



# AN ENCHANTING DESERT WILDERNESS

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SPLENDID ISOLATION, RUGGED LANDSCAPES, AND WATERS TEEMING WITH LIFE GREET MARINERS ON THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA, A THIN STRETCH OF WATER SEPARATING BAJA PENINSULA FROM THE MEXICAN MAINLAND AND DUBBED THE “WORLD’S AQUARIUM” BY JACQUES COUSTEAU

The Gulf of California is a sea between two deserts, Mexico’s Baja Peninsula to the west and the Sonoran to the east. A lonesome and desolate place, the deserts remain idle, waiting for an event that rarely happens. The rain that never falls hardens the conditions for life, causing this vast space to be home to only the toughest creatures. Succulents have evolved to need next-to-no water, with thorn armor warning off predators. As the desert plateau leads up to the water’s edge, with erosion hundreds of feet above the waterline, you can see the earth’s unadulterated history with each granular color variant. The sea, on the other hand, is in continuous motion.

Whereas above the water only the most resourceful creatures survive, below the waterline tells a very different story—one that celebrates a plethora of active sea life. Called “the world’s aquarium” by Jacques Cousteau, these waters are abundant with migratory species, from humpbacks and California gray whales to leatherback sea turtles, Humboldt squid and giant manta rays, not to mention the charismatic colonies of sea lions that live on the rocky outcroppings along the Espíritu Santo Archipelago.

The Sea of Cortés, now officially known as the Gulf of California, was named after the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, who set

out to conquer the Aztec Empire in Mexico for Spanish interests. By 1536, Cortés reached the Baja California Peninsula by foot and later commissioned the Spanish sailor Francisco de Ulloa to pilot the western coast of Mexico. His men were the first Europeans to sail the Baja California Peninsula. Initially, they assumed the peninsula was an island, rather than a desert extending toward California and continuing north.

Before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, the Baja Peninsula was home to various Indigenous peoples with distinct regional civilizations. Among the earliest people were the Guaycura, who eventually settled in an area extending from Todos Santos to La Paz and along the desert coast. Given that Baja California Sur, the southern part of the Baja California Peninsula, is an arid region with low precipitation and sparse plant life, the Guaycura turned to the sea to sustain their communities.

