California Gray Whale Watching

Mulege and Laguna San Ignacio, Baja California

Mulege is a small sleepy “Old Mexico” town located about two-thirds the way down the Baja peninsula on the Sea of Cortez. It is conveniently positioned on the eastern side of the Baja Peninsula just a half hour flight from “The Whales” in Laguna San Ignacio on the western side of Baja. Mulege has a web site, http://www.mulege.net/ that is well worth exploring.

Paul Kutler, one of our CFIs, who has just returned from a trip to the Baja, will lead this year’s trip. We will leave on **Friday, February 26th**, returning on **Monday, March 1st, 2010**. Our hotel in Mulege will be the Hotel Serenidad, right on the airstrip (http://www.hotelserenidad.com/). This renowned hotel has been catering to pilots for over 40 years. We will be staying there for 3 nights.

The **deposit** this year will be $100 per person. Of this, $75 will cover all the reservations required for the trip and will automatically be applied to your hotel bill upon arrival. It is a non-refundable deposit unless you give a 10-day notice or you can find someone to take your place.

**A ground school** will be offered, Tuesday, February 16, 2010, from 7-8:30 PM, to the pilots just before the trip. This ground school will include everything a pilot will need to know to complete a generic international flight. Additionally, it will cover our trip to Mexico, crossing the border into Mexico, flight planning in Mexico, all the dos and don’ts once in Mexico, exiting Mexico and entering the USA northbound. Customs, immigrations, insurance requirements and general declarations will all be covered. The cost of the ground school will be $25. This will include a written summary, and a step-by-step checklist for use on the trip.

**Very important**, as from January 2007 no person is permitted entry into the United States of America without a valid passport. If you plan to go and don’t have a valid passport, you should get one immediately. You can apply for one at the Palo Alto Main Post Office located on the corner of Bay road and Laura Lane on the airport side of 101, just West of Embarcadero Road. In addition, you will need to enroll in eAPIS (Electronic Advanced Passenger Information System) with Customs and Border Protection. This can easily be done at https://eapis.cbp.dhs.gov/. It takes a little bit of time to get your account set up with them, so this should be done early. Its use will be explained in the ground school.

So, **how do you sign up**? Simply go to the Sundance Flying Club web site and click on the Baja Map on the right hand side. This will take you to the Mexico trip registration page.
FAQ

Q: Who can join the trip?
A: Anyone! You do not need to be a Sundance Flying Club member to go. If you want to take your own airplane, that is fine.

Q: I am not a pilot, does that mean I can’t go?
A: If you want to go as a passenger, simply indicate that, and we will find you a seat on one of the airplanes that are going. You will share the airplane costs with the others in the plane.

Q: I want to take a Club airplane. What do I need to do?
A: Register as a pilot and book the airplane of your choice as soon as possible. We will need to arrange some details for you and so will need to know as soon as possible.

Q: What pilot qualifications do I need?
A: A private pilot is all you need. Our flights in Mexico are restricted to Day VFR.

Q: I am a low time pilot. Can I go?
A: Yes. This is a wonderful way to time-build!

Q: Do I need to be able to speak Spanish?
A: No.

Q: I heard that there was a hurricane there last year. Are the airstrips open?
A: Mulege is in excellent condition. Laguna San Ignacio is in good to excellent condition. It opens January 20th. Both airstrips are expecting us.
Maps and Things

Mulege
http://www.hotelserenidad.com/airstrip.htm

Laguna San Ignacio
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laguna_San_Ignacio_Airstrip

Whale Watching
http://sites.google.com/site/aridaecoresort/
The trip is four days long. We leave Palo Alto Airport early on Friday morning and arrive in Mulege that afternoon. The rest of Friday can be spent enjoying the Town of Mulege. Saturday starts late (we lose two hours because of time zone changes) and we try to arrive at Laguna San Ignacio, a half-hour flight, by noon. Laguna San Ignacio is similar to Watsonville, in that it can be subject to fog in the mornings. There are no weather reports in Baja. If you get there before it burns off, you have no choice but to return to Mulege. The rest of the day is spent on the water petting whales and watching all their incredible antics.

Yes, I said petting whales. Once out on the water, we sit in fishing boats called “pangas” and wait for a whale to approach. Sometimes they will stick their noses right in the panga and you will be looking into a great big eye the size of a watermelon. Other times, they will bump into the panga or if you are lucky they might swim under the panga and gently try to surface, raising the panga a few of inches and then dropping it back into the water. Their behavior varies depending on which month you go. Before sunset we return to Mulege. There is no night flight in Baja. It can be very dangerous to get caught in the air after sunset in Baja.

Sunday, you have several choices. Fishing is an excellent choice. The Sea of Cortez is world famous for sport fishing and few are disappointed. If you are a scuba diver you know it is also world famous for diving. Eighty dollars buys you two dives with boat, dive master and all equipment provided. If you are not a diver but would like to be, ninety dollars will buy you a morning ground school and practice in chest high water until you are proficient. When both you and your instructor are comfortable with your performance, it also includes one supervised dive in the afternoon. Day trips are available to visit the ancient cave paintings outside of town (eight thousand years old I believe) and I have spent more than one day just wandering around Mulege. The people are extremely friendly and the town has numerous cultural sites worth visiting, including a prison with no cells or bars, because when it was open Mulege was so remote no one could escape. Of course, there is always the perennial favorite - shopping. Because of the favorable exchange rate bargains abound.

There are many good restaurants of varying price in Mulege, including the one at our hotel. It’s my favorite. Breakfast can be had for $3 and dinner for $5 or $6. Because they squeeze fresh oranges, picked the day before in the valley five miles west of town, I spend as much on orange juice as I do on my breakfast. How about buying large fresh lobsters directly from the fisherman in their boats as they dock at Bahia Tortugas for $4 or $5 apiece. We have several books for loan at the Club about flying in Mexico and Baja California and things to do and see in Mexico.

Sunday night, the last night in Mexico, is spent in Mulege. Monday morning we enjoy breakfast in Mulege, and then back in the planes for the trip home with arrival at Palo Alto in the early evening.