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Jump In, the Water's Fine!

Austin's swimming holes give sweet relief for summer heat

AUSTIN, TX— Austin's summers can be tough to endure. Fortunately, the city is situated on a network of cool, shady grottoes to be used swimmers, waders, and floaters. Barton Springs Pool's consistent 68-degree temperature can be shockingly refreshing in weather up to 40 degrees warmer. Hamilton Pool's light waterfall cascades over smiling swimmers, and children splash into the water from the rope swing at Krause Springs. But these aren't the only stops — Austin provides sanctuary from the outdoors with dozens of swimming holes and pools.

Zilker Park's Barton Springs Pool combines a natural lake setting with neighborhood swimming pool to create a 959-foot playground for tanning, swimming, and enjoying the outdoors. With nearly 350,000 visitors each year, it ranks as Austin's most popular swimming hole. The constant cool temperature encourages 70% of those visitors to plunge into Barton Springs' water during the summer. Sunbathers soak up rays on the grassy knolls located on either side of the pool, while the sky reflects off the translucent water, which reveals a limestone bottom.

Barton Springs remains the centerpiece of Zilker Park, which also includes Zilker Hillside Theatre, hike and bike trails and the Zilker Zephyr, a miniature train that winds visitors around the park. This family-friendly haven is located at 2101 Barton Springs Road. Barton Springs Pool opens daily from 5 a.m.-10 p.m., and closes on Thursdays from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. for cleaning. Weekday passes are \$3.00 for adults, \$2 for juniors between the ages of 12-17 and \$1 for seniors and children 11 and under. Summer passes are also available from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Just west of Austin lies Hamilton Pool, a sanctuary for outdoor enthusiasts. Located in the center of a 232-acre preserve, the pool is surrounded by a grotto and diverse vegetation. The cave-like rock formation serves as a unique backdrop and overhang to the cool, blue-green

water, which flows down a tree-lined creek to the Pedernales River. Visitors swim, picnic, play Frisbee, bird watch and climb the rocks surrounding the water. Pool-goers lie on rafts or swim underneath the partial dome of rock overhang. Hamilton Creek flows over a broken edge of the dome and forms a curtain of water across the pool. Visitors can also relax on a boulder underneath the beads of water splashing from the 42-foot waterfall.

Parking only allows for 75 cars, and that capacity is often reached during the busy months of May to September. The area opens year-round from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, weather permitting. Admission prices are \$8 per vehicle and \$3 per pedestrian/bicyclist. Annual permits are \$75 per vehicle and a free Lone Star pass is available for disabled veterans and persons over 65.

A little farther west of Hamilton Pool is Krause Springs, one of the most beautiful swimming holes in the state. Water is pumped into the pool at a rate of 70 gallons per minute where it then cascades into a 25-foot waterfall to form an enticing collection of artesian spring water below. Two holes in one, the elevated spring is shallow and a great place to relax before sliding down the flowing brook or meandering down the rocks into the 8-foot-deep bottom spring. The grottos, waterfalls, rope swing and beautiful landscaping make Krause Springs a popular spot for weddings and other special events. A camping area includes picnic tables, barbeque pits and restrooms.

Krause Springs is open year-round from 9 a.m. to dusk, and admission prices are \$3 for children up to 11 years old and \$4.50 for all others, Monday through Thursday. Prices increase by \$.50 on weekends and holidays. Camping is \$5 for children and \$8 for adults with an additional \$5 charge for RVs.

The Austin Parks and Recreation Department oversees more than 200 parks, many of which offer swimming in a natural setting. In addition, 47 public swimming pools are available in the Austin area. For a full listing, visit www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks.

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