

## Review: The Plagues and Pleasures of the Salton Sea

Written by Dave Howard

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[Interview with Directors Jeff Springer and Chris Metzler here](#) &nbsp;

When Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" came out, it was overwhelming. What could one person possibly do to reverse the trend? A new documentary, **PLAGUES AND PLEASURES OF THE SALTON SEA**, sheds light on a smaller problem. That is if you consider a sea a "smaller problem." Part eco-warning and part character study co-directors Chris Metzler and Jeff Springer, have made an excellent first feature.

The Salton Sea, just south of Palm Springs, was created due to an engineering accident in 1907. Part of the Colorado River flooded what was once known as the Salton Sink. Due to the run off from the irrigation, it never evaporated in the Imperial Valley 120 degree summers. In the 50's it became the California Riviera, a weekend playground for the rich and famous. The rich and famous stopped coming after a series of "fish die-off's" a natural progression, which resulted in hundreds of dead fish washing ashore.

Now only admired by the locals, the Salton Sea has become a monument of neglect.

While the filmmakers do point out that the area is dying and will eventually wreak havoc on nearby Palm Springs, the main focus of this film are the characters that inhabit the area. An all-star cast of local color has been assembled. There is "The Landman" an earnest Cal Worthington type who hustles property, an aging (yet well hung) nudist who loves to welcome the passerbys on the highway, gang bangers who have escaped Los Angeles, a n Evangelical Christian,

who is building a never ending monument to God and the unofficial mayor "Hunky Daddy" a beer loving former Hungarian Freedom Fighter. One would be wrong to characterize these people as lost souls; they are "found" souls. The Salton Sea unites them.

There is one thing that unites these folks and it's hope. Outside of the weather, it's really the only thing they have left. Most have seen the glory days of the 60's and the subsequent downfall. In the 90's, Sonny Bono championed their cause. He brought attention, bills and bigwig Republicans (including Newt Gingrich) into town. "Then," one of the residents states "He went skiing." As homage to Sonny a law was passed to restore the town, yet the folks are still waiting for improvements. .

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The film, all shot on Mini-DV, looks fantastic. The filmmakers manage find to find beauty in even the most unattractive images. Because of the small camera they used, they are able to get their subjects to really open up. Self proclaimed Trash Director John Waters narration is inspired and suits the subject perfectly.

At it's core, PLAGUES AND PASSIONS OF THE SALTON SEA is a true story of the human experience. It is a tale of folks who never give up.