

Caspian Sea or Khazar Sea

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Caspian Sea (ancient Caspium Mare or Hyrcanium Mare) or Khazar Sea, saltwater lake in southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia, the largest inland body of water in the world. The Caspian Sea is bordered on the west by Azerbaijan and Russia, on the northeast and east by Kazakhstan, on the east by Turkmenistan, and on the south by Iran. Caspian Sea (ancient Caspium Mare or Hyrcanium Mare) or Khazar Sea, saltwater lake in southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia, the largest inland body of water in the world. The Caspian Sea is bordered on the west by Azerbaijan and Russia, on the northeast and east by Kazakhstan, on the east by Turkmenistan, and on the south by Iran. It extends about 1210 km (about 750 mi) in a northern and southern direction and about 210 to 436 km (about 130 to 271 mi) in an eastern and western direction. It has an area of 371,000 sq km (143,000 sq mi). The Caspian coastline is irregular, with large gulfs on the east, including Krasnovodsk Gulf and the very shallow Garabogazköl Gulf, which acts as an evaporation basin and is the site of a major chemical plant that extracts salts from the deposits.

The Caspian Sea has a mean depth of about 170 m (about 550 ft) and is deepest in the south. Its level varies from year to year but averages about 28 m (92 ft) below sea level. In the 1960s and 1970s the level fell substantially, partly because water was withdrawn from tributary rivers for irrigation and other purposes. In 1980, a dike was built across the mouth of Garabogazköl Gulf to reduce water loss, creating a lake that was expected to last for several years. Instead, the gulf dried up completely by 1983. In the meantime, the level of the Caspian Sea began rising again at a rate of about 14 to 20 cm (about 6 to 8 in) annually. To restore water flow into Garabogazköl Gulf an aqueduct was built.

The southern and southwestern shorelines of the Caspian Sea are bordered by the Elburz Mountains and the Caucasus Mountains. The sea has numerous tributaries, notably the Volga, Ural, and Zhem rivers, all of which flow into it from the north. Other tributaries include the Gorgan (Gurgan) and Atrek rivers, flowing from the east, and the Kura River, flowing from the west. The sea has no outlet. The Caspian Sea is linked to the Baltic Sea, the White Sea, and the Black Sea by an extensive network of inland waterways, chief of which is the Volga River. These waterways provide an outlet to northern Europe for the oil fields of Baku, Azerbaijan on the Abseron Peninsula. The Caspian Sea also contains highly productive fisheries, yielding valuable catches of sturgeon (the chief source of caviar), salmon, perch, herring, and carp. Other animal life in the Caspian Sea includes tortoises, porpoises, and seals.

Navigation is frequently dangerous because of violent southeastern storms, and during the winter months the northern parts of the Caspian Sea are closed by ice. The chief ports are Krasnovodsk, Turkmenistan; Baku; and Makhachkala, Russia.

Caspian Sea Map

Located in southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia, the Caspian Sea ranks as the largest inland body of water in the world. Several rivers empty into the Caspian Sea, although their flow has diminished due to dams and lakes. This map illustrates the location of the Caspian Sea and shows the Garabogazköz Gulf, one of the many large gulfs on the eastern portion of the coastline.

Caspian Seal

People correctly associate seals and sea lions with marine environments. Almost all pinniped species are found in the oceans and along their coasts and island shores, but a few kinds of seals are residents of landlocked lakes. The Caspian Sea, which is the world's largest salt lake, is home to the Caspian seal, *Phoca caspica*. How did it get here? Scientists believe the ancestor of the Caspian seal swam upriver from the North Atlantic Ocean to reach the Paratethys, a huge inland sea. Then, about 5 or 6 million years ago, the Paratethys began to dry up: Today's Black, Caspian, and Aral seas are its remains, and the Caspian seal is a legacy of the time when a salt sea stretched from Europe to Central Asia

Sturgeon Worth Their Weight in Gold

Historically, 90% of the World's caviar has come from the Caspian Sea region and its tributary rivers. The supply, however, is shrinking rapidly. The effects of pollution, loss of spawning habitat, increased poaching and over-fishing has proven to be devastating to the sturgeon population and, consequently, caviar production.

Largest Lakes and Inland Seas

The largest lakes in the world include the Caspian Sea, Lake Superior, and Lake Victoria. The Dead Sea is the world's lowest lake, 408 m (1,340 ft) below sea level. The Caspian, the world's largest lake, covers an area of 370,998 sq km (143,243 sq mi). Lake Baikal is the deepest freshwater lake in the world, with a maximum depth of 1637 m (5371 ft).

World's Largest

Inland Seas and Lakes

Approximate Area

Caspian Sea, Asia

371,000 sq km/143,000 sq mi

Lake Superior, North America
82,100 sq km/31,700 sq mi
Lake Victoria, Africa
69,490 sq km/26,830 sq mi
Lake Huron, North America
59,600 sq km/23,000 sq mi
Lake Michigan, North America
57,800 sq km/22,300 sq mi
Lake Tanganyika, Africa
32,900 sq km/12,700 sq mi
Great Bear Lake, North America
31,790 sq km/12,270 sq mi
Lake Baikal, Asia
31,500 sq km/12,200 sq mi
Aral Sea, Asia
31,220 sq km/12,050 sq mi
Great Slave Lake, North America
28,570 sq km/11,030 sq mi