brown pelicans perched on the rocks, jockeying with gulls and blue-footed boobies.

On day three, the wind vanished and sun returned. Heading for the village of Loreto, Un-Cruise's Expedition Leader Mark Hopkins announced signups for the next day's activities. "You can tour the historic town, with time for lunch. Or you can join the bus to Magdalena Bay on the Pacific Coast, to see the grey whales and their calves," he told us.



Blue-footed boobies and brown pelicans ignore the photographers, Sea of Cortes, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

By mid-morning we were seated in four large pangas, motoring slowly across the lagoon. At first, nothing showed itself. But just as it seemed that the trip was a bust, a mottled hump silently broke the surface nearby. Then a second smooth black back emerged with a calf by her side. As the day warmed up, so did the whales, rolling sideways to inspect us with one eye and "spy hopping" straight up between the pangas for 360-degree look-around. A few whales slid next to the panga, as if courting the feel of a human hand. By one o'clock we were ready for lunch at the local cafe, plates heaped with chicken enchiladas, tacos, rice, beans, chile verde, sliced mangoes and a fresh green salad, served with beer.

How much leeway does a cruise ship captain have in a place like the Gulf, where the itinerary is always flexible?

"It's rarely a problem," said Russell. "That's what I like about remote destinations like this one. Big cruise ships depend on stopping at ports with docks, tour buses and shops. They have to go where they're expected. But here in Baja we get to decide when and where to anchor and what to do that day."

It's the kind of flexibility that Un-Cruise makes its mission. "Comment cards and feedback tell us that our passengers want good food, a choice of wines and the little luxuries that matter," says Sarah Scoltock, the cruise line's spokesperson." But they don't want to sit in the lounge and look out the window. They want to experience a place in person, kayaking or paddle boarding, hiking or snorkeling."

Whales and sea lions, rays and birds, coral and cactus; explorers at heart will surely agree: as indefatigable adventurer Jacques Cousteau liked to say, the Sea of Cortes is the "Galapagos of North America."



Take a deep breath, Mrs. Whale. It's time for your close-up, Magdalena Bay, Pacific Coast of Baja California Sur, Mexico..

THE ROUTES: Starting in December 2013, the 64-passenger Safari Voyager moves to the Sea of Cortes to sail year around. Seven-night roundtrip itineraries from San Jose del Cabo include "Baja's Whale Bounty," and "Cousteau's Aquarium of the World." The seven-night roundtrip cruise out Guaymas, mainland Mexico, focuses on the "Marine Miracles of Baja California." The 14-night one-way cruise between Guaymas and San Jose del Cabo explores the "Essential islands of Baja California North and South."

THREE CRUISE STYLES: Ships in the "Wilderness" category focus on active adventure. "Safari" designated ships offer soft adventure with a touch of luxury. The "Heritage" designation offers living history aboard ship and port-side.

RATES AND SERVICES: Cabins are priced per person double occupancy starting at \$2995 in low season. Rates include port fees and taxes, airport transfers, park entrance fees, sports equipment, guided hikes, yoga classes, a wellness program and all onboard guide services. Valid passports are required to enter Mexico. For more, call 888-862-8881 or visit www.un-cruise.com

©The Syndicator, Anne Z. Cooke. Images courtesy of Steve Haggerty©ColorWorld.