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Big Bear Lake: Big-Time California Boating (and Fishing)

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If you're looking for big-time California boating (and fishing), head for the mountains of Southern California and Big Bear Lake. Known as one of the state's premier alpine getaways, Big Bear Lake is famed for deep blue skies, mild temperatures, lots of sunshine, and vast amounts of aquatic pursuits. "Our lake is huge, with ample room to enjoy your favorite water activities," says Ken Brengle, CEO for Big Bear Lake Resort Association.

Located in the San Bernardino Mountains, Big Bear is especially popular as a "cool" boating destination from spring to fall. Daytime summer temperatures typically average a cool 78 degrees. At 7,000 feet, the lake is naturally 15 to 20 degrees cooler than most inland valleys and desert communities, and typically 20 to 30 degrees cooler than Las Vegas and Phoenix.

The lake is seven miles long and about one mile wide at its widest point, providing about 22 miles of shoreline. The average depth of the lake is 35 feet.

Native Americans originally called the lake "Yuhaviat," which translates to "Pine Place." When Benjamin Davis Wilson entered the area in 1845, he found it swarming with bear so he called the lake he found, Big Bear Lake. This lake was actually Baldwin Lake, in that modern-day (and man-made) Big Bear Lake didn't yet exist. Ben Wilson would go on to become the first mayor of Los Angeles and a two-term state senator. George S. Patton was one of his grandchildren.

Today, the variety of fun in the sun at Big Bear Lake ranges from action-packed to easy-going. Along with boating and fishing (see below), the options include water-skiing, wake boarding, jet-skiing, and sailing of all sorts using the constant lake breezes. Parasailing at 7,000 feet above sea level and all of Big Bear Valley is another popular option.

For the less adventurous, narrated lake tours are offered onboard the *Big Bear Queen* and *Miss Liberty* paddleboat. The *Big Bear Pirate Ship* is another option. Meadow Swim Beach is popular for protected swimming the clear lake waters - with barbecue areas, tennis, and volleyball nearby.

Also on land, backcountry activities like hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and off-roading are shaded by lush evergreens and oaks. Big Bear event coordinators take pride in open-air events, planning a packed calendar for visiting boaters. Keynote annual events include Old Miners Days, Antique Auto Show, Big Bear Renaissance Faire, Heritage Days, and Art on the Lake. "Our events are hot, but the weather up here will remain cool," says Brengle.

Fishing is also a major Big Bear lure. The lake is a first-rate rainbow trout fisher and one of only a handful of Southern California lakes to be planted with rainbow trout on a regular basis. During the season, Big Bear Lake receives about 2,000 pounds of rainbow trout from the Department of Fish and Game every two weeks and averages about 150,000 to 200,000 pounds of trout every year, leaving a profusion of "pink meat holdovers" for lucky anglers.

In addition to the great trout action, Big Bear Lake has both largemouth and small mouth bass. Other varieties include catfish, crappie, pumpkinseed, and bluegill.

Off the water, visiting boaters will find a variety of shopping, dining, and accommodations options (including seven public campgrounds). Big Bear Lake Village is an especially popular base.

For further information about Big Bear Lake boating and more (including ordering a copy of the great Visitors Guide), contact the Big Bear Lake Resort Association by visiting www.bigbear.com or calling 800-4 BIG BEAR (800-424-4232). Their Visitors Center is located at 630 Bartlett Road, Big Bear Lake, CA 92315. ■



Big Bear Lake provides plenty of ideal spots for both boating and fishing.

Photo courtesy of Tim Wolcott

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BOATER QUIZ

1. If you move your boat to a new state of principal use, the registration certificate from your old state is good for how many days?
 - a. 30
 - b. 60
 - c. 120
2. Where is the largest boatlift in the world?
 - a. United States
 - b. Belgium
 - c. China
3. What is the minimum height registration numbers must be on the forward half of a recreation boat?
 - a. 5 inches
 - b. 4 inches
 - c. 3 inches
4. Most propeller blade accidents involve what kind of boat?
 - a. Sail boat with auxiliary motor
 - b. Open motorboats 16 to less than 26 feet in length
 - c. Speedboats
5. If passing other than standard portside to portside, what is the proper signal?
 - a. 2 short blasts (one second each)
 - b. 1 short blast
 - c. 1 long blast followed immediately by one short blast
6. According to USCG survey, Minnesota is the state the with highest percentage of boaters who never completed a safety course. What is that percentage?
 - a. 37.4 %
 - b. 53.6 %
 - c. 81.9 %
7. What percentage of all boating fatalities occurred on boats where the operator had not received boating safety instructions?
 - a. 27 %
 - b. 70 %
 - c. 91 %
8. What is a FLUKE?
 - a. A sudden gust of wind in the sails
 - b. A mistake on a chart
 - c. The palm of an anchor
9. According to a USCG survey, only 0.3 percent of boaters in one state declared they carried no personal flotation devices on board, the lowest of the 50. What state was it?
 - a. Utah
 - b. Florida
 - c. Wisconsin
10. According to a USCG survey, cabin motorboats are taken out more days a year than any other kind of recreational boat. What is the mean number of days primary operators take them out?
 - a. 17
 - b. 37
 - c. 31

Answers: 1 a, 2 b, 3 c, 4 b, 5 a, 6 c, 7 b, 8 c, 9 a, 10 c

Tip on Navigating a Channel

Unlike a car, you should not always hug the right side of the road (channel) while navigating with a boat. Of course, in a heavily traveled channel with lots of traffic, you want to stay toward the right side and have oncoming traffic pass to your port side. But, if you have the opportunity, you would be prudent to stay toward the windward side of the channel. Current also should be a factor in the decision on where you should be steering your boat.

Staying to the windward side, or the side from which the current is flowing, is very prudent and can be looked upon as "defensive navigation." You always want to anticipate what you would do if something went wrong with your power:

- 1) In a powerboat, an engine can stop operating at any time.
- 2) In a sailboat, a sail can suddenly malfunction at any time.

This is basic Murphy's Law.

By being on the side of the channel that is upwind or up current, you have a lot more room and time to handle the dilemma. And if you go aground, the wind and/or current will help you get off. Had you been on the leeward side, the wind and/or current would get you stuck even worse. ■

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