

Sea of Cortez, Mexico

La Paz | Cabo Pulmo | Cerralvo | El Bajo | Las Ánimas | Isla Partida | Espíritu Santo

Mexico Master - 7-night itinerary

- **Pre-embarkation check-in:** 11:00-17:00 at Hotel El Ganzo*
- **Embarkation:** Hotel El Ganzo, San José del Cabo Marina at **18:00***
- **Disembarkation:** San José del Cabo Marina at **08:30**

*Earlier embarkation and disembarkation are not possible.

Mexico Master operates on a same-day turnaround, so the crew will be busy restocking and preparing the vessel until the designated embarkation time. Guests arriving early who wish to use the Hotel El Ganzo's facilities before embarkation can purchase a day pass from the hotel reception desk.

Additionally, this itinerary involves a significant amount of overnight cruising on the return to San José del Cabo Marina, which can be affected by sea and weather conditions. We can not guarantee the vessel will be back in port for disembarkation earlier than the normal time.

Flights & Transfers

Flights and transfers are not included in the liveboard price.

- **Nearest Airport:** Los Cabos International Airport (SJD)

Los Cabos Airport is approximately 30 minutes drive from San José del Cabo Marina.

IMPORTANT: *Guests are strongly advised to arrive the day before embarkation to allow for flight delays or missing luggage. Flight disruptions are common, and scheduled arrival times are not guaranteed; therefore, travel insurance is mandatory.*

Master Liveboards can not be held responsible for flight-related issues, but we will assist you wherever possible. However, *the liveboard departure time cannot be altered* to accommodate guests' late arrival.

Guests are advised to allow at least 3 hours between disembarkation and their return flight departure time.

Participation in this liveboard itinerary is subject to acceptance of our Terms & Conditions as outlined here: www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions.

Important Diving Information

Conditions in the Sea of Cortez are generally calmer than at offshore Pacific sites, but some diving involves open-water channels with moderate to strong currents, and some sites extend beyond open water certification depth limits.

- **Mandatory minimum certification:** PADI Open Water, or equivalent*
- **Mandatory minimum logged dives:** 10 logged dives

*Advanced Open Water and Nitrox certification are recommended. Divers should also be comfortable with drift diving.

Guests who do not have the minimum certification and number of logged dives, or who our crew feel do not have the necessary skills or experience to safely dive in certain conditions, may be denied participation in some or all dives.

Water Temperatures: 26°-30°C (79°-86°F). Upwellings in some locations can reduce the temperature by a few degrees.

Wetsuit recommendations: Most guests will find that a 3mm full-length wetsuit is sufficient for the water temperatures. However, those who are prone to feeling cold may be more comfortable with additional layers or a 5mm wetsuit. *Gloves are not permitted in Cabo Pulmo National Park.*

Itinerary Details

Departing from San José del Cabo Marina, Mexico Master will head north along the Baja Peninsula coastline into the Gulf of California, covering a distance of roughly 92 kilometres. The itinerary combines the sheltered island waters along the southeastern shores of Baja California Sur with the more exposed offshore seamounts in the southern Sea of Cortez, offering a varied programme across seven nights.

Cruising distances between dive sites are mostly only a few hours, allowing for full diving days at most locations, although there are some periods of overnight cruising.

Number of scheduled dives: up to 20

While we aim to fulfil the number of scheduled dives, weather, sea conditions, wildlife activity, and the National Park authorities' restrictions can all influence the final programme. The following is an example of the day-to-day itinerary outline. The actual scheduling and order in which sites are visited may vary from one trip to the next.

- **Day 1:** Embarkation at 18:00 followed by introductions, safety briefings and dinner. Overnight passage north to Cabo Pulmo.
- **Day 2:** Diving at Cabo Pulmo National Park (morning check dive and 2 afternoon dives)
- **Day 3:** Diving at Cerralvo Island, La Reina and La Reinita (3–4 dives)
- **Day 4:** Diving at El Bajo seamount (3-4 dives)
- **Day 5:** Diving at Las Ánimas (3–4 dives)
- **Day 6:** Diving Isla Pardita and Isla Islotes (3–4 dives)
- **Day 7:** Diving at Espíritu Santo Island (3 dives)*. Overnight cruise to San Jose del Cabo
- **Day 8:** Breakfast at 07:00 followed by disembarkation at 08:30

*The number of dives possible on the final diving day will be determined by guests' flight departure times. We kindly ask guests to ensure they leave 24 hours between their final dive and their departure from Los Cabos International Airport.

Each full diving day is typically scheduled as follows, except where restrictions apply. Night dives may be offered where conditions permit, but are not guaranteed:

- Early wake-up and continental breakfast
- Briefing and dive 1
- Hot Breakfast and relaxation
- Briefing and dive 2
- Lunch and relaxation period
- Briefing and dive 3
- Snacks and relaxation period
- Briefing for dive 4, where possible
- Dinner

Safety and dive briefings are conducted in English, but can also be given in Spanish if required. If you or any of your group do not speak or fully understand English or Spanish, please let us know before you arrive.

Dive Sites

The Sea of Cortez stretches more than 1,100 kilometres between the Baja California Peninsula and mainland Mexico. The southern reaches covered on this itinerary concentrate an extraordinary range of marine life into a relatively compact area: rocky seamounts and island coastlines provide habitat for vast schools of fish and multiple shark species, while deep-water channels deliver the nutrients that drive this ecosystem's exceptional productivity. Wreck diving in this part of Mexican waters is also among the most varied in the country.

While we wish to show you the best diving possible, the safety of all on board is paramount. In the unlikely event we are unable to reach or remain at a specified dive site, we always do our best to offer diving at alternative locations. The following descriptions cover the areas that are usually included; Site selection is at the discretion of your Cruise Director and is subject to sea conditions, wildlife activity, and permit requirements.

PLEASE NOTE: *The inclusion of specifically named sites is not guaranteed*, and there may be dives at sites that are not listed below.

Cabo Pulmo National Park

Typical depth: 8–28m (26-92 ft)

Cabo Pulmo is one of the most significant marine conservation stories in the eastern Pacific. Severely depleted by overfishing by the late twentieth century, the reef was granted National Park status in 1995 and has since recovered to a degree that has drawn international scientific attention. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, the hard coral formations, which constitute the only true coral reef on the Pacific coast of North America, are thriving after three decades of protection, and the fish biomass now ranks among the highest recorded in the Sea of Cortez. One of the many diving highlights is entering a school of bigeye

jacks that can number tens of thousands, a wall of fish dense enough to block the light. Bull sharks are resident for much of the year and are regularly encountered at depth.

NOTE: The *use of gloves and dive knives is not permitted* within the National Park boundaries.

Cerralvo Island, La Reina & La Reinita

Typical depth: 10–30m (33-98 ft)

The southernmost large island in this part of the Sea of Cortez, Cerralvo sits in an exposed position where Pacific and Gulf waters converge, generating the strong currents and good visibility that characterise diving here. The rocky reefs and walls hold substantial fish life, with large schools of jacks, snappers, and grunts, and scalloped hammerheads reliably present around the island. During the early season, mobula rays gather in the shallower water in remarkable concentrations. To the north, the smaller reef structures of La Reina and La Reinita offer diving in slightly more sheltered conditions, with better coral coverage and more time to explore the reef without strong water movement. Conditions across this area can shift considerably from one dive to the next.

El Bajo Seamount

Typical depth: 16–40m (52-131 ft)

El Bajo is a submerged seamount system comprising three peaks that rise from around 60 metres to within 16 metres (52 ft) of the surface, and the topography drives everything that happens here. A thermocline that forms above the peaks draws scalloped hammerheads, and on a good morning, schools of a dozen or more are possible, circling in the cooler water before the sun climbs and disperses them. Oceanic manta rays are a regular presence, and from June onwards, whale sharks move through with genuine frequency. The ridges and boulder fields on the mounts themselves hold moray eels, Pacific creolefish, and dense reef fish populations, and it is worth spending time on the structure rather than focusing entirely on the blue water above. Current can run hard here, particularly on the exposed faces.

Las Ánimas

Typical depth: 10–35m (33-115 ft)

The islet surface tells you one thing about Las Ánimas: there is a California sea lion colony living here, and the animals are in the water from the moment you descend. That is the immediate experience of the site. Below, the seamount drops into deeper water and the character of the diving shifts. Scalloped hammerheads concentrate above the mount in the early morning, mobula rays pass through in the early season, and bull sharks make occasional appearances. Bottlenose dolphins move through regularly, usually on their own schedule rather than yours. The rocky substrate supports dense fish populations and repays slower, more attentive diving between the pelagic activity. Current can be significant, particularly around the exposed faces of the seamount.

Isla Partida & Los Islotes

Typical depth: 5–18m (16-59 ft)

Isla Partida offers a different pace from the exposed seamounts. The sheltered coves and rocky coastline here give varied underwater terrain: boulders, ridges, and sandy channels with good sponge and coral coverage, and resident fish populations that reward unhurried diving. Eagle rays move along the sandy margins, Cortez angelfish work the reef structure, and the calmer conditions make this a good site for macro work and close observation.

At the northern tip of the island, Los Islotes (also known as Isla Lobos) hosts a resident colony of more than 400 California sea lions on a cluster of rocky islets. The sea lions here are genuinely interactive in a way that is hard to anticipate if you have not dived with them before. Juveniles treat divers as entertainment: spiralling, fin-tugging, and blowing bubbles directly in your mask. Diving in the clear, shallow water above the rocky substrate while the colony moves around you is one of the standout experiences this region offers. The site also supports schools of jacks and sardines, moray eels in the crevices, and the occasional hammerhead passing through in the blue.

Espíritu Santo Island

Typical depth: 9–22m. (30-72 ft)

Three wrecks lie in the waters off Isla Espíritu Santo, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site just north of La Paz. Together, they offer one of the most dynamic wreck diving locations in Mexican waters.

The Salvatierra, a 97-metre car ferry that sank in 1976 after striking a reef, now rests on a sandy bottom at around 18 metres. The wreck is encrusted with coral and sponge growth after nearly five decades, and is home to large grouper, moray eels, and schools of fish that move through the hull.

The Fang Ming is a Chinese vessel seized by the Mexican Navy in 1995 following an attempted people-smuggling operation and intentionally sunk in 1999 as one of the first purpose-sunk artificial reefs in Latin America; at 20–22 metres, it is accessible and well-colonised by a variety of marine life, including green sea turtles.

The C-59 has a longer and more distinguished history. An Admirable-class minesweeper built in 1944, as the USS Diploma (AM221), she earned three battle stars for service in the Pacific during the Second World War. The US sold her to the Mexican Navy in 1962, and she was renamed the ARM Cadete Francisco Márquez. After being retired from the Mexican Naval fleet, she was cleaned of contaminants and scuttled as an artificial reef in 2004. Resting on her starboard side at 9–20 metres, her passageways are home to Cortez angelfish and dense schools of fish.

Between them, these wrecks offer a full day of varied diving in calm, sheltered conditions.

Seasonal Highlights

The following highlights are associated with specific periods within the June to September season during which Mexico Master visits the Sea of Cortez. All wildlife sightings are subject to natural variation and cannot be guaranteed.

Mid-May – early July: This is the peak period for mobula ray aggregations in the southern Sea of Cortez. Schools of Munk's pygmy devil rays can gather in vast numbers at the surface and at depth, producing one of the most dramatic marine wildlife spectacles in Mexico.

PLEASE NOTE: *Mobula ray aggregations are a natural phenomenon and cannot be predicted or guaranteed.*

Peak activity is most reliably associated with June and early July, although various natural phenomena play a part in this; departures later in July and into August may encounter smaller groups or passing individuals. Guests booking specifically for the mobula experience are advised to select the earliest available departures in the season.

June – September: Scalloped hammerhead sharks are reliably present at Las Ánimas and El Bajo throughout the season. Whale shark encounters are possible from June onwards.

July – September: Strong fish schooling activity and productive conditions for large pelagic encounters.

Year-round: California sea lions at Las Ánimas; bottlenose dolphins throughout; bull sharks at Cabo Pulmo.

Should you have any questions about the dive sites or whether this itinerary is suitable for your experience level, please contact our reservations team, who will be pleased to assist and advise you: dive@masterliveboards.com