

STARTERS / Live!: Wet and Wild

Gather the family and head for one of America's best hidden swimming holes.

Summertime. Mid-July. The heat has hiked to the high-90s, the air is stale as week-old rye bread, and the community pool is mobbed with middle-schoolers hopped up on high fructose corn syrup. Waterpark? The wave pool is jammed, too; besides, the ice cream costs \$4.95 a scoop

Here's a better idea: Get off the beaten pack and scramble to one of America's many hidden swimming holes. With a little investigation, you can find a secluded pond in a nearby state park or follow a stream until you find a swimmable pool of water backed up by a rock dam. Or seek out one of these famous natural swimming-hole hot spots. But be safe, will ya? Never swim alone. Jump feet first, don't dive. Always check to see that water is void obstructions and deep enough before jumping in. Have fun.

– Andrew Mengel

1. Fawn's Leap Falls, Greene County, NY

Hidden in the Catskill Mountains, Fawn's Leap Falls is a legendary, 40-foot waterfall that descends into a natural pool in the middle of Kaaterskill Creek, just above Moore's Bridge. Past swimmers have left a rope to help you scale the cliff to the panorama view that overlooks Upstate New York's lush foliage.

<https://www.theoutbound.com/new-york/swimming/swim-at-fawns-leap>

2. Blue Hole, Wimberley, TX

This popular watering hole located in Blue Hole Regional Park, in Wimberley, Texas, features rope swings hung from cypress branches, a deck with ladder, picnic areas, pavilion and hiking trails.

<http://friendsofbluehole.org/>

3. Madison Blue Springs, Lee, FL

Slates of limestone shimmer through this cool crystal-clear spring-fed swimming hole. Once hard to reach, the water is now easy to access from wooden stairs and ramps. The pool is 25-feet deep in some spots and attracts scuba divers.

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/park/madison-blue-spring>

4. Meadow Run Natural Waterslide, Ohiopyle, PA

For centuries, this creek's rushing waters have carved a smooth chute into the sandstone, creating a perfect natural waterslide that dumps swimmers into the Youghiogheny River in southwestern Pennsylvania. Usually in late-August park rangers host a race for sliders and kayakers, with an all day picnic and music. Don't forget your water shoes.

<http://wilderness-voyageurs.com/ohiopyle-natural-water-slides-meadow-run/>

5. Sliding Rock, Brevard, NC

Sliding Rock, in Pisgah National Forest, used to be known for one of North Carolina's largest apple orchards, but now the apples have lost their luster to the 60-foot smooth, sloping boulder that acts as a natural waterslide. The mountain water is brisk, never topping higher than 60 degrees. But Sliding Rock is a safe family spot, thanks to a lifeguard on duty until mid-August..

http://www.ncwaterfalls.com/sliding_rock1.htm

6. Paradise Forks, Williams, AZ

Paradise Forks is for avid adventurers. This hidden hole is pinned in the peaceful pine trees of Kaibab National Forest. A challenging hiking path leads to the water, but true daredevils can climb their way up, as Paradise Forks is a dream for rock climbers.

<https://www.mountainproject.com/v/paradise-forks/105787813>

7. Falling Water Falls Hector, Arkansas

Falling Water Falls looks like a watering hole from the Garden of Eden. Thin tentacles of water fall off a shallow cliff, into a deep, light blue pool, as mist traipses above its surface and mixes with the sunlight fighting through the treetops. Hit this hole in August when the heat is still sweltering, but the crowd has dispersed.

<http://www.exploretheozarksonline.com/activities/parksnature/nationalforests/ozark/bigpi/ney/fallingwaterfalls.html>

8. Johnson's Shut-Ins, MO

Volcanic activity from billions of years ago shifted the land in Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park, forming huge boulders separated by deep indigo pools. The park is family friendly, with a picnic area, hiking trails and camping ground. The water can be chilling but refreshing on hot summer days

<https://mostateparks.com/park/johnsons-shut-ins-state-park>