

# Salton Sea

The Salton Sea is the largest lake in California. Located in the southeastern region of the state, it spans Riverside and Imperial counties in one of California's most scenic desert areas. There was great excitement about developing resorts and luxury communities along its banks...but history and geography have not been kind to the Salton Sea.

The Sea occupies the lowest portion of a structural basin called the Salton Trough, hemmed in by mountains on all sides. Because of its location, the Sea is a terminal lake, meaning that all water that flows in, stays in until it evaporates...leaving mineral deposits like salt behind. For hundreds of years, the Colorado River often flowed into the Salton Sea, helping to keep the salt content of the lake water from rising too high, and ensuring a healthy wildlife population. But heavy rains caused huge floods which inundated the lakeside resorts, and the Colorado River was diverted to another course.

The Sea once supported a productive fishery, but now the only fish able to survive the high salinity and pollution levels are tilapia. It has been called "California's crown jewel of avian biodiversity," since bird watchers are able to see over 400 species here, including some very rare birds. Fish die-offs, elevated bacterial levels and large algal blooms at the Sea have been harmful to some bird species, but the lake continues to attract bird watchers from around the globe.

Recreational activities in the area include boating, camping, off-roading, hiking, and photography. One attraction, the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, has 1,400 campsites in five campgrounds, hundreds of picnic sites, trails, playgrounds, boat ramps

and a visitors' center. All of this makes the Salton Sea sound like a very appealing place, but that is not necessarily the case. Since the Colorado River stopped flowing into it, the lake has been drying up, leaving hundreds of feet of stinky shoreline between the lake and the once prosperous areas of development around it. It has become a bit of an eyesore, but still hosts an abundance of wildlife.

## Source(s):

Hoffman, Eva J. "A Guidebook to Amtrak's Sunset Limited." Flashing Yellow Guidebooks, Golden, CO, 2009.

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