Like the Galapagos and Cocos Island, these isolated volcanic landmasses offer incredible adventures in diving and an outstanding collection of unusual large and small marine species. You will most likely encounter Silky, Silvertip, Galapagos and White-tipped Reef Sharks. The schooling Scalloped Hammerhead is here, as is the immense and solitary Great Hammerhead, although you would have to be lucky indeed to glimpse this leviathan.

Season: October-June
Visibility: 15-30 metres
Water temperature: 21-27°C (lowest in January-March)

Lying in a remote corner of the Eastern Pacific is a small group of four volcanic islands, known as the Islas Revillagigedo. Isla San Benedicto, more than 300 kilometres offshore, is the closest to Mexico’s Baja Peninsula, while Isla Socorro lies 36 kilometres further south. Isla Partida lies to the southwest and Isla Clarion, the farthest from land, lies no less than 597 kilometres from the tip of the Baja Peninsula. Substantial volcanic activity was last recorded in 1993, when Isla Socorro awoke from 145 years of apparent dormancy. A fissure opened up on the ocean floor and gas-filled rocks, some more than 3 metres in diameter, floated to the ocean’s surface until the gaseous contents dissipated and allowed the rocks to sink. Except for a small Mexican naval base and a village on the southern tip of Isla Socorro, these desolate little islands remain largely uninhabited by man, yet serve as a major gathering place for a variety of large pelagic species. Because the remote offshore location, these islands are visited only by long-range boats and commercial tuna-fishing vessels. All boats require a permit to visit the Revillagigedo Islands, as they were declared a National Protected Area by the Mexican Government in 1994.

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Manta encounters must surely be at the top of most divers’ wish lists, and it is here at Boiler or at El Canyon that these wishes are most likely to be fulfilled. Situated at the northwest tip of Isla San Benedicto, Boiler is an underwater pinnacle found just 4 metres below the surface and dropping to a sandy bottom at 36 metres. El Canyon is located at the south end of San Benedicto and the two cleaning stations there are a magnet for large pelagics. Some of the Pacific’s largest Manta Rays have been regularly recorded on this seamount, as this is where these enormous delta-winged creatures enjoy the luxury of attending a cleaning station attended by resident King and Clarion Angelfish, along with Barberfish. Manta Rays enjoy an obviously relaxing beauty treatment as these smaller fish remove troublesome parasites. When Manta Rays wish to interact with divers they typically approach overhead and seem to enjoy bathing in the rush of divers’ bubbles. It is possible to make gentle contact with the Manta Rays, although gloves are not permitted. (The under surface of the Manta Ray is quite rough, so be careful!) This particular Manta Ray population is extraordinarily interested in divers and fantastic diver/Manta Ray interaction is common.

Punta Tosca is located on the west side of Isla Socorro and is the site of some of the finest in-water Humpback Whale sightings. One can also expect some shark excitement. Silky, Galapagos and Silvertips Sharks are regularly present here as are turtles and loads of lobsters. Over half the total Tiger Shark sightings from the islands have been from Punta Tosca.

Cabo Pearce is a current-swept reef that juts out into the prevailing current on the east side of Isla Socorro. The outer cleaning station has provided some amazing schooling Scalloped Hammerhead sighting for divers who are happy to tuck into the protection of the rocks and peep out to see these big guys. An inner cleaning station is more protected from the sweeping current and is a great place for dolphin encounters. When darkness falls over the reefs a fabulous way to spend some time is to watch the flying fish swim under the ship’s lights and get chased by dolphins and Silky Sharks.
The Revillagigedo (Socorro) Islands, Mexico

**Big Fish Heaven**

O’Neal Rock (also known as Hammerhead Central) on Isla Socorro is the place to expect shark excitement. Scalloped Hammerheads, Silky Sharks, Galapagos Sharks and Grey Reef Sharks have been regularly sighted here. A large rocky plateau at 12 metres attracts large schools of reef fish along with lobsters, rays and eels. Below the plateau, a cavern in the wall at 27 metres forms a scenic backdrop for underwater photographers with a wide-angle lens.

At the North End of Isla Socorro some rocks protrude from the surface of the sea. Here, at 15 metres, a series of large boulders serve as home to large schools of some of the Eastern Pacific’s ‘speciality’ species. Stunning bright orange Clarion Angelfish form large schools. The more richly-patterned juveniles bear bright blue slashes on the body, which gradually fade as they reach maturity. The smart Red-tailed (because it has a red tail!) or Crosshatch (because its golden body bears scales with dark outlines, giving a cross-hatched appearance) Triggerfish is found here in the Revillagigedo Islands as well as in the Galapagos and Hawaii. At about 9 metres depth the volcanic terrain takes on a moonscape-like character with swim throughs and pockets in the rock. Sea urchins, starfish, Socorro Lobsters and octopus are the local residents here. Shy moray eels, peeping from their day-time resting places, draw back at the approach of the diver.

Roca Perdita, way out in the ocean and over a 160 kilometres (100 miles) from land, is a lone outcrop of rock rising 30 metres above the sea and only 70 metres in diameter. The rock is a magnet for passing pelagic species. Almost vertical walls drop to a depth of over 70 metres. Large schools of jacks, tuna and mackerel can be found here and, of course, with so much food swimming around in the ocean, sharks often turn up to see what snacks they can catch! Look out for huge tuna, Wahoo and also Marlin. This is the place for some serious big fish action!

The open ocean crossing between Cabo San Lucas and San Benedicto in the Revillagigedo Islands takes around 24 hours and the crossing is usually calm during the winter months with blue skies and sunny conditions. Seas can build up and occasionally (and unusually) can reach up to 2-3 metres. Return trips are usually a little more bumpy than the outbound. The Revillagigedo Islands are for more experienced divers who are happy in open-ocean situations. There are some highly colourful reefs at Socorro with sub-tropical corals and coral heads, though some of the reefs can be fairly barren due to the strong water movements through this area. There are some good gorgonian populations and if you have a moment to spare between gazing at big creatures, check out the barnacle shells for you may see a small red-spotted face peeping out, betraying the presence of a Red-spotted Barnacle Blenny.

The very nature of big animal diving means that encounters can be incredible and you can have the dive of a lifetime, but it is important to understand that this is not a zoo and Mother Nature is a fickle creature. Big animals do not always show up and some days can be much slower than others, but when the big guys come in, it will all be worth waiting for and most trips have at least a couple of days when the diving is truly mind-boggling.

**NAUTILUS EXPLORER**

For full details of Nautilus Explorer, please see our Guadalupe Island, Baja California holiday description.

Whilst not recommended (for obvious reasons!) for use on the Great White Shark trips at Guadalupe Island, here at the Revillagigedo Islands why not take advantage of the kayaks and Laser sailboat available for your use. There is re-breather support on the vessel and Nitrox is available for an additional charge. Try your hand at some video work with one of the rental videos and see if you can make the next National Geographical film!

Nautilus Explorer offer as series of mostly 8 nights cruises from November to April. The cruises commence at San Jose del Cabo at the southern tip of Baja California. Guests join the boat in the afternoon on the day of the cruise departure and leave the boat after an early breakfast on the last day.
Price: from about £1208 for an 8 nights cruise. Includes: transfers to the boat from local hotels in San Jose del Cabo; 8 nights cruise on *Nautilus Explorer* on a twin/share or quad/share basis with full board including non-alcoholic beverages; 6 days of diving (4 dives per day). In addition, there is a port fee, currently US$65, payable in cash on the boat. Airport transfers are not included, but there is a shuttle bus service between Los Cabos Airport and the Hotel Solmar Suites costing US$12-15 one-way. Deposit: £400 (8 nights cruise).

Single Occupancy Supplement: 75% of the cruise cost in a twin cabin (but you can avoid paying the supplement if you are willing to share a cabin).

**SOLMAR V**

*Solmar V* is a comfortable liveaboard offering space for 22 guests in 12 cabins (10 twin-berth and 2 single-berth). Superior cabins are located amidships and standard cabins are located towards the front of the boat. Each air-conditioned cabin has a private bathroom with sink, shower and head along with built in colour television and VCR. The interior of the boat has been carefully designed in rich polished mahogany inset with brass fittings, and with forest green upholstery and carefully-chosen artwork reflecting underwater scenes. Seating in the main salon is provided by four large, well-upholstered U-shaped booths.

The large quarter deck has a special camera table and bench-style tank racks with good-sized gear-storage bins below. There are four rinse tanks (two for cameras/computers and two for dive gear) and two freshwater showers. The stern features a broad, full-width dive deck with a super-wide, in-water ladder to facilitate easy exit from the water, although two 7-metre inflatable pangas are used to drop and retrieve divers at specific sites, if need be. Nitrox is available at an extra charge. The owners of *Solmar V* have created a boat that combines the service expected of a deluxe resort hotel with the special requirements of a luxury liveaboard diving vessel. Three gourmet meals are prepared and served daily, along with pre- and post-dive snacks.

Between late October and early June *Solmar V* offers a series of 8 nights cruises to the Revillagigedo Islands, with five and a half days of diving. The cruises commence at Cabo San Lucas at the southern tip of Baja California. Guests are picked up from the Solmar Suites Hotel and join the boat in the afternoon on the day of the cruise departure and leave the boat after an early breakfast on the last day.

Price: from about £1768. Includes: transfers between the Hotel Solmar Suites and the boat; 8 nights cruise on *Solmar V* on a twin/share basis with full board including soft drinks, beer and wine with dinner; 5 full days of diving (usually 3 or 4 dives per day) plus one or two dives on the last day; local tax at 10%. Airport transfers are not included, but there is a shuttle bus service between Los Cabos Airport and the Hotel Solmar Suites costing US$12-15 one-way. Deposit: £700.

Single Occupancy Supplement: 50% of the cruise cost in a twin cabin (but you can avoid paying the supplement if you are willing to share a cabin).

**FLIGHTS:** Prices from about £896 to Los Cabos. There are daily flight connections to Los Cabos, where an overnight stay will usually be required prior to the cruise. We will quote you the airfare applicable, based on routing, season, current fare levels and booking class availability. Our quote will include all taxes and fuel supplements applicable at the time of quotation, as well as our service charge. The usual airfare deposit is £300.

**COMBINATIONS:** Why not combine a visit to the Revillagigedo (Socorro) Islands with a stay at La Paz on the Sea of Cortez, where you can enjoy some exciting underwater encounters with California Sealion. Moving between San Jose del Cabo and La Paz involves a straightforward road transfer of less than 3 hours. Talk to us about the possibilities.