A Glorious View
Pacific Ocean

A layer of stratocumulus clouds over the Pacific Ocean serves as the backdrop for this rainbow-like phenomenon known as a glory. Glories form when water droplets within clouds scatter sunlight back toward a source of illumination (in this case, the Sun).

Although glories may look similar to rainbows, the way light is scattered to produce them is different. Rainbows are formed by refraction and reflection; glories are formed by backward diffraction. From the ground or from an airplane, glories appear as circular rings of color. In this image, however, the glory is stretched vertically because of how the imager scans the surface in swaths.

Note, too, the swirling von Kármán vortices visible to the right of the glory. The alternating rows of vortices form as air masses run into an obstacle—the island of Guadalupe—and form a wake behind it.