

SAVOR VANCOUVER
The ethnic food markets of this British Columbia city will make your taste buds sit up and say 'Howdy!' / **D4**



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Inner beauty

Between canyon walls, Lake Powell offers both awe-inspiring sights and a perfect playground

By Rob Dunton

Imagine exploring the Grand Canyon — not by dusty trail, sweaty mule-back, or bouncing white-water raft, but floating serenely on a cloud of azure blue — hovering 500 feet above the valley floor on a magic carpet made

of glassy water. From this enchanted perch, you can soar next to towering walls and examine minute geological variations, waterfalls and Anasazi ruins. This is what it

is like to boat on

Lake Powell and explore its 1,900 miles of snaking shoreline in northern Arizona and southern Utah. The Glen Canyon Dam (finished in 1966) essentially inundated a northern extension of the Grand Canyon.



PAUL HORN / Union-Tribune



Houseboating on Lake Powell gives you a new perspective on the workings of water and wind on rock. You can climb formations that seem to have more movement than the water, water-ski to your heart's content, or just look and wonder. Rob Dunton photos

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POWELL

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A waterfall is created by a thunderstorm

The damming of Glen Canyon, submerging precious Anasazi ruins, created over the next 17 years a giant, scenic bathtub with depths of up to 500 feet. It's more than 186 miles long, with more combined shoreline than the West Coast of the United States.

The first time I heard of Lake Powell was on a flier enticing me to spend a week there for Captain Sven's second annual Powell fest.

Though I had written my first research paper in the third grade on John Wesley Powell, the Civil War veteran and noted explorer who ran the Colorado and Green rivers in 1869, I'd missed his namesake body of water.

Captain Sven's flier painted visions of rollicking about on jet skis, sleeping beneath the stars on the roof of a cozy houseboat, endless water-skiing, hiking to beautiful Rainbow Bridge, reeling in largemouth bass, and even hopes of scuba diving to sunken Anasazi ruins. It was a tantalizing advertisement for seven days of aquatic hedonism in one of nature's finest playgrounds.

Six weeks later, our convoy headed northeast, towing a ragtag collection of boats and toys. We broke up the 597-mile drive with a layover in Las Vegas, continued east through Zion and Bryce national parks and finally arrived at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Acres of docks, houseboats and watercraft came into view as we dropped down on Wahweap marina.

The sounds of revving and whirring of boat engines floated up the boat ramp. A breeze carried the faintest whiff of Eau d' Marina – that unmistakable combination of water, two-stroke oil, stale beer, gas, refuse and septic scents.

My puppylike enthusiasm soured when I eyed a row of ramshackle houseboats. Painted dull white and chipped chocolate brown, these corrugated boxes mounted on a pair of pontoons did not inspire oohs and ahs. This is what eight adults were going to be bunking in for the next week? But Captain Sven continued past the low-grade boats, then past the mid-grade until we finally stopped at a 55-foot floating palace. He had booked the QE II of Lake Powell, and with the cost spread eight ways, it was reasonably affordable.



Lake Powell is in the Glenn Canyon National Recreation Area, which stretches for hundreds of miles from Lees Ferry in Arizona to the Orange Cliffs of southern Utah. Photo by Rob Dunton

Ski patrol

Our ski boat had gone as far as the narrowing canyon walls would allow. We slowly backed in until the stone walls touched our hull. We were at the base of a thousand-foot-high ravine, half-filled with water since the late '60s. The shadowed walls stretched hundreds of feet above us until they hit brilliant blue. In this protected gully, the air was still and the water stared back like emerald mercury. I jumped into the 70-degree water with my vest and slalom ski, grabbed the handle and let the ski rope unfurl as the boat idled out.

"Hit it!" I had never skied in conditions so perfect or breathtaking. I popped up, reaching 35 mph in a flash. As we sped out, the narrow gorge slowly opened up, allowing me to ski wider and wider. For thrills, I tried to cut each turn within inches of the sandstone, blasting rooster tails of water against the walls. Finally exhausted after almost 100 turns, I let go. Gliding to a stop, I sank into the refreshing water; even in Water Ski Heaven, muscles give out eventually.

A huge part of the Lake Powell adventure is enjoying the water and its majestic setting. Whether on wakeboard, kneeboard, or inner tube, all the members of our group, at every skill level, took turns behind the ski boat.

At day's end, we watched the stars appear and make silhouettes of the black buttes. Lounging on the roof deck after dinner, our aches reminded us of the day's thrills and spills, with dreams of more tomorrow.

Rain falls

It was Thursday – four days had past and in the course of three hours, a summer storm had come and gone. Blustery weather stirred up the surface of the lake, thunder boomed and echoed and re-echoed as the sounds tried to find a way out of the canyon. Cool, steady rain fell, and then quit. At a rounded nick in the canyon's rim, a spontaneous waterfall sprouted, spewing off the sandstone cornice. Our houseboat was beached within 50 feet of the falls, and as we peered up from the shelter of our boat, we wondered what the water-gathering world above looked like.

As soon as the thundershowers stopped, we scrambled up a narrow switchback cut into the cliff face. In less than 15 minutes, we crested the trail. Undulating sandstone rose and fell, twisted and warped like swirled mocha frosting atop a giant cake.

A groove had been carved by centuries of storms and ran right off the edge. The collected rainwater hurried past us on its way south, starting its long trip to the Colorado River and the Sea of Cortez. We bounded around, exploring the surface as if Mars had suddenly become hospitable. Climbing weathered mounts of stone and stepped peaks, we kept finding great view spots, and then better ones. We imagined watching one-armed John Wesley Powell leading his entourage of nine men and four wooden boats back in 1869 – making their way past Dirty Devil River toward the narrows of Glen Canyon.

Hot from our hike, we headed back down the trail, stripped and showered in the refreshing remains of Rain Falls. Where were the personal chef and masseuse when you needed them? We'd have to add them to the recruit list for our next trip.

Rob Dunton is a San Diego-based writer.

If you go ...

Getting there: Drive the 597 miles from San Diego.

Where to stay:

- Rented houseboats are the best option. They range from 44 feet to 59 feet and sleep 4-12 people. Prices: \$1,971 to \$6,235 per week, depending on size, amenities and season.
- Rent a powerboat and tent camp along the shore (no camping at Rainbow Bridge or within one mile of the marinas).

Boating: Ski boats rent from \$199 to \$400 per day, depending on size, power and season. All accessories can be rented as well.

Scuba Diving and Kayak Tours and Rentals: Twin Finn, 811 Vista, Page, AZ 86040; (928) 645-3114; www.twinnfinn.com. Kayak rentals: \$35-\$55/day.

When to go: June through September, the water warms up to an average 75 degrees, with air temperatures from low 60s at night up to 110 during the day. Winter water averages 50 degrees, with air in the mid-20s at night and mid-40s during the day.

Information: Lake Powell Resorts and Marinas, ARA Leisure Services, P.O. Box 56909, Phoenix, AZ 85709; (800) 528-6154. For groups of 20 or more, call (800) 341-8934.

Helpful Web sites:

www.nps.gov/glca

www.powellguide.com

www.lakepowell.com

www.lakepowellvacations.com