

▶▶ Home to unreal shapes, wide-open vistas and world-famous landmarks, the desert states of the south-western United States are like nothing else on earth.

Spectacular though they undeniably are, the parched red-rock scenery of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado may not initially strike one as particularly promising swim destinations.

But impressions can be misleading. With warm temperatures, a laid-back spirit, and phenomenal views, the area in fact boasts a healthy and growing open water swimming scene, with several established events, new guided tours, and a sound support structure for independent swimmers.

Renowned Slovenian long distance swimmer Martin Strel was captivated by the Arizona landscape when he visited on a speaking engagement in 2010. Two years later, he and his son Borut are now running swimming tours based in the state.

Lake Powell, which is shared between Arizona and Utah, and whose shoreline is longer than the entire US West Coast, was formed in the 1960s by a dam on the Colorado River that flooded the huge Glen Canyon. Even in mid-winter, the water temperature never gets below

8-9C, and stays above 20C between May and November – reaching a peak of about 27C in August. While the area is popular for many kinds of outdoor activity, swimming is arguably the most striking way to experience Lake Powell's unforgettable juxtaposition of warm, shimmering water and dry, towering rock formations.

Another large man-made reservoir in the region is Lake Mead (which straddles Arizona and Nevada, formed by the Hoover Dam on the Colorado). Boulder City – which lies next to the dam, 20 miles from Las Vegas – is the base for the popular 'Slam the Dam' swim each October in Lake Mead. Hundreds of swimmers take part over distances of 5, 2.4 and 1.2 miles.

The organisers of this swim (Swim Las Vegas) will also be starting another event – Lake Mead Swim, or the 'Las Vegas 10km' – in 2013. Other organised swim events in the region include the Deer Creek Open Water Marathon Swim, which takes place in a reservoir near Salt Lake City at an altitude of 1,600 metres. There's also an Arizona Open Water Swimming series (which takes place in five lakes in the state) and the Horsetooth swim in Colorado, with distances of 10km and 1.4 and 1.2 miles.

CLUBS AND GROUPS

Swim Las Vegas: swimlv.com

Utah Open Water: utahopenwater.com

Arizona Masters Swimming: azlmsc.org

Colorado Masters Swimming: comsa.org/openwater.html

For more swimming groups in the South West and across the USA, visit usopenwaterswimming.org

CRAWL THROUGH THE DESERT

The desert states of the American South West may seem an unlikely swim holiday destination, but as **Jonathan Knott** discovers, this could not be further from the truth.

The South West also has several flourishing open water swimming groups, often linked to masters clubs. Swim Las Vegas, for example holds regular open water workouts in Lake Mead.

Independent swimming is permitted in both Lake Powell and Lake Mead, as well as in many other lakes in the region, but boat support is essential for longer swims. This is because swimmers are forced to share the water with speedboats, jet skis and other watercraft. Swimming remains a relatively rare – hence unexpected – pursuit. Boats and guides can easily be hired from places such as Antelope Point Marina (on Lake Powell, near Page).

Swimming aside, the region features enough outdoor and adventure attractions to detain enthusiasts for a lifetime – possibilities include hiking, fishing and rafting. Local wildlife includes coyotes, eagles, foxes, and condors.

Page itself lies near the middle of what has been dubbed the 'Grand Circle' of natural attractions. The area includes the Grand Canyon, many other national parks, and attractions such as Rainbow Bridge. This red-rock arch is one of the largest natural bridges in the world and is sacred to the Navajo tribe of Native Americans, who control much of the land around Page and Lake Powell.

Other than the Glen Canyon Dam itself, one notable sight near Page is Horseshoe Bend – where visitors can look from a height over the calm green-blue Colorado River as it turns through 270 degrees. A little further afield, it's possible to take in the area's full majesty at the Grand Canyon. Whether you visit the North or the South Rim, this is a sight guaranteed to strike awe into even the most jaded adventurer. ●



The shoreline of Lake Powell is longer than the entire US West Coast

KEY FACTS

- **Where:** Page, Arizona
- **When:** Shoulder season travel is advisable for active holidays since temperatures in high summer are very hot.
- **Stay:** Toroweap villas luxury self-catered apartments. Prices are from \$350-500 per night. (toroweapvillas.com; info@toroweapvillas.com) Holiday Inn Express Page-Lake Powell: goo.gl/azZjz
- **Get there:** Page is approximately a four-hour drive from Phoenix, Arizona or Las Vegas, Nevada. British Airways flies direct to both cities from Heathrow.
- **Find out more:**
Strel Swimming Adventures: strel-swimming.com
Antelope Point Marina: antelopepointlakepowell.com
Grand Circle: grandcircle.org
Page, Arizona: visitpagearizona.com

EVENTS

- Slam the Dam Swim: slamthedam.com
- Arizona Open Water Series: dcbadventures.com
- Deer Creek Open Water Swim: deercreekopenwater.com
- Horsetooth Open Water Swim, Colorado: horsetoothswim.com