

Socorro

by Michel Braunstein

Islas de la Revillagigedo, better known as Socorro, is a small archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, South West of the Baja California region in Mexico. The archipelago includes four islands called Sorocco, even though this is actually the name of one of the islands..

The San Benedicto, Roca Partida and Socorro islands are generally accessed during the regular live aboard trips (9-10 days), which the remote Clarion island is only reached during the 12-15-day live-aboards.

Many pelagic species can be found in the area, including all kinds of sharks like silver tips, white tips, black tips, hammerheads, tiger sharks, whale sharks and even rarely the great whites. You can also find all kinds of huge fishes or fish shoals, dolphins, false killer whales, and many more.

The huge manta rays are probably the most impressive and the most elegant of all species in that area and they are well integrated.

The last time I was as excited and didn't know what direction to look as the mantas were coming literally from everywhere, was in Yap, Micronesia and a bit in the Maldives. What makes the manta diving

experience so different between Yap, the Maldives, and Socorro, is the actual size of the mantas themselves. In Socorro, they are HUGE!!! The mantas are all 5 to 6 meters wide, double the size of the species in the far eastern destinations!! Meeting the mantas at the El Boiler dive site located in San Benedicto was

so intense and pleasurable, we can almost call it an orgy.

The fact that they keep very close to the divers and seem to like so much to “fly” over our bubbles is quite funny. Even though the mantas look like they are swimming away, there is no need to catch up with them, as they are coming back.

Here, you can find two types of mantas. The first type is the black manta, which, as its names tells it, is completely black on the upper and lower sides, with only a few white traces on the belly. The second type is called “chevron”; it is white on the lower side and black with some artistic design on the upper side.





We had the opportunity to encounter bottlenose dolphins on a few occasions, mainly during the first morning dives; then, they leave to the open sea. At times they come back, like on the Socorro island, and you can see them again during a later dive. What can possibly make a diver happier than meeting some joyful dolphins in the wild? Our divemasters told us stories about dolphins imitating them by standing in front of them, very much like the divers stand at the safety stop for example. In other cases, the dolphins are doing some movements and they wait for the diver to do the same... I did not have the chance to witness that but the dolphins

I saw came to greet us quickly. However, I had the great opportunity to witness an amazing scene of three dolphins performing a synchronized dive while a manta ray was swimming in their background. What a delight! As a photographer, spotting that kind of scene from a safety stop, much too far to take a proper picture of that beautiful scene, made me a bit nervous!!

Sharks are fully present all over the islands. Silver tips can be found in large quantities at the cleaning stations and so are white tips.

In many places in Roca Partida, white tips can be spotted resting in groups, laying on top of each other.



We also saw hammerheads, usually when diving into the blue. Socorro does not have the same breathtaking wallpaper view featuring many dozens of hammerheads, like you can enjoy in the Cocos Islands, Malpelo, the Galapagos Northern Islands, or Wolf and Darwin, but there are still quite a bit of them. Hammerheads are mostly swimming alone and sometimes you can see them in groups of two or three; if you are lucky enough, you can see pods of 10-15 hammerheads.

The Galapagos sharks are quite large and widespread.

Silky sharks will sometimes swim along with you all the way back

to your safety stops. They migrate during the end of May and June, sometimes in groups of about one hundred. A few years ago, a pod of over one thousand was spotted in Roca Partida.

We had the chance to spot six different species of sharks swimming together in the "El Canyon" dive spot cleaning station, in San Benedicto. This raised our adrenaline so high.

BTW, our first dive day was in El Canyon and was rather uneventful. However, when we came back, our last dive day was full of action; there were lots of sharks, mantas, and dolphins. It was super-exciting! Real hardcore!!



Whale sharks and tiger sharks are supposed to live in the region, but I didn't see any during my trip. The great white was seen on rare occasions.

During the season, it's possible to spot the humpback whales' migration. They stop around Roca Partida to rest for 2-3 months (between January to March) during their migration to Hawaii.

Besides the pelagic fishes and other turtles, you can find some beautiful reef fishes in the archipelago, especially in the Socorro hike dive spots. There is also some amazing micro life, even into the blue. Honestly, you should not have to travel to see these while you have so many amazing big animals swimming around.

Dives can be quite eventful and have lots of currents; that's always a good thing as these types of dives bring about a lot of life and action.

From your dive ship, you embark on a panga (Zodiac) that brings you from and to and from the dive spots.

Because of the intensive diving schedule and great depths (4 dives a day at 30 meters), it is best to dive with Nitrox, to avoid decompression stops.

The sun is always very present, even if sometimes hidden by clouds. If you have a nice shiny head, like I do, make sure to protect it with



a hoody or another type of hat while you are on your way to and from the dive. The sun won't be forgiving if you forget to protect your head and it will burn it real hard... of course this advice is not only true for the head.

Live-aboards leave either from La Paz, San Jose del Cabo, or Cabo San Lucas, in the Baja California region, Mexico.

My trip was scheduled kind of last minute because I had to travel to the region; so I thought it was a good idea to plan this dream adventure and add it to my trip. First, I checked with the Nautilus Fleet, which is great, but I could not book with them since they had no space available for the dates I was able to join. Then, I checked with the equally amazing Solmar V; they were very responsive, accurate, and professional; I was fortunate to be able to book with them.

The trip did not start as well as it could have. A short time before leaving my hotel in Cabo San Lucas to the Solmar V at the marina, I got an urgent message inviting me to a meeting at the Hotel Bahia. There, we met with Jorge Hauser, Pelagic Fleet's (Solmar V) CEO, who told us that one of the boat's engines was defective that it would take a few days to repair, and therefore we wouldn't be



able leave as planned. However, another boat, the "Southern Sport", was promptly set up to leave two days later with the entire Solmar team. The Solmar V company really dealt with this unpleasant situation quite gracefully; they paid for all the expenses due to flights and hotels modifications and cancelations. They even offered all the participants a free voucher for a future trip to Socorro or Guadalupe. Shit happens, but they handled it all with the greatest care. Chapeau for the amazing and speedy organization.

So, we began our trip with two days delay, but who cares, when you come back with so many beautiful experiences and pictures in your



head. I was also amazed by the professionalism and the devotion of each member of the team, Nacho, Daniel, Hex, Andres, Crazy Luis, Paloma, the amazing cook....

The crossing from the continent to the Socorro Islands takes slightly over 24 hours on a sea that is not always the quietest. Even if you're not used to being sea-sick, you can still feel nauseous; make sure you bring along some motion sickness meds, just in case.

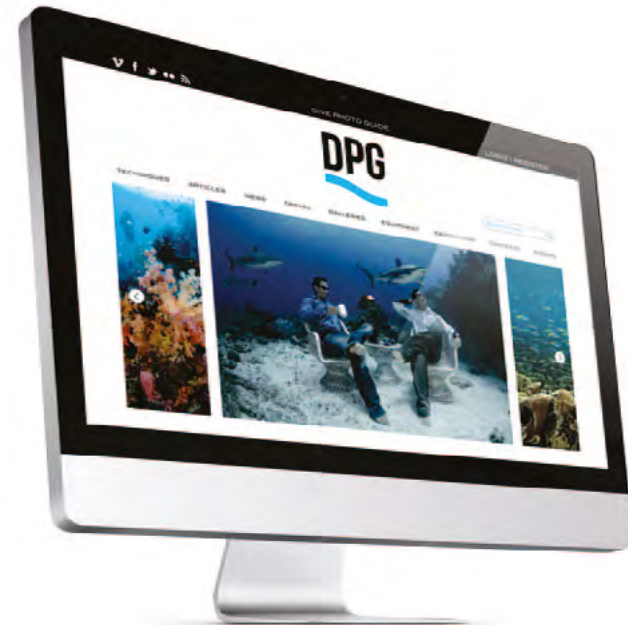
At first, I thought that there would be many Americans onboard, but there was only Liah, a cute young lady who had just finished college and who was the most amazing underwater model. There was also

a super cool group of Mexicans, all under 30, with whom I had the best time both onboard and below the surface.

So, if after this article, you are still not convinced, you should go and see by yourself and book your trip to Socorro; let me just add that, holy guacamole... Mexican food is so damn tasty, probably among the tastiest in the world (the competition is hard!)...and when you eat Paloma's meals, you will forget all about your diets while onboard. That was sooooo yummmmmmyyyy mhhhhhhhhh delicious!!!!

Michel Braunstein

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