



Check It Out! Swim with Your Horse

By Sonja Cassella

As summer is here and the days are hot ... time to jump into some cool water. But wait – you also want to spend time with your horse? Have you always wanted to get wet on horseback, but never been in the right place at the right time? No problem! We've located four sites where horse swimming is not just practical, but can be done with impunity. Check out these retreats where you can beat the summertime blues in the water ... on horseback!

EAST COAST

LOCATION: Island Beach State Park, on the Central New Jersey Coast

DESCRIPTION OF SWIMMING AREA:

Five miles of beach trails; swim into the ocean from the beach. "There is no specific spot on the beach where swimming is best - it's all basically the same - and up to you, as the rider, to go in as deep as you like!" said Lori Sigmund, a trail rider and frequent visitor to the park.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Within the park, you'll find interpretive exhibits, sport fishing, miles of white sand beach, and plenty of sand dunes. History/geology: Island Beach is a typical barrier island.; that is, a long thin strip of land paralleling the shore, just a few miles out. In geologic terms, these islands are very new;



Five miles of beach trails are available at the Island Beach State Park in New Jersey. Photo by Lori Sigmund

most barrier islands are believed to be less than 10,000 years old.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE: Horses are permitted on the beach from October 1 to April 30.

FEES: \$5 per vehicle. Some restrictions apply, including a limited number of horses allowed on the island per day. Horsemen must reserve 5 days in advance; call the number below. for more information.

DIRECTIONS: To get to Island Beach, take the Garden State Parkway to Tom's River (Exit 82A) and follow Route 37 east across the causeway to Seaside Heights. Follow Route 35 south until it dead-ends at the park entrance.

FOR MORE INFO:

Island Beach State Park
P.O. Box 37 • Seaside Park, NJ 08752
Phone: (732) 793-0506
www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/island.html

BRITISH COLUMBIA

LOCATION: Lake Okanagan in southern British Columbia

DESCRIPTION OF SWIMMING AREA:

A rental horse swim-ride is offered at Okanagan Lake Lodge. "We do a trail ride down to the swim beach, and there we take the saddle off a horse, or two, and we take that horse in the water, controlling the horse, and the guests get to swim with it," according to Peter Obstfeld, who runs Okanagan Stables.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Lake Okanagan Resort is a full-service destination, with golf, water sports, vineyards, tennis, hiking, shopping and nature activities.

GEOLOGY: Surrounded by the Monashee Mountains, Lake Okanagan is nearly 100 miles long. The valley is actually the northern end



How often do you go on a trail ride where you wear a swim suit? Okanagan Lake Lodge Stables offer a two hours swim ride.

of the Great Basin (known down in Nevada as the Sonoran Desert).

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE: The stables are open from May to October, with the best swimming in June, July and August.

FEES: Rental horse plus swimming lessons, \$135 for two hours.

DIRECTIONS: Highway 97 travels to the Okanagan region from the Canada/US border crossing just south of Osoyoos. Or take the Trans-Canadian highway or Highway 5 (a toll road) from Vancouver.

FOR MORE INFO

Lake Okanagan Resort Stables
2751 Westside Road • Kelowna, BC V1Z 3T1, Canada
(250) 769-2634
<http://lakeokanaganstables.com>
email: info@lakeokanaganstables.com

WEST COAST

LOCATION: Montaña de Oro State Park, Central California

DESCRIPTION OF SWIMMING AREA: Enjoy 50 miles of trails and ride right into the surf.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Montana De Oro means Mountain of Gold; the park is named for the golden wildflowers that bloom in spring. There are six campsites with corrals in Hazard



The best place to swim your horse is by the Tsali Recreational Area at Fontana Lake in North Carolina.

DESCRIPTION OF SWIMMING AREA: The 29-mile long, 11,700-acre Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) lake has more than 240 miles of shoreline. The best place to swim your horses is by the horse trails at the Tsali Recreational Area.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Fontana Reservoir occupies a site of particular splendor deep in the Great Smoky Mountains. Fishing, boating, and swimming are all popular at Fontana, but it is perhaps most appreciated by wilderness hikers and campers.

GEOLOGY: Fontana Dam itself is an engineering marvel. When completed in November 1944 to produce electricity for the war effort, the 480-foot-high dam became the highest in the Eastern United States and the fourth highest in the nation.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE: In the summer months, trail riders can cool off in the lake's waters. As a shared-use trail, trail riders are allowed on the Tsali trails Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays.

FEES: A daily fee of \$2 per horse is charged or you can purchase a yearly pass for \$15.

DIRECTIONS: The Tsali Recreational Area is located off on Highway 28, west of Almond, North Carolina.

FOR MORE INFO: US Forest Service's Cheoah District Ranger Office at 828-479-6431

There are other places to swim with horses – if you need to find one that's near to you, ask around. Most regions can claim at least one.

**A FINAL QUESTION:
CAN ALL HORSES SWIM?**

The accepted wisdom is that yes, once in the water, all horses can swim. However, there is a caveat, and it's one that depends on your horsemanship and your particular mount. As they say: "You can lead a horse to water. But ... you can't make him swim." **TB**



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The sand dunes at Montana De Oro make for challenging riding but the reward is incredibly beautiful vistas.
Photo by Sarah Rickard

Horse Camp that can accommodate from 6-25 horses at each. Wildlife in the park includes black tailed deer and the black oystercatcher. There is spectacular surfing nearby.

GEOLOGY: This park features rugged cliffs, secluded sandy beaches, coastal plains, sand dunes, forests, streams, canyons, and hills, including 1,347-foot Valencia Peak.

BEST TIME OF YEAR TO RIDE: Ride year round. Dress in layers though; California's central coast area temperatures can quickly change from warm to cold. Great place to ride in winter when the temperatures are mild and it's often sunny and warm.

FEES: Hazard Horse Camp high season camping rates are \$30 per night to \$25 low season rates.

DIRECTIONS: The park is six miles southwest of Morro bay and seven miles south of Los Osos, on Pecho Road.

FOR MORE INFO
Montaña de Oro State Park
(805) 528-0513, (805) 772-7434,
(800) 444-7215

SOUTH

LOCATION: Fontana Lake, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina

- SWIMMING SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:**
1. Don't go out in the water with your horse if you are not a good swimmer. Wear a life jacket.
 2. Remove tie downs and martingales.
 3. Don't swim alone; use the buddy system and bring a friend along.
 4. Swim only in familiar waters, and watch out for deep mud, swift currents, or in the ocean, waves.
 5. Take off your boots and breaches or jeans before attempting to enter the water with your horse. These could make it hard to swim for shore if you come off – which happens when swimming far more often than riding over dry ground.
 6. Swimming is best done bareback – you don't want anything getting tangled up in the saddle while you're in the water. Even if you have a synthetic saddle, dipping it in water may be a bad idea – the metal could rust, and if it takes too long to dry out completely, it could get moldy.
 7. Leather bridles can also be damaged, and leather reins can be slippery, so a nylon bridle is ideal for swimming.

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