

sealions and still love every minute, but La Paz does offer numerous other dive sites, including some interesting macro subjects. Luke's right hand lady, Afelandra, is a local nudibranch specialist and has found and named new species in the area in spite of her young age. She was very keen to take us out to one of the macro sites they have discovered, whale island, and we dived on a sloping wall hosting several species of nudibranch and other fine La Paz macro subjects. Also of note, whale sharks are consistently seen in the last months of the year in La Paz although these tend to be in murkier, more plankton rich waters than those you might see on the other side of the continent at the Isla de las Mujeres.

Besides the diving in the area, La Paz is one of the coolest and most vibrant towns I've visited for restaurants, bars and general liveliness. Three and four generations of local families walk, bike, scoot together along the seafront 'known as the Malecón. We even saw someone walking a goat!

Our hotel, The Seven Crowns was placed right in the centre of the Malecón walkway and suited us perfectly. Again everything was arranged smoothly and expertly by our host, Luke. La Paz is also home to one of the most prestigious universities for Marine Science in Mexico. This meant that as we were spending time with Luke and Afelandra, we were constantly surrounded by people, both young and older, besotted with all things ocean related, keen to chat passionately about their areas of research with infectious enthusiasm. We also spent a nice dry day walking around the Whale Museum which is very much worth the time spent and we came out brimming with new knowledge about Cetaceans and the development of life in the Sea of Cortez.



Frolicking Californian sea lions, Canon G7X2, Nauticam housing, Nauticam WWL-1, F6.3, 1/200, ISO 400

I hope this brief article has managed to reflect some of the fun and excitement that we felt visiting Baja California and the Sea of Cortez. I'll be running a guided photo trip in October 2018 if you want to put it into your diaries right away. It will be special, with some surprises guaranteed.

Essentials

Flights – We flew via Las Vegas for the DEMA dive show but coming directly from London you would usually fly via Mexico City into either Cabo San Lucas for Cabo Pulmo or La Paz airport itself.

Operator – Without hesitation I would recommend a package through Luke at Cortez Expeditions. He has lived in La Paz for 20 years and knows the area extraordinarily well including sites that are off the beaten track. His new boat is ideally

Beautiful soft coral cups, Nikon D500, Nauticam housing, 105mm VR macro, F22, 1/200, ISO 400

suited for between 2 and 6 divers and he prefers to run a more personalised service than a larger scale operation. He prides himself in the sustainable practices of his operation and invests in the local community for supplies and staff. He has also hosted such big names as the BBC and world on major productions with some large production houses. Contact him at www.cortezexpeditions.com he will be able to fill you in on anything you need to know and arrange a bespoke trip depending on your requirements.

Seasons

There are peak periods to visit the area depending on what you are aiming to see. The optimum season for sealions is September-October-early November as the adults will not be as protective over their pups which are already growing in size. Water temperature varies considerably over the year so this should be taken into account if you prefer warm waters. Again October-early November brings in the warmest waters, this dropping off towards the end of November where winds can pick up. We lost two days diving due to Northerly winds preventing us from crossing the channel to the sealion colony, but



these dry days were a pleasure in La Paz, eating, drinking margaritas and generally bimbbling about. Contact Luke again for information on peak times for specific fauna visits.

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Alorese fish traps

by Gilles Brignardello

Fish traps in Alor are one of the favourite subjects that UW photographers and divers often mention; Alor is the only place where they have seen them...

As man hunter evolved so did his fishing tools; and the purpose of his hunt... Today we have recreational fishers doing it for fun and challenge, the commercial ones for profit and the traditional ones most often for their food. Sometimes they all share the same technique and sometimes they differ greatly.

There are still corners of the world where tradition exists as if suspended in time. In Indonesia many fishermen in remote coastal villages still use a traditional bamboo woven fish trap named “bubu”. Often times its shape is cylindrical and its open end is narrowing inwards. The fish is attracted by a bait placed inside the “bubu” and is guided towards it through the elongated entrance. Once inside the fish is trapped since it hardly ever finds its way out to freedom...

Bubu comes in various shapes and sizes, from rectangular and trapezoidal to half rounded or conical. Based on its use it can also

be categorized into a ground, floating or a drifting bubu as well as a special type used in a tidal belt. Bamboo traps were initially used in rivers, lakes and swamps and eventually found its use in the sea as well.

In Alor Archipelago the fishermen use cylinder shape ground fish traps to catch small to middle size fishes. There are several dive sites in Pantar Strait where it is almost guaranteed to see the fish trap serving its purpose underwater but the sight is often heartbreaking to the divers since the trapped fishes are often the colorful coral reef fish like a butterfly fish, damsel fish, anthias, trumpet fish and surgeon fish. But rest assured nothing goes to waste and everything is relative – what is an aquarium fish for one person might be an important source of protein for another one.

On the islands Pura and Ternate weaving of a fish trap is an artisanal craft and the knowledge has been passed down through generations from fathers to sons. Pura and Ternate are the two islands in Alor that rely heavily on the daily fish catch either for immediate consumption or for preserving the catch (salting and sun drying method) for months when the

