

THE BIZARRE TAR LAKES: AN ODDITY OF NATURE



There are only a handful of asphalt lakes around the world. They are nature's oddities and therefore attract a lot of attention. Tourists, paleontologists, politicians - all realize the true value of the bubbling tar lakes.

Asphalt lakes are full of surprises. For years, scientists were trying to fully comprehend the conditions of their creation and paleontologists rejoice over their ability to preserve animals that get trapped in them for thousands of years. They are only found on the Western Hemisphere. The two largest ones are the **Pitch Lake in Trinidad** and the **Guanoco Lake in Venezuela**. Los Angeles also attracts with its **La Brea Tar Pits**.

The scientists explain that the origin of the Pitch Lake in Trinidad is connected to the subduction of deep faults under the Caribbean Plate which resulted in oil leaks. However, locals believe that once, two tribes of Chaima Indians were leading a war against each other and to celebrate their victory, one of the tribes ate all the sacred hummingbirds. The legend says that the gods opened the earth to create a lake that flooded the entire village, thus punishing the Chaimas for their terrible sin. The Pitch Lake was discovered by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1595, covers an area of 40 ha and runs 75 m deep. The **lake attracts 20 000 visitors each year** and the asphalt generates some \$ 3 million a year.

In Venezuela, there is another large asphalt lake, the Guanoco. It is only a few feet deep, however, covers an unbelievable area of 445 ha. It is covered by grass and for that reason many tourists do not come for a visit. However, its industrial value is immense for the local government.

The La Brea Tar Pits in L.A., California are another amazing attraction. Located in the heart of Los Angeles, in the Hancock Park, the tar pits are unique as they are covered in water. Many animals were tricked into coming here and ended up drowning. For years, excavation works have been going on here and many animals have been found perfectly preserved in the asphalt. The oldest organism discovered date back some 38,000 years. A partial skeleton of a Native American woman was discovered here as well, its estimated age being 9,000 years.

The lakes are simply a fascinating example of the many wonders of nature to be found on our planet. For anyone who finds themselves in their vicinity, they are an absolute must see.

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