Full Detailed Itinerary - Mexico: Beautiful Baja California

Day 1: Arrival in San Jose del Cabo

After arrival in this resort city at the southern tip of Baja California's Peninsula, you will be transferred to a nice beach resort for the night. Early arrivals can explore the beaches and colonial buildings of the area if desired. There is no birding on this day, so you are free to arrive when you wish, although the tour starts with a dinner meeting and briefing this night, so please try and arrive at the hotel by 6pm. A single night will be spent in a beachside resort.

Day 2: Estero San Jose del Cabo

This part of Baja California is dominated by arid habitats, and so this large wetland, the only coastal lagoon in Baja California Sur, acts like an oasis for waterbirds, provided by this island of rich bird habitat. We will search among the reeds and cattails for one of the major avian targets of the tour, the Belding's Yellowthroat, a restricted range, endangered, species that is endemic to Baja California. At this time of year, the lagoon is loaded with wetland birds, including migrants from the north that supplement the year-round residents, like Least, Western, and Clark's Grebes, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Heerman's and Yellow-footed Gulls, Elegant Tern, Brandt's Cormorant, Least Bittern, Reddish Egret, and a mass of wintering sandpipers, plovers, and stilts. As mentioned previously, the surrounding area is desert, and we will occupy ourselves with the rich avifauna in the surrounding area this later in the day, with birds like Gila Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Vermilion Flycatcher, California Scrub-Jay, Verdin, Phainopepla, and Hooded and Scott's Orioles all possible amongst the cacti. We will be keeping a special eye out for more local species, particularly Xantus's Hummingbird, Gray Thrasher, and Chestnut-rumped Seedeater. At dusk, we will seek Elf Owl, the world's smallest owl, in these deserts too. The night will be spent in a beach town on the eastern side of Baja California Sur.

Day 3: Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de la Laguna

Our second day chasing local avian specialties will take us up into a low mountain range that slices through Baja California Sur. Depending on access and road conditions (roads are rough and need 4x4, or a tough hike), we may be able to find the montane endemic Baird's Junco. Even if we don't locate it, there are plenty of other great birds in the pine-oak woodland in the Sierra; there are a number of local subspecies which we will be keen to see, in case they are split into endemic species in the future. This includes Northern Pygmy-Owl, American Robin, Acorn Woodpecker, Band-tailed Pigeon, Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Spotted Towhee. Other birds of interest here include both Xantus's and Costa's Hummingbirds, California Towhee, and Black-throated Gray-Warbler. After a morning on the mountain, we will drive north to the state capital La Paz. The first of two nights will be spent into the north, in the state's beachside La Paz.

Day 4: Whale Shark Boat Trip & La Paz birding hotpots

This morning our focus will change from birds to marine wildlife and in particular Whale Sharks, when there will be an optional snorkeling session to see them up close too. In the afternoon, we will return to dry land and have some casual birding close to La Paz. There are excellent wetlands in the area loaded with ducks, gulls, terns, shorebirds (including Long-billed Curlew), and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, while frigatebirds

patrol the skies overhead. In the surrounding arid habitats we can find species like Cassin's Kingbird, Cactus Wren, Violet-green Swallow, California Gnatcatcher, and MacGillivray's Warbler. A second night will be spent in a good hotel in La Paz.

Day 5: La Paz to San Carlos; afternoon Gray Whale Boat Trip

During the morning we will drive across the peninsula, heading to the northeast of it, and the coastal town of San Carlos. In the afternoon, we will take our first boat trip out of there to see Gray Whales up close at the very best time to see them. A single night will be spent in the coastal port of San Carlos.

Day 6: Gray Whale Boat Trip 2 and Todos Santos

A second boat trip is scheduled in the morning to study the Gray Whales again. By planning two boat trips we have the very best chance at seeing the whales well, even if there are unforeseen cancelations of one of them. In the afternoon we will make the long drive south to the town of Todos Santos on the southwest side of the peninsula, where we will spend our final night. There may be some time in the late afternoon for some birding close to Todos Santos, where we could find Gilded Flicker, Verdin, or Hooded or Scott's Orioles, as well as plentiful waterbirds in the coastal areas.

Day 7: Departure from San Jose del Cabo

After some brief, final, birding in the morning, we will travel back to the city of San Jose del Cabo for afternoon departures out.

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