

To see grey whales in San Ignacio Lagoon is one thing, to interact with them is another, to have so many whales around the boat wanting to play with you that you don't know where to turn is in a different league altogether.

It is impossible to explain to someone who hasn't witnessed the spectacle, who hasn't been taken into the world of the grey whales, what it is like. But I can tell you that there is nothing like it on earth. No wildlife experience you will ever have had in your life, whether in Africa, Asia, the Americas or the polar regions, can prepare you for the grey whales of San Ignacio Lagoon.

This is the first time I have been in April (my previous visits have been in February) and I have to admit that I was slightly concerned that with fewer whales in the lagoon that it would be a different, and not necessarily comparable, experience. Fewer whales in the lagoon because by now all of the males - and some of the females - are heading north on one of nature's greatest migrations to their feeding grounds in the Arctic.

All of the eastern Pacific grey whales come down to the lagoons on Mexico's Baja peninsula to breed and calve - and they spend a few months here - arriving in late December. The males are here to procreate, but unlike other species they are not selfish about who they mate with and whether anyone else has mated with the same female. In fact, males are known to help another mate with willing females... all very 'hippyish' and 'right on', and they all seem to get along fine!

I needn't have worried of course because the whales were truly sensational. On our first boat ride out into the whale watch zone we saw first one, then two and then three pairs, and then of course many more throughout our afternoon. Some friendlier than others and each 'single' blow was in fact an indication that there was a pair of whales there - always a mother and a calf. The calves are so inquisitive that a passing boat that splashes and squeals with delight is simply irresistible - its a 'must see, must play' toy to be enjoyed for as long as possible. Because boats that splash and sing and whoop with joy are a welcome distraction from swimming up and down the lagoon until its time to leave and head north.

Sometimes being encouraged to the boats by their mothers if they are a little unsure, they open their mouths so we can tickle their baleen, and they roll over and over in sheer delight as we rub and scratch and kiss them. On one boat trip we had no fewer than four pairs of grey whales around the boat tumbling, spy-hopping, splashing, pushing the boat along and just generally having a great time. It surely couldn't get any better... but of course it did. The following day we had six pairs of whales playing with us - and it really was them playing with us - and a further seven or eight pairs 20 to 30 metres away watching and waiting for a chance to come and play too.

... and if you don't believe me, come to Baja with me next year and see it for yourself. Your life will have been irrevocably changed you will have witnessed the greatest whale watching spectacle on earth... but on the whales' terms, not ours. This is their lagoon, it's their place - and let us hope that it always will be.

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