

10 Common Myths About Great Salt Lake

1. "It stinks!"

Great Salt Lake itself doesn't really stink. This is a *shore* phenomenon experienced when one is downwind wading out along the mud flats or in the cities on windy days. Lake muds are rich in organics from brine flies, fly eggs, brine shrimp, algae, etc., which are being decomposed by bacteria in an oxygen-poor environment—a reduction-zone. This process emits hydrogen sulfide (H₂S), a gas that smells a lot like rotten eggs. The odor is released and carried by waves and wind. It turns out that Farmington Bay is the biggest offender here, because its waters have been nearly isolated from the rest of the lake by a developed sandbar and a causeway. So, what does it actually smell like sailing out on "the Great Salt?" Sailors can tell you. It is a salty-sea smell—a lot like the ocean!

2. "It has too many flies"

Squeamish tourists often make this claim, but brine flies are largely another shore phenomenon. Late July through early August is brine fly season, and the world-class populations of birds depending on them for food aren't complaining! They are an extremely important part of the natural ecosystem, serving to remove tons of pollution from the lake each year—the stink back in the city would be phenomenal without them! What's more, if you are being bugged by a bug, chances are it isn't a brine fly. Brine flies don't bite; in fact, they are harmless.

3. "It's too salty."

Ranging over time and in different bays between 3% and 28% salinity, Great Salt Lake is one of the world's saltiest seas. Many think a sailboat would corrode and be reduced to a bucket of rust, but fiberglass doesn't corrode and regular maintenance can minimize its effects elsewhere. True, it's too much for powerboats to risk with those big expensive engines, but it is ideal for sailing. Everything floats better in the higher salinity, too. Swimming and floating in the lake is a common entertainment in summer.

4. "It's dead, Jim."

False again. It's teeming with life! Plankton, algae, brine shrimp and brine flies form the base of a food pyramid that supports one of the largest biomasses on the North American continent. Vast numbers of birds flock here. Take a drive out to the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and see for yourself. The whole system is delicate, however, and needs our protection, as evidenced by occasional diebacks or epidemics.

5. "It's polluted."

Again, the smell on shore, the flies, occasional die-backs or epidemics among birds and a few polluting industries might encourage this impression, but in fact, Great Salt Lake remains pristine in many areas and very much worth protecting. (Remember those brine flies that remove pollutants? Imagine what it would be like without them in this lake with no outlet!) Two companies actually rely on the lake's unique mineral content and water quality to produce high-quality health and dietary supplements for worldwide distribution. Of course, we all do need to keep a watch on our industrial activities around the lake; Pollution is everybody's business: "We have met the enemy and they is us!"

6. "It's a barren, ugly desert."

Hey, Great Salt Lake has got to be one of the most beautiful spots on Earth! Don't take our word for it—visit Antelope Island, take one of the Salt Island Cruises, or come sailing and see. It's a real shame that so many live next to these shores without appreciating this treasure in their own backyard. More than a few sailors have compared Great Salt Lake with its desert setting to the Gulf of California's Sea of Cortez. Sunsets here are incomparable!

7. "It has no economic value."

Not true. Tourism combines with brine shrimp and mineral extraction to employ thousands, while contributing millions of dollars to our regional economy. 1.3 million tourists visit GSL annually, one-third of which are from out of state. In large part because of its premier wildlife viewing locations along the eastern shore of Great Salt Lake, Utah attracts 530,000 non-residents and 515,000 residents for the express purpose of watching wildlife. These people expend approximately \$681,000 per year in wildlife-watching activities—a higher expenditure than for either hunting or fishing and involving more participants than hunting and fishing combined. The lake's mineral and shrimp cyst extraction industries are valued at up to \$300 million and \$58 million, respectively.

8. "It's too shallow and confining to sail."

Wrong again. Great Salt Lake is shallow along its mudflats and shorelines, but with an average depth of 13 feet, 32 feet maximum, it's sufficient. And there is plenty of it. Great Salt Lake has an area just slightly less than the state of Delaware. The area that is actually sailable is about the size of Rhode Island. The "Great Salt" is big enough to give any sailor a feeling of solitude in a matter of minutes.

9. "You can't sail in the winter."

Yeah, you can! Great Salt Lake is unique in that it can be sailed year round. The salinity is so high that it practically never freezes. Sailing while surrounded by snow covered mountain landscapes brings to mind vistas common in Norway and New Zealand. Very beautiful it is, sailing on those unseasonably warm winter days! Of course, one must dress accordingly, use safe practices and be cautious of hypothermia—as for any other winter sport.

10. "No one sails there."

There are approximately 360 filled slips at Great Salt Lake Marina, not to mention a regular entourage of faithful trailer sailors who launch from here. There is a second smaller marina at Antelope Island. The oldest continuously chartered yacht club in America is found here on the South Beach Shore: Great Salt Lake Yacht Club, "home of the world's saltiest sailors." It is certainly home of the world's friendliest sailors. Newcomers are constantly being congratulated and welcomed.

"THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE!"