

Lindblad 2-Week Baja Expedition

By Mary Sonnack and Paul Conrow

March 2011

Note from Willamette: the 2012 dates are March 24 - April 7, 2012. There are only 3 category 2 cabins still available!

Key info: Lindblad offers several 1-week trips in Baja, but only one 2-week departure, per year.

Even their naturalists and marine biologists compete to be on the 2-week. It is the only time that some islands in the north end of Sea of Cortez is visited. The 2-week departure is always a photography themed departure. Even if clients aren't rabid photographers, they should consider the 2-week itin. There are more staff onboard so that is an advantage to all. Plus there is more shore time, more sunrise and sunset shots, and more wildlife. Plus, it is the only time to see the "boojum" trees. These are skinny, 100+ ft. tall trees that grow to be 700 yrs old.

Mary said there were several people that had been waitlisted for 2 years to get this departure.

To encourage locals to support tourism and protect the marine life, environment, etc., Lindblad pays them to be "whale watchers" on their trips. They don't need them, but they have found this wage system is working. Also, Mary was surprised how actively the Mexican government is protecting the national parks.

Lindblad was upfront about their March trips; some whales may have already left the area. However, they saw humpbacks, blue, fin, sperm, grey, and beards. at one point, they had a pod of 1000+ dolphins around their zodiaks. Example of Lindblad's attention to detail: they were unable to get the boat into the Pacific to see the gray whales due to high winds. So, Lindblad hired trucks/vans/cars and drivers and took the guests overland to the Pacific Coast, then had pangas waiting to take them into the bay. Mary said it was a brilliant day, even over the really bumpy roads. Totally worth the drive. and they also visited an island, protected by the government, that had over half a million birds on it. The locals used to come out, break all the eggs, causing the birds to lay more. they'd return to harvest these new eggs, and sell them in the markets. Government has banned that and actively patrols, apparently. Mary said several times that Baja is referred to as the Mexican Galapagos, and many of the passengers were so surprised at the huge variety of endemic wildlife.

Finally, Mary wanted to make everyone aware of Lindblad's Conservation Fund, which they introduce at the end of the cruise. Any amount that passengers donate is triple-matched by Lindblad and Lindblad takes no admin fees. And the fund goes to non-profits locally.

AND, if the passenger donates \$250, they get a certificate and can deduct that amount from their next Lindblad trip. Mary and Paul are already confirmed for Galapagos next year, and Lindblad said they can apply this to the already booked trip; doesn't have to be a new booking.

So, they donated \$500, which means \$1500 into the fund, and \$500 off their Galapagos booking. I asked her if Lindblad capped the amount; she had no idea, but wished she'd asked because they would have done much more, since it is "free money".