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Hunting for Swimming Hole Hideaways in New England

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Coos Canyon, Maine. Photo by See/Swim.

By the time I arrived in Massachusetts in fourth grade, I was on my third elementary school. I was the only Asian kid in the small rural town, and our family arrived on the idyllic New England scene like a fish out of water. Needless to say, our weekends were wide open, and my mother dictated how our family should spend the time. My mother, homebound during the week as a housewife and afraid to drive, would ask my father to take us to her two favorite places: shopping malls and hikes in the woods.

My three younger siblings and I didn't love being dragged to watch my mother shop 'til she dropped into deeper credit card debt, but the hiking in the woods meant freedom for me to run around, untethered by language barriers and social mores we didn't understand. During our exploration of New England woods, I would often stumble across swimming holes tucked away between trees. To cool off, I loved jumping in whenever there was a chance, no matter how fusty the water looked. Bonus points when the water was clear.

I felt a certain magic when I would unexpectedly come across water in the middle of a forest, like a welcome oasis hidden away, transporting me to another world. Often, the swimming holes I found during my hikes had no names, or names that I could remember. It didn't matter; I just made up names myself, feeding on my own imagination.

Hiking in New England sometimes meant being slathered in hot, humid sweat, suffocating in muggy temperatures. There was nothing more invigorating than jumping into the water, even if it was a little murky and muddy. It felt thrilling when the icy, cold water hit my skin, jolting my senses into acute awareness of the forces of nature all around me.

The beauty of swimming holes is that they're undefined. Swim, jump, or wade – I could do whatever I wanted in the body of water. Its main purpose

was to placate through a little organic R&R.

The depth of the swimming holes runs the gamut from water deep enough for cliff jumps to knee-high wading pools. Sure, sometimes I was swimming with sticks, mud, and even snapping turtles, but hey, I learned to paddle as fast and far away from them as I could. Did I kick something slimy? Probably a fish swishing its tail against my ankles.

“Perhaps venturing into swimming holes taught me to be a little fearless about jumping into the unknown.”

I wasn't always sure what lay beneath the surface of the brown mirrored water. It was a good telltale sign if there were already other people in the water, but our family's adventures in the woods were often when other American families gathered for holiday get-togethers like July 4th, which meant we were frequently alone on the trails.

Perhaps venturing into swimming holes taught me to be a little fearless about jumping into the unknown. It inspired me to take up scuba diving in my twenties, reaching advanced-level diver certification, completing 70 dives in seven countries. There is something to be said about learning to bravely tackle mysterious barriers without having a clear picture of what's beneath the surface.

Maybe growing up with swimming holes made me more resilient during the pandemic. While none of us knew when or how the epidemic would end

(binge-watching *Contagion*, *Outbreak*, and virus-centric fatalistic films didn't help), I never once felt that the uncertainty was so daunting that I wouldn't come out of the other side of the crisis.

I've passed on my love of jumping into swimming holes to my daughters. When I coerce them into trying something new, they sometimes say to me, "What's the point?" The point is that life is an unknown adventure.

Not only have I taken my girls to jump into swimming holes, but I've also led my daughter to leap off piers into the Bosphorus Strait with local boys in Istanbul. It may not be a Tiny Trip to make your way to Turkey anytime soon, but a short getaway to a nearby swimming hole is good training for the big adventure of life. We may not always know what the world has in store, but we'll never find out unless we jump in feet first.

The author and her daughter (pictured) jumped from this pier in Istanbul.

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New England Swimming Holes to Explore

1. Chapel Brook Falls, Ashfield, MA

Chapel Brook Falls includes three waterfalls that feed into swimming holes along the trails. You can do a short hike from the parking area or reward yourself with a cool down after a longer hike around Pony Mountain. It's a perfect place to chill out as you listen to the gentle hum of the waterfall pouring over the rock ledges.

2. Coos Canyon, Byron, ME

When you go for a dip in Coos Canyon's emerald green water, you might emerge with gold flakes speckling your skin. The Swift River, which contains precious metals, flows into this swimming hole. People pay top

dollar for the 24K gold experience with facials and food, but here in Maine, you can be flecked in gold for free.

3. Franconia Falls, Lincoln, NH

The White Mountains are home to many swimming holes, but natural waterslides are what make Franconia Falls more unique. An easy hike, climbing only 300 feet in altitude, leads to a three-foot water chute that lands you safely in a seven-foot deep pool when the water level is low.

4. Bristol Falls (also known as Bartlett Falls), Bristol, VT

There's nothing more thrilling than discovering a rope swing, ready for you to grasp so you can plunge into the waters. You'll find one here at this local favorite swimming hole. The natural pool sits at the bottom of a 14-foot waterfall. A secret cave is curtained behind Bristol Falls.

5. Georgiaville Pond Beach, Smithfield, RI

Located on the Woonasquatucket River, this secluded freshwater swimming hole has a sandy beach for relaxing and picnicking, plus restrooms and accessible parking spots in their lot. The historic Smith-Appleby House, built in 1696, sits at the north end of the pond.

6. Mashamoquet Brook State Park, Pomfret, CT

Walks in this recreation area take you along various swimming areas, from a large pond equipped with platforms for jumping to gentle, isolated brooks you can wade through. The nearby Wolf's Den Campground gives you the option to stay overnight to explore the historic mill, a natural rock

formation shaped like a throne, and Wolf's Den, named after the last wolf killed in Connecticut.

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