

# “Thar she blows!”

Few things are more thrilling than spotting gray whales as they gracefully travel up and down the California coastline. Watch for spouting as whales migrate south from late November to January, fleeing the cold northern waters and seeking out warmer lagoons in Baja California for birthing. Just beyond the surf zone, you might see them frolicking, resting, or lifting their tails (flukes) or heads high out of the water. In the spring, gray whales return to the abundant feeding grounds of the north, completing a more than 10,000-mile journey—the longest migration of any mammal.

Instead of teeth, a gray whale’s mouth contains rows of comb-like plates called baleen. When feeding, the whale will dive to the ocean bed, turn on its side, open its mouth, and plow along the bottom. As it rises to the surface, it strains mud and water through the baleen, spits out the waste, and swallows the thousands of tiny animals it has captured in the mud.

**Breathing—As they surface during a series of shallow dives, whales breathe quickly, releasing warm, moist air that appears as spouting.**

**Diving—Long, deep dives take these giant mammals down 150 feet and can cover a distance of about one-quarter of a mile.**