

UNIV 392 – Loreto: A Living Lab of Biodiversity, History, & Sustainability

Dr. Ruben Alarcon, Biology

Dr. Amy Denton, Biology

Lecture: 2.5 hours per week; days/time/location TBA

Trip to Loreto, Mexico: 15-30 March 2027 (10 days within this window)

Anchored in the historic town of Loreto, Mexico—once the capital of Las Californias and the first Spanish colonial settlement on the Baja California Peninsula—this course explores the rich biological, cultural, and geological tapestry of Baja California Sur. Founded in 1697 by Jesuit missionaries, Loreto is a region shaped by centuries of interaction between people and nature, now renowned for its pristine desert shorelines along the Sea of Cortez and unique cultural identity. Students will explore the island biogeography of Parque Nacional Bahía de Loreto, encompassing five major islands within 750 square kilometers of protected marine area. From towering cacti forests and coastal lagoons to the feeding and calving grounds of endangered blue whales, the region offers unparalleled opportunities for field study and exploration at the interface of desert and marine habitats.

Loreto, however, faces growing threats, including mass tourism, overfishing, accelerated drought and water scarcity, which challenges local sustainability. Working alongside *Conserva Loreto*, students will dive deeper into conservation science and sustainable development through community-based research projects. This includes hands-on engagement in the newly designated Nopolo (2,076 ha) and Loreto II (6,217 ha) National Parks—declared in 2023, to preserve freshwater aquifers, wetlands, and desert ecosystems. Through this interdisciplinary lens, students will confront the pressing need to conserve Loreto’s natural heritage while honoring its cultural history, contributing directly to a resilient future for both community and environment. This course will culminate with a trip to Loreto and the surrounding national parks, using only local hotels, guides, restaurants, and transportation operators to support community-based ecotourism and sustainable development.