

LEVELED BOOK • R

# Charlene's Sea of Cortez Journal



Written by Francis Morgan

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## MONDAY: Los Islotes

My name is Charlene, and I am eight years old. This is my **journal**. I am going to write in it every day while I am on a cruise in Mexico's Sea of Cortez. Last night, we boarded the ship *Sea Bird* at La Paz. We met other passengers at dinner. After we went to bed, the ship left the **harbor** and sailed through the night. When we awoke this morning, we were near a small island called *Los Islotes*. We could hear a lot of noise coming from the island. There were many chattering birds and barking sea lions.



We had to have a safety drill before going to the island. The captain explained what we should do if there were an emergency. All of us had to practice putting on our life jackets. I met a nice boy named Petar, and he is ten years old.



My new friend Petar in a life jacket

In order to get close to the island, we had to ride in **inflatable** rubber boats. We were able to get very close to the sea lions. There were hundreds of them. Some were sleeping on the rocks, while others played in the water. Then came the best part. We were allowed to snorkel and swim with the sea lions. They

were very friendly and playful. I loved it when a young one swam up to me to say hello. It was a great day!



A lazy sea lion

## TUESDAY: Half Moon Bay

When I woke up this morning, I looked out of my cabin window. I saw a beautiful white sandy beach. The sea was calm, clear, and blue. The sun was shining brightly. We had sailed to Half Moon Bay at Isla San Francisco. The ship's crew had been up early. They had taken a lot of **kayaks** to the beach for us to use after lunch. At lunch, I met two more kids near my age—James and Catherine, who are brother and sister. We were all excited about kayaking. After a quick boat trip, we were on the beach. We were given a brief kayak lesson, and then we picked out our kayaks. Some were for two people; others were single-seaters.



Catherine and her mom kayak near me and my dad.



I went with my dad in a two-seater. I sat in the front. Dad is very strong, so we were soon whizzing along on the top of the water. It was great, but my

arms soon got tired. I left it to Dad to get us back. After kayaking, I played with Petar, James, and Catherine on the beach. We made a huge sand castle and had swimming races. In the evening, we had dinner on the beach. The crew built a bonfire, and we all gathered around. We ate hamburgers and fish tacos. Afterward, we toasted marshmallows on the bonfire to make s'mores. After everyone was full, we had a sing-along. A few people had brought guitars. They played popular songs and everyone joined in singing. It was a perfect end to a perfect day.

## **WEDNESDAY: Isla San Jose**

When I awoke this morning, we hadn't stopped anywhere. We were still sailing. This was because we were on the lookout for whales. I learned there are many different types of whales in the Sea of Cortez. I hoped that we might see some of them. Later in the morning, we saw an island in the distance. It was Isla San Jose. We were going **ashore** there. The rocks on the island were a pretty orange color. There were **fossils** of shells in the rocks. We even saw a fossil of a turtle that had died thousands of years ago. We went on a long hike. I saw a big bug on a flower. I took this photo. The bug is called a tarantula wasp.



A tarantula wasp, how scary!



I saw a bird repeatedly flying to a cactus. I quietly sat down to watch. The bird was feeding its babies. It had made a nest in a hole in the cactus.

Violet-green swallow

When we got back to the ship, a surprise was waiting. The captain invited Petar, James, Catherine, and me to the ship's bridge. The captain showed us all the instruments and explained how they worked. He even let each of us steer the ship.

We were looking out for whales, but there were still no signs of any. I hope that we will be luckier tomorrow.

James steers the ship. I got to steer first!



## THURSDAY: Dolphins

Breakfast this morning was interrupted by the captain letting us know that there were dolphins close by. Everyone left half-eaten cereal, eggs, and bacon and rushed out onto the deck. People were looking out to sea with their **binoculars** and cameras.



James didn't need binoculars when the dolphins got close to the ship.



Bottle-nosed dolphins, my favorite!

Soon there were hundreds of dolphins surrounding the ship. They seemed to be as curious about us as we were about them. The dolphins were very graceful. They swam so fast, and jumped out of the water as they sped along. Six or seven dolphins swam right in front of the ship. They seemed to enjoy being pushed along by the bow of the ship.

The marine **mammal** expert on the cruise told us that the dolphins were swimming rapidly together to round up fish to eat. There were many gulls and pelicans diving into the sea to catch fish disturbed by the dolphins. In the evening, we watched *Finding Nemo* on James's portable DVD player. It couldn't have been a better day!



Petar, James, and Catherine watch a DVD while I snap a photo.



Blue whales—one is underwater. You can almost see its shape in the background.

## FRIDAY: Whales, Catalina Island

It happened today! We saw whales. We were cruising along when I saw a kind of fountain in the distance. "What's that out there?" I asked one of the cruise's sea animal experts. "It's a whale's spout," he answered. "Great job. I'll ask the captain to head for it."

Soon we were next to the biggest creature on Earth—a blue whale. And not just one of them, but a pair.

They seemed happy to be swimming next to the ship. They were huge, over eighty feet long. It was very exciting to hear them breathe out of their blowholes.

One of them would dive down under water. We timed how long it stayed under. It was about eight minutes. We could then calculate when it would surface again. We had just enough time to run inside and get an ice cream cone before the whale surfaced again.



I'm glad I don't sound like this whale when I breathe.



*The shells of these dead turtles almost look alive.*

We watched the whales for a long time, but soon we had to leave them. We were going to Catalina Island. We landed on a pebbly beach at Catalina Island in the afternoon. Petar found the shells of some dead turtles. They were very creepy because their heads were still attached. They looked alive, but they didn't have any eyes.

## SATURDAY: Santa Rosalia and La Rasa Island

I was woken up very early this morning. The sea was very rough, and the ship was tossing and turning on the big waves. It was a little scary, but Mom assured me that the ship was safe. At breakfast, everyone looked tired. The movement of the ship on the big waves was the reason that nobody had slept much. The sea was calmer when we pulled in to the harbor at Santa Rosalia. This small town was where the ship stopped to pick up supplies and fresh water. Santa Rosalia was once a mining town. Although there is no longer mining, there are lots of old deserted buildings and rusty equipment still around.

*This used to be full of coal.  
The coal was loaded onto old  
steam ships for fuel.*





Heermann's gull

In the afternoon, we sailed on and landed at Isla Rasa. Every spring, hundreds of thousands of seabirds nest on this island. We had arrived at the perfect time because the birds had just arrived on the island the day before.

The birds are mainly Heermann's gulls, elegant terns, and royal terns. The noise they make is deafening. We had to walk very carefully to make sure we didn't step on any nests or eggs.



## SUNDAY: Bahia de Los Angeles, Boojum Forest

Today was our last day on the ship. I am writing this at the airport while waiting for the plane to take us home. This morning, we went ashore at Bahia de Los Angeles. There were buses waiting to take us to the **boojum** forest. I didn't know what a boojum was, but I soon found out. A boojum was a most peculiar tree. It looked like an upside down carrot, but was very, very tall. There were hundreds of these trees in the desert forest. We hiked for a mile or so into the boojum forest. I loved the boojums because I had never seen anything quite like them. The desert forest was the only place on Earth we could see them.



Boojum tree and James



Two fin whales swim near the ship to say goodbye.

In the afternoon, we sailed toward our last stop—Guaymas. On the way, we were very lucky because we saw many marine mammals. It was as if they had all come to say goodbye. We saw four fin whales swimming together. They are the second largest whales in the ocean.

A little while later, eight pilot whales swam along with the ship. They were very small. It was fun watching them jump out of the water. Finally, a friendly dolphin and a pelican stopped by to say farewell. This is the end of my cruise journal. I will always remember this wonderful vacation and the new friends that I have made.



Dolphin



Pelican

## Glossary

<b>ashore</b>	onto the shore; on dry land (p. 7)
<b>binoculars</b>	a hand-held device made up of two lenses for seeing things far away (p. 9)
<b>boojum</b>	a tree that looks like an upside-down carrot and only grows on the Baja California peninsula (p. 17)
<b>fossils</b>	the remains of plants and animals that turned to stone over time (p. 7)
<b>harbor</b>	a sheltered body of water near the shore (p. 3)
<b>inflatable</b>	able to be filled with air before use (p. 4)
<b>isla</b>	Spanish for “island” (p. 5)
<b>journal</b>	a written account of things that happen (p. 3)
<b>kayaks</b>	small, light boats with a single or double opening in the center (p. 5)
<b>mammal</b>	a warm-blooded animal with hair and a backbone that feeds its young milk (p. 11)
<b>terns</b>	seabirds that are smaller than gulls but in the same family (p. 16)

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