

TOUCHING SILK IN THE BAJA

This is my story of traveling to Baja-Mexico in search of a whale to touch

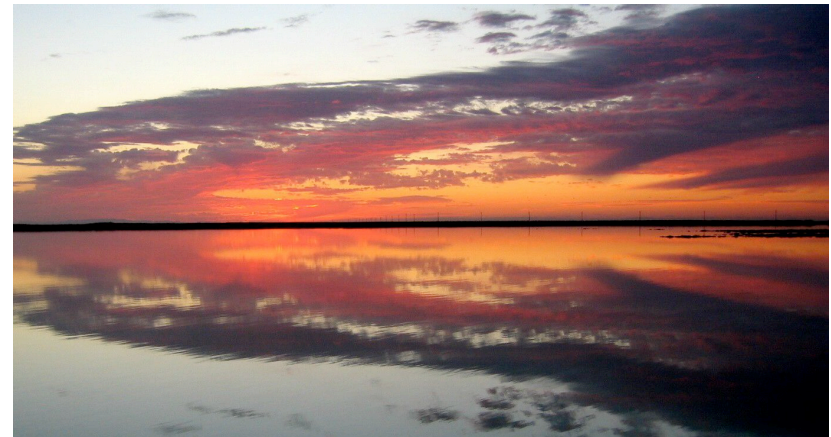


DRAMATIC SUNSETS OF GUERRERO

NEGRO

Normally, the tale of my journey begins from the point when I begin traveling. But this time I think I'll start with the story of my dramatic sunset adventure in Guerrero Negro. After making reservations for a trip into Scammon's Lagoon I found a small motel called Las Ballenas, which means "the whales." I wanted to see the sunset and found out that there was a dirt road leading from town along a dike through the salt ponds, which ended at the old salt works pier. I was lucky to have found the road, as there were no signs pointing out the way to the pier. I was the only person traveling on the old pier road and noticed when I arrived that I was the only one there as well. It was a very rustic place, with an

abandoned lighthouse, a large warehouse, several buildings adjacent to the lighthouse, and a dilapidated pier. When the sun began to set into the Pacific Ocean I took some wonderful photographs of this peaceful, scenic, tranquil, and interesting place.





Lighthouse and Old Pier, Guerrero Negro, Baja, Mexico

Starting to explore the grounds around the lighthouse, I found a heaping pile of very large fan shells. The mound was over ten feet tall and twenty feet wide. There were thousands and thousands of shells in that pile, some of which measured eight inches across. I had heard that clams were plentiful in this area, but wondered



if our oceans' well being will outlive man's insatiable hunger.

I remembered when I had sailed into Cabo San Lucas and landed at the docks there. As I walked along the pier I came upon the area where sports fisherman were hauling in their catch of the day. I was saddened to see several truckloads of marlin being loaded and taken away. There was blood everywhere. The number of marlin that had been killed that day was unbelievable. This could not go on indefinitely, I thought, the sea would not be able to sustain our ferocious appetite. And I could not understand the sport of catching beautiful creatures such as marlin. It would be one thing if these fish were caught for food as a matter of survival. In fact, however,

many were killed for a photograph, and the pleasure of the hunt.



I digress – let us return to my sunset adventure in Guerrero Negro.

The sun along the old pier had finally set and it was beginning to get dark when I suddenly heard a loud blast, the sound of many vehicles speeding down the road, and saw lights flashing as these fast-moving vehicles barreled into the area of the old pier. I saw about eight trucks and SUV's come to a screeching and dust-filled stop around the old boat launch ramp. Some trucks faced the bay and others pointed outward toward the road and lighthouse. The vehicles stopped and men armed with machine guns jumped out. Some ran down to the launch area and others faced out with their weapons at the ready. Luckily, I had not been seen and quickly ran into the lighthouse tower. It was old and dilapidated,

but the stairs spiraled upward. I immediately climbed up to the first-level window and looked out in time to see a fast-moving powerboat skimming along the bay toward the launch ramp. The boat bore down at full speed and at the very last moment, cut its motor and glided into the ramp area. Immediately, men from the truck ran to the speedboat and started off-loading the small bales that were being thrown to them from the boat. These items were quickly loaded into the vehicles. Everything about this operation worked with military precision; within ten minutes the speedboat, was off- loaded and roared back into the bay. The armed men quickly jumped back into their trucks and took off at a high rate of speed. I think I held my breath through the whole event, stunned by what I was watching. By the divine heavens, I had been spared the agony

of discovery. I quickly descended the deserted lighthouse, got in my vehicle (which was parked behind the lighthouse), and drove back into town. That was one dramatic sunset!



Surviving A Sunset In Guerrero Negro

THE JOURNEY TO GUERRERO NEGRO

A year before embarking upon my journey to Guerrero Negro my girlfriend and I were sipping coffee and eating breakfast at the French Bakery & Restaurant in Cabo San Jose, Baja. During our breakfast I explained to her that I have always loved the ocean and all those interesting things that it brings us. Particularly, I always wanted to see the migration of gray whales from the Bering Sea to the warm Pacific lagoons of Mexico. The waiter spoke very good English and upon hearing that I was interested in seeing the migration of whales recommended that I visit San Ignacio and Scammon's Lagoon at Guerrero Negro, Baja. He then said, "You know, it has been said that the laziest people in Mexico are in Guerrero Negro." He went on to

say; "It has been told that two guys from Guerrero Negro were sitting on a park bench when they spotted a brand new 100-peso note across the street. One looked at the other and said, 'I hope the wind blows it over to us.'" I had a good laugh and was reminded that earlier this year a well- seasoned Mexico traveler had told me, "Beware of people from the state of Michoacan—they are very sneaky people. And hold onto to your belongings around people from Guerrero, they are known by all in Mexico to be thieves." Although these warnings were spoken with humor and a laugh, they actually reflect the continuing division among humanity: man's sense of tribalism—his desire to be associated with a group. My observation is that associations and connections that occur through religion, location, ethnic ties, political, or some other type

of grouping have always resulted in conflict throughout history. Mankind seems to identify itself in small groups as opposed to a global, one-brother perspective. Sometimes one wonders if there is any hope for global peace, goodwill, and the fraternity of mankind.

After we drank our coffee my girlfriend and I rode the city bus from San Jose to Cabo San Lucas. During the ride I recalled my first trip to the Baja in 1989. At that time I had a forty-foot sailboat that I had sailed from Newport Beach to Cabo San Lucas and then through the Sea of Cortez. I'd brought along a small moped, which I would unload during landfalls and use to explore the region. At that time there was nothing between Cabo San Lucas and San Jose; both were small villages. However, in the last twenty years this

area has become a vacation destination and has undergone massive development. On my first moped trip from San Lucas to San Jose in 1989 I had come upon a burned-out vehicle lying alongside the road. I could tell that the car had apparently run off the road and had flipped over several times. Nearby there was a cross, indicating that someone had died in the accident. I was surprised at the time that the fatal wreckage has not been cleared. As I sat on the bus recalling these events while looking out the window, I was stunned to see that very same wreck. I quickly stood up and again briefly looked at the wreck. That wreck had now lain there for at least *sixteen years*. The strange thing about this sight was that when I first saw the wreck it lay in the rubble of a barren desert. Now the town had completely built itself around this very wreck.

Some things still stay the same, regardless of progress.



Photo of wreck I took in 1989 - It's still there!

Shortly thereafter I returned home to California, but always kept the vision of seeing the whales migrate to Guerrero Negro.

On night in early January I had a dream about the time I swam with a pod of whales in the South Pacific. The next morning I left my home in California and started driving south to Baja, Mexico. I had no specific plan except to follow my dream to Guerrero Negro.

As I crossed into Mexico I was amazed at the juxtaposition of poverty and wealth. On the one hand you can see poor people walking around who own nothing but the clothes on their back and fueled with nothing more than their hopes and dreams for a better life. At the same time you can see someone drive by in a \$40,000 car. The middle class in Mexico is emerging, but it

still has a long way to go. Regardless, I truly enjoy the country and being among the local people. The genuine kindness, interest, and friendship I have experienced in my travels in Mexico gives me hope and continued optimism that the basic human characteristic of people is their good nature.

Arriving in Ensenada, I took a wrong turn off the primary route and ended up in a suburban area where many of the town's streets were dirt roads. I also saw live wiring dangling from power poles and also on the ground; others were connected to various shanties and homes. I later read in a local paper that a little girl had been electrocuted when she stepped on one of these wires. I wished that, for every time I had heard one of my former colleagues complain about

their wages, they could experience the fear of a parent sending their children out knowing that the surrounding area is strewn with live electrical wire. Or that a dirt road to their home is the best they could ever hope for.

Again, I was struck by the melding of Third World with modern conveniences. Driving down the main street I saw a brand-new MacDonald's, a Costco, a Burger King, all side-by-side with Mexican shanties and street carts where tacos, tamales, and tortillas were being hand-cooked and sold to passersby in the same manner as a century ago.

The journey from Carmel to Guerrero Negro was 900 miles and I arrived in the late afternoon of my second day of traveling. I learned that Guerrero Negro is the location of the largest salt

ponds in the world—and that there were now ten whales in Scammon's Lagoon.



I immediately signed up for an afternoon excursion to see the whales. The guide told me that it was early in the season (mid-January) and that there were three distinct behaviors that the whales would display in the following two months. Apparently, as the whales start arriving

in the lagoon during January they are primarily exploring the lagoon and sounding. Therefore, most of the sightings of the whales will involve observing their flukes. In February as the whales settle in, they engage in breaching activities. And then in March after the baby whales are born, they engage in friendly behavior where they float next to the tour boats and allow themselves to be touched.

I was somewhat surprised by this information. With so much said about the whales in Scammon's Lagoon, it had seemed like whales were being petted there every day during the entire season. So much for the power of advertising and folklore. Perhaps, my lack of research also played a role in this. Nevertheless, as my father once told me, "It's the hunt that is

exciting." I decided that no matter what happened that I had a dream and a vision that I was pursuing and what followed after that would only be karma!

I checked into my \$22 motel and went to see the sunset of Guerrero Negro— and that is where I began my story.

It had been a long journey and that evening I turned in wearily and dreamt of the whales of Scammon's Lagoon.



THE SALT WORKS OF GUERRERO NEGRO

Before going out to Scammon's Lagoon I decided to tour the salt works at Guerrero Negro. I learned that these salt works were the largest in the world; twenty-five tons of salt is harvested daily. The operation is in partnership with the Japanese, who initially financed the operation in 1954. Back then there were no paved roads into Baja and the salt was loaded on barges and with a tugboat pulled out to Cedros Island (several miles from the southern tip of Vizcanso Bay). Apparently, the lagoon was too shallow for oceangoing vessels and freighters from Japan, Africa, and several South American countries, which forced them to pick up their salt from Cedros instead. Flooding low-lying marshes that are encircled by manmade dikes produces the

salt. The water is then left to evaporate under the sun. These dried salt lagoons reminded me of a Canadian winter scene. The salt operation was vast and encompassed several thousand acres.

I recalled that when I had sailed through the Sea of Cortez in 1989 I had come upon several deserted islands that were once producing salt through this evaporation method. These islands were very interesting to explore because when the operations ceased, everything was left in place. There were abandoned homes, offices, small towns, lighthouses and on one island, a complete church. The church was several steps from the ocean and I remember being awestruck by the beauty of the blue skies and the Sea of Cortez as I looked out from the church doors. Exploring that church, I entered the sacristy and

found a gold chalice and crucifix, green silk vestments, and a very large and antique-looking Bible written in Latin. For a moment I was tempted to take the Bible as a souvenir. But I then thought that the wrath of God might descend upon me in the form of a storm at sea. And so I made the sign of the cross out of

respect and left everything just as I had found it. That memory is forever with me. Perhaps the salt works in the Sea of Cortez were abandoned because they were small and unprofitable when the large salt works in Guerrero Negro began operating.



THE WHALES OF GUERRERO NEGRO

After visiting the salt works I met up with our whale watching tour guide and loaded up into a Mexican panga, which is like a large skiff. Our boat driver then took off like a bat out of hell. Unfortunately, I was sitting on the front seat and was getting bounced up and down as the bow of the boat skipped over the waves.



We finally reached the mouth of the lagoon where it met the ocean. We circled around for about thirty minutes and did not see anything. I was beginning to think that it was too early in the season and remembered that the guide had said that so far only about fifteen whales had been spotted arriving into the lagoon. Considering that the lagoon is several miles wide, I started feeling that our chances of a whale encounter were slim. We started to slowly troll along the shoreline. I was sitting against the side of the boat with my right hand hanging over, but not touching the water, when all of a sudden I felt something lightly hit my hand and then something wet and smooth brush up under it. Startled, I jumped up and saw a dolphin just below the surface of the water in front of the boat.

This dolphin had apparently seen my hand and playfully brushed up against it.



The other passengers in the boat also jumped up when I did, but they could not see anything.

Since I was wearing polarized sunglasses I could see two dolphins crisscrossing the bow of the boat, just below the surface. They then surfaced and dove and by then everyone saw them. I quickly pulled out my camera and climbed onto the foremost bow area and tried to take some pictures. The problem with digital cameras is that there is a slight delay between when the camera focuses and the shutter snaps. I looked at my photographs later and ended up with a picture of the dolphin about a foot underwater. My sense is that he was looking back at me and smiling. Several minutes later the dolphins left. I felt like I had just met "ET." A close encounter of the third kind with a dolphin. I felt elated and thought that no matter what happened with the whales, my

trip to Guerrero Negro had already been successful.

We kept slowly trolling around the mouth of the lagoon when all of a sudden I heard a loud exhalation to my left. I saw a large whale spouting and floating along the surface. Two other whales then joined that one. And so for about an hour we circled the area watching as the whales rose to the surface, spouted, and then slowly dove back under.

That day there were no dramatic displays of breaching, close encounters, or deep diving to show off their tails. But I had taken a path less traveled and was enjoying the journey as it unfolded with its many twists and turns toward the fulfillment of a vision, a dream, and a desire.



This in itself made my journey a wonderful experience.

That night in the Motel Ballenas I had a dream. It took me back to the time I was in the South Pacific visiting the Cook Islands. I was on the island of Raratonga and had made acquaintances with an ex-pat New Zealander who was leading diving expeditions around the island. He mentioned that there was a whale pod swimming around the island and showed me several photographs he had taken the previous day. They were incredible, and showed divers actually swimming adjacent to whales. At the time I was not even aware that whales were familiar to that area. I later learned that whales migrated to many places in the South Pacific from the cold winter waters of the Arctic.

Unfortunately, as in many places in the world, the whales had been hunted almost to extinction. But a small pod had made its way to Raratonga and was now circling the island. I signed up and the following morning we loaded up his large skiff with dive equipment and headed out to the spot where the whales had last been seen. I sat in front of the skiff looking forward at the soft blues of the South Pacific and the lush green island to my left. All of a sudden a large whale leapt from the water, its full body extended out from the ocean. It fell back into the water with a resounding cascade of splashes. I was caught completely unaware—and dazzled. The whale then came back out again and again. Like a pirouetting ballet dancer, all the while coming closer and directly toward us. The New Zealander immediately cut the engine and we

went into drift mode. I calculated that the forward motion of the whale and our drift could set us on a course where our paths would cross. The whale was now very close and I pulled on my flippers and donned my diving mask and snorkel. I then dove into the Pacific. The sun beat down on my back and cast a golden and blue prism of light into the depths. I floated, looking to my left, my right, and then ahead. From the blue mist a shadow started to appear directly in front of and below me. I immediately took a breath and kicked downward and ahead. The sun was sending penetrating golden rays through the soft blue waters and it seemed I was diving to the apex of a lighted vortex when all of a sudden from the apex of this prism a whale appeared. We were on converging paths. I then spread my arms and legs, floating underwater, waiting and

accepting where fate had brought me. The whale continued on its path without any deviation and as it came closer I could see that it would pass directly under me. I continued to hold my breath as the whale passed below. I could see all its features and was amazed how it moved silently forward without any motion of its body. I felt as if I was in a state of suspended animation, as if my thoughts were separate from my body and I was seeing everything from another dimension. This scene unfolded around me in silence. I turned as the whale passed under me and watched, as it turned left and continued downward. Deeper and deeper, into the dark blue it continued, eventually fading and fading until it disappeared into the depths of the Pacific. I was completely mesmerized.

As I surfaced I felt very elated and grateful. I sometimes wonder why these types of events always seem to bring us such great elation. I am sure that the answer is that somehow we are all connected. Science indicates that we may have evolved from the ocean and perhaps that is why man has always been drawn to the sea.

When I got back in the boat we and continued our journey. About ten minutes later we spotted a pod of whales spouting and moving forward in our direction. Again I could tell that our paths would intersect on a parallel course. This time as I pulled on my mask and snorkel I remembered I had brought along a \$5 disposable underwater camera. As the whales continued to swim toward us I jumped out of the boat and started to swim to a point where I thought I would be

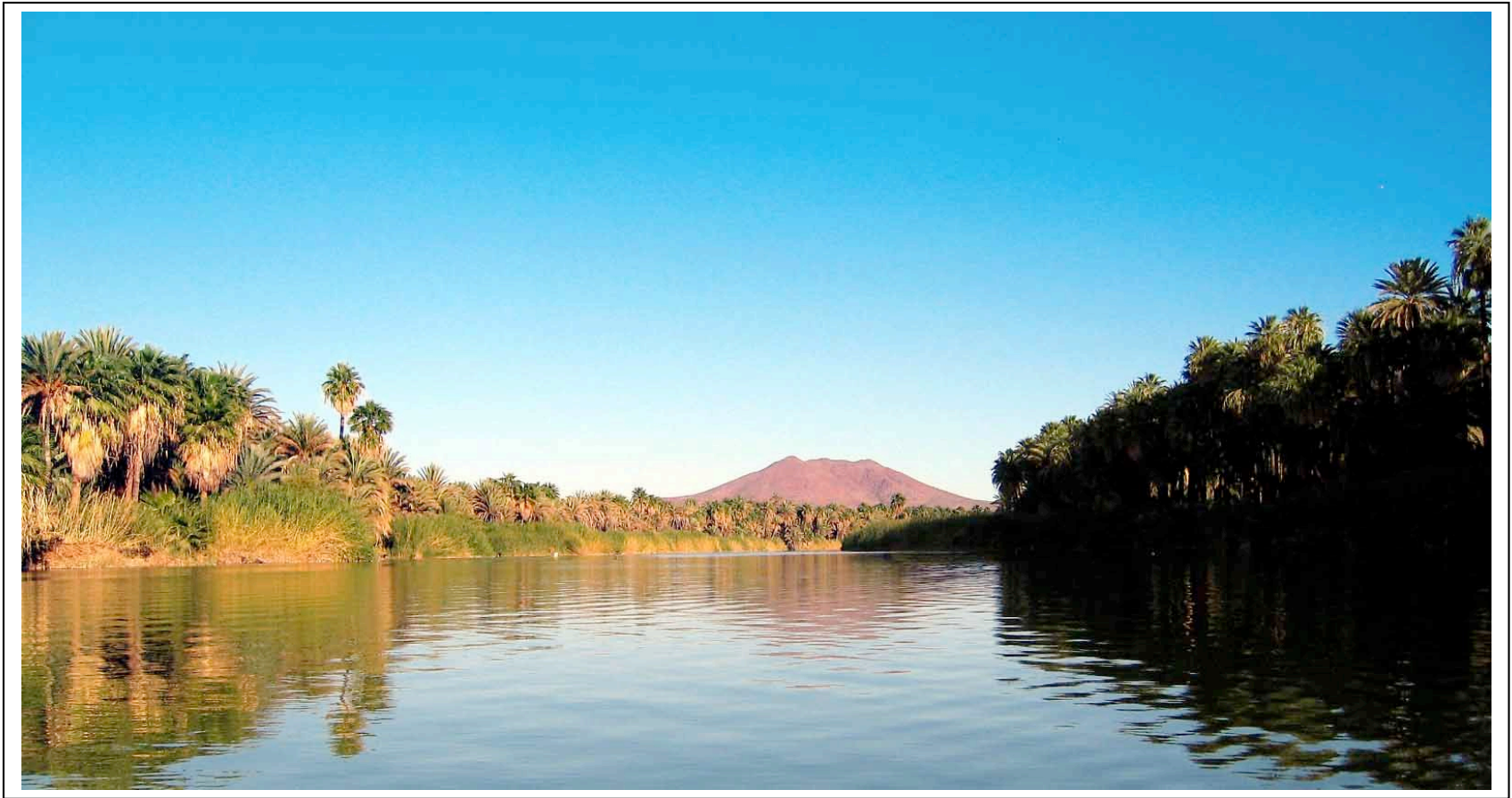
perpendicular to the whales as they swam by. I took a deep breath, descended to about six feet, and continued forward. A mother whale and her calf passed directly in front of me. I snapped a photograph. In that picture, the whales are so close that all you can see is the eyes of the mother whale and the outline of the baby whale's head as it swam alongside her. These events actually occurred. But, in my dream that night I was able to reach out and touch the baby whale as it swam by me.

THE CHORUS OF SAN IGNACIO

The following day I set out for the town of San Ignacio, which is described as an oasis in the desert. A dirt road heads west out of town for about thirty-six miles, ending at San Ignacio Lagoon. Whales also migrate to this lagoon. However, my primary interest was visiting the town's Spanish mission and trying to arrange a tour to see the primitive cave paintings located in the Sierras, situated about twenty-five miles east of San Ignacio. Apparently, San Ignacio is situated in a small valley fed by a thermal spring that flows through the valley, which accounts for its designation as an oasis in the desert. As I drove from Guerrero Negro the landscape was barren and reminded me of the Arizona desert. I could see the tops of thousands of swaying palm

trees as I approached San Ignacio. Turning off the main road, I gained my first impression of San Ignacio, which was that it looked like it was situated in a large gully, not a valley. But then our preconceived notions and home influences often colors, our thoughts and expectations. And sometimes this difference is one of the elements that make a journey such a pleasure. I have often thought that the flowery language of guide books and tourist brochures create a series of visions in our mind that are bound to change once we see a place in real life.

As I followed the road into town, I saw a forest of palm trees. About a half mile down the road a beautiful lagoon opened up to my left. It was a very tropical and tranquil setting.



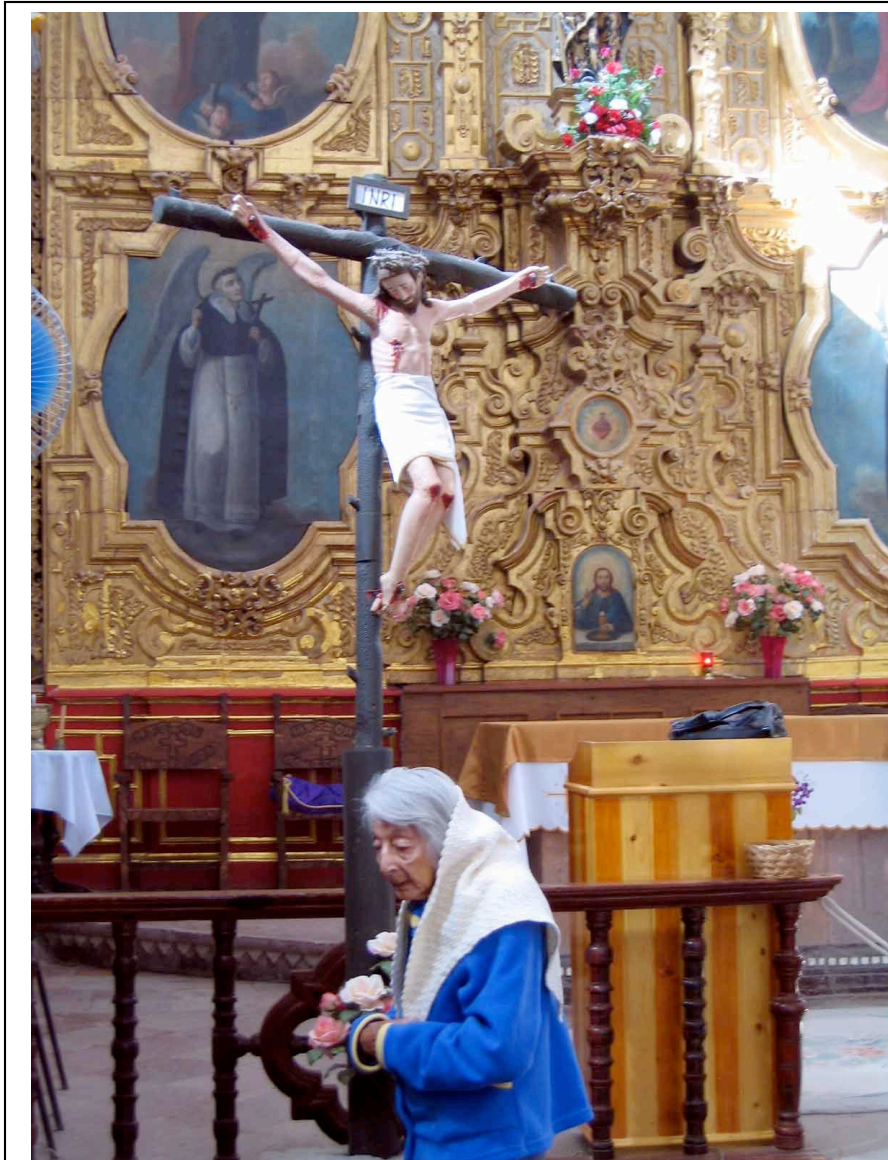
I continued into town and noticed that groups of townspeople were picking up trash and cleaning the roadside. I was somewhat surprised; this was the first time I had seen this type of activity.

These people take pride in their town, I thought. When I entered the town square I felt like I had transported back in time. To my immediate right I saw a beautiful church built in the old Spanish mission style. I pulled over to look at the structure and photograph it. Approaching the church I heard a chorus of young voices melodically singing from within.

I entered and saw that the townsfolk were gathered for Sunday mass. It had been a long time since I had attended service, but something was drawing me there. I saw the men and women whose faces were carved by the toil and

the desert elements. I wanted to be there and felt both a great kinship and a great sadness. Tears welled up in my eyes as I heard the chorus of young people singing. It sounded like a sad, longing prayer for the dream of better days to come. People were lifting up their arms to God and praying as they received the holy sacrament. All the while a heartfelt, happy, soulful, and sad chorus sang. I made the sign of the cross and thanked the Lord for my good fortune.





EGRETS, MOSQUITOES, AND A DREAM

REALIZED:

After settling into the Posada Hotel I decided to return to the San Ignacio fresh water lake to enjoy a cold beer. There I started talking (in my broken Spanish) to the owner's wife and learned that the lake was about one and a half kilometers long and that it ended at the source, which bubbled up from an underground spring. She said that the water was only waist deep at the source and that it would be delightful to swim there. With my very limited Spanish, I was amazed that we were actually able to carry on a conversation that covered a full range of subjects. We used simple words, sign language, and a lot of smiling and laughing. Communication

is as much about laughter and goodwill, as it is about the effort at the spoken word.

It was a beautiful, sunny day and the lake was tranquil and surrounded by lush palm trees and all manner of greenery. The scene was too inviting and the adventure too interesting to pass up. So I quickly changed into my swimming shorts, got into a kayak, and started paddling to the source.

The lake was filled with a variety of birds, some of which had migrated all the way from Canada. The paddle up the lake was very easy and pleasant. I was the only person there. Oh, what solitude. Arriving near the source, I noticed an egret along the bank fishing for its meal. I decided to float the kayak as close as possible to the bird and then try to photograph it as it spread

its grand wings for flight. I drifted closer and closer to the bird, holding my camera at the ready, eye at the lens finder and finger on the shutter button. All of a sudden the egret started to spread its wings. I quickly pressed the shutter. The bird started flying directly over me and with the camera still to my eye and with my head, neck, and back arched upward, I followed the bird as it was flew directly above. Now, mind you, this all takes place in a matter of a millisecond. Well, just as I was about to take my next shot the egret decided it was time to relieve himself. And the center of my forehead was the intended target. Oh, egad! Holy smoke! I immediately put my camera in a plastic bag and jumped into the lake. And that is how I came to swim in the source of San Ignacio's warm water lake.



After my lake swim I went to the town Internet café, which is where the town guide organizes whale and cave painting trips. He told me there were no other tourists in town that wanted a cave painting excursion. But there was room for another person to see the whales in the Bay of San Ignacio. Although I had already done the

whale-watching excursion in Guerrero Negro I decided to take the San Ignacio trip as well. After all, the genesis of my journey had been stories from this lagoon.

That evening as I turned in I felt content and grateful that good fortune has smiled on my life and that I was able to experience this journey. I lay there in the dark drifting off to sleep, but then I began to hear a slight screeching sound in the air. It came closer and closer. If anyone has ever heard the sound of tiny wings flapping a million times a second, they would shudder knowing that a mosquito is overhead—and is observing its next meal. That sound is like chalk grating and screeching over a chalkboard. I went from twilight sleep to an immediate state of alertness. I froze and listened and readied my hands. All of a

sudden with lighting speed I swatted the air with all my might, hoping to squash that intruder. Then there was silence. Ah, I got him, I thought. I then started to doze off again ...until ever so lightly I could hear that mosquito's return. Fully alert, I again chased the evil intruder. The battle raged all night. I remembered that one of the worst nights I spent in my life was lying on a jungle floor in Vietnam covered with mosquitoes. The mosquitoes were horrid and there was no winning, for they owned the night. It was sheer agony. After that experience when someone would complain frivolously I would tell him or her to go sleep on a jungle floor for a year and then come back and complain. Some things never change, as the mosquitoes of the La Posada Motel were masters of the night. I finally threw the cover over my head and fell sleep (although

throughout the night I could hear the mosquitoes flying overhead trying to penetrate my defenses).

I awoke the following morning to clear skies and a sense of anticipation about the start of my journey. It was about thirty-six miles to the lagoon along a dirt, gravel, and washboard road. The journey was slow and I was thankful for the soft seat and good suspension system of the van that was taking us to the lagoon. My fellow travelers were an Italian couple from Torino and an elderly gentleman from Munich. However, I must remind myself to use the term “elderly” with caution. When I was fifty I bought a ticket at the movies and the sixteen-year-old boy in the ticket booth asked me if I wanted a senior ticket. I was actually speechless when he said that to me.

And the clock keeps ticking, in only one direction—forward. So my wisdom to share those dreaming of grand voyages and designs is simple: Just do it!

The landscape along the route was desert-like with magnificent vistas abounding everywhere. Also, along the way there were



signs that pointed out various dirt roads leading to small villages and other settlements. A precise road map of Baja California would show that there is only one major north-to-south road through the peninsula. And it seems that the great majority of roads that lead to the small villages are dirt and gravel. Some of these are almost impassable.

The trip to the lagoon took almost two hours; we were very happy to reach our destination. Looking at the lagoon gave me a great sense of joy, anticipation, and happiness. A complete whale skeleton lay along the shoreline, with many of these bones strewn about. We immediately put on our life jackets, loaded into the panga, and motored off to where the lagoon met the ocean.



We were out for about ten minutes when I saw several whales spouting in the distance. As we neared them I got my camera ready and was looking at the water in front of the boat when our guide yelled to us. I turned around and saw a whale with a third of its body sticking up vertically in the air, watching us. This behavior is called eye or spy hopping. Some think this behavior is actually related to a whale rising up from the

water to observe something. It seemed as if the whale hung in the air for several seconds and I was able to take a photograph during that time.



We started off and within several seconds the whale had circled our boat and again did the same vertical behavior. It was a magnificent sight—I was elated. In the past I had seen whales showing off their flukes, breaching, and spouting, but this was the first time I had personally witnessed this vertical behavior.

We continued toward the ocean and encountered many whales spouting along the way. There was one set of whales that were being followed by three playful dolphins. As we neared the dolphins they came over to our boat and frolicked about, swimming along our side, under, and around the boat. Sounding, jumping, twisting, turning, and diving. Watching these friendly creatures was delightful and I could not feel anything but kinship with them.



The whales were apparently late arriving into the waters of Baja California and I realized that my grand expectation of having a close encounter with a whale might not occur. Nevertheless, I was very content and thankful for my experiences along my journey to San Ignacio.

We kept slowly trolling in the lagoon and spotted a large whale that was accompanied by a smaller whale. As we drifted closer I could see a large

gray floating about three feet under the water, next to the boat. This animal was at least thirty feet long. As our boat drifted so did the whale. Since I was wearing polarized sunglasses I could easily see through the sun's reflection over the

water. Another whale then started to come into focus. Both whales then started to simultaneously rise to the surface alongside our boat. It was a mother and her calf.



The mother whale's head was encrusted with barnacles, which gave it a sand, brown, gray, and white color. The whale stayed there, right next to the boat. I could have reached out and touched it. I felt it was calling to me, "Touch me—I want a close encounter with a human" But I was too busy taking a photograph and then whale started sliding back, and down under.



Amazingly, it only went down about three feet and continued to follow the drift of our boat. We started splashing the water with our hands; the small whale then surfaced next to the boat. I could see it was a baby, a calf. It looked like it was the length of a Volkswagen bus, but thinner. Its skin had no barnacles and was a shiny dark gray or black color. It surfaced at the mid-section of the boat and the Italian lady was able to reach over and pet it. I was in the forward section of the boat and as I leaned over the whale dove under, and I missed touching it by inches. Another whale watching panga came along and our guide stood off to the side to let them experience an encounter. The two whales continued with their friendly behavior and I heard one of the passengers exclaim that she had petted the baby whale.



That boat slightly rocked out of the water as the large whale arose under its front bow. I then started splashing the water with my hand trying to entice the whales back over to our boat. It worked! They turned around and started gliding over toward us. The mother whale came directly alongside our boat and started to rise up. Her baby eagerly came along and floated over its mother as she rose out of the water.

The baby whale was literally lifted out of the water and started wiggling on its mother's back. Gently, it slid off its mother near her fluke area and away from the boat. The mother whale then swam under the boat. I was transfixed, staring at her midsection. The whale guide yelled and I turned around to see that the whale had lifted its head and was looking at my backside. I quickly

turned around, leaned over, and placed my fully extended hand against the whale's head. It then slid gently forward and under.

How can anyone describe in words the sights, sounds, and feelings that an encounter such as this can bring about? I can tell you this. Before I touched the whale I would have guessed that it would have felt like placing my hand against a hard, wet car tire. However, it felt like soft silk!

I had a vision, I had a dream, I had a desire, and I followed it to San Ignacio. In my memory I can hear the sad chorus of the young singers in that church, and I can feel the tears well up. I can also see smiling and happy faces. I have seen the salt of the earth, and know that there is a promised land—for everything.

Touching Silk In The Baja

