



# *Your comprehensive guide to understanding what sargassum is & why you need to know about it*



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# What is Sargassum?



## Understanding Sargassum

You may have heard about sargassum or seen news headlines but what is it? Sargassum is a large brown seaweed (a type of algae) that floats in island-like masses and never attaches to the sea floor. It can stretch for miles across the ocean.

When it washes ashore, it rots and gives off a substance called hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) which causes a rotten egg smell.



## Resort Strategies for Mitigating Impact

**Removal & Disposal** - the most common way to address the sargassum. This can be done manually or with the help of heavy equipment.

**Barrier Systems** - nets, booms or other physical barriers designed to trap the sargassum before it reaches the beach.

**Natural Solutions** - using sea turtles or other marine organisms to feed on the sargassum.

**Awareness Campaigns** - educating guests on the causes and how to reduce their own environmental impact.

## More than Meets the Nose

### The Surprising Benefits of Sargassum

- Provides an important habitat for a variety of marine organisms including fish, crustaceans and jellyfish
- Acts as a carbon sink absorbing large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Improves water quality by removing excess nutrients and pollutants from the ocean.
- Contains a variety of compounds with medicinal properties including antioxidants and anti-inflammatory agents that have been used in traditional medicine for centuries.
- It has economic benefits as well. Sargassum is used as a fertilizer in agriculture, as a feedstock for bioplastics and biofuels and as a source of alginates for the food, pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries.





# Frequently Asked Questions

*I'm addicted to seaweed, I must sea help!*

**Q** | Where is sargassum commonly found?

**A** | Sargassum can be found in almost all Caribbean countries, the east coast of Mexico and US, as well as other beach destinations around the world. There has been no issue with sargassum on the West coast of Mexico to date (Huatulco, Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, Cabo).

**Q** | Is there a Sargassum "season"?

**A** | There is a season that typically happens from May - October but it can be seen as early as February and as late as November.

**Q** | How can I guarantee that the resort I choose will have no sargassum?

**A** | YOU CAN'T! Sargassum is very unpredictable and while there are areas that tend to be less prone to heavy sargassum it can change from day to day and even hour to hour. A sargassum free beach cannot be guaranteed for this reason.

**Q** | Does sargassum smell?

**A** | In the water, sargassum is harmless to humans, but once it lands on the beach and starts decomposing, it begins to release hydrogen sulfide gas, or H<sub>2</sub>S. Colorless, poisonous and with an unpleasant rotten-egg odor.

**Q** | Is it safe to swim, walk or run in sargassum?

**A** | While you can certainly still swim and walk in the water that has sargassum present there are some very minor health risks to be aware of (see below).

**Q** | What are the health risks of H<sub>2</sub>S?

**A** | For the average tourist, any health risks are minimal. Those with respiratory conditions may want to avoid spending too much time near the beach out of an abundance of caution. Swimming can cause skin irritation and/or rashes from the hydrazoas (tiny cousins to jellyfish) that inhabit the sargassum. Usually removing yourself from the irritant will resolve the problem but if not over the counter hydrocortisone steroid cream may help (don't forget to pack some!)

**Q** | Can I change my resort or destination if there is too much sargassum?

**A** | This will depend on the change and cancellation policy for your reservation but changing your resort or destination will not provide a guarantee that your vacation will not be affected by sargassum. I recommend that you purchase the appropriate cancellation insurance.



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