

Go wild and immerse yourself in nature

Lucas Tatek from the Great Ouse Valley Trust is a wild swimmer. Here he explains why and how to do it safely.



Photograph by GOVT

On a hot summer's day, what could be more refreshing than entering the cool waters of your favourite secret spot on the Great River Ouse? Wild swimming, as opposed to using a swimming pool, is gaining popularity. It's free and the health benefits of taking a dip in nature are well known for both physical and mental health. The initial shock of cold water appears to fortify the body against anxiety and depression, as well as waking you up! It also releases hormones, such as endorphins and adrenalin, which have therapeutic benefits.

With your head now at the same level as the ducks, you are literally 'in' nature, as opposed to looking down or up at it, and you feel at one with your surroundings. Dragonflies dart past and you are able to get closer, much closer, to that shy, elusive Heron, and perhaps enjoy an eye-level glimpse of a Kingfisher. It can be quite euphoric! The only sounds are your gentle strokes against the water and the occasional plop of a jumping fish, or maybe it was a Water Vole! You can experience a truly Zen moment of tranquillity and calm, and for a short time you can tune out and forget the passage of time. Now how often do you get to do that?

Many informal wild swimming groups have sprung up since the pandemic and it is estimated that wild swimmers in rivers, lakes and reservoirs almost doubled when pools were closed. Furthermore, the social interaction groups offer is of great benefit to mental health.

Here are some common-sense guidelines. Swim only in areas where access in and out of the water is easy, and free of rocks. Never jump or dive in - you don't know how deep it is, or what obstacles may lie beneath. Never swim in fast-moving rivers, after heavy rain, or in areas of water weeds. Never swim anywhere that has warning signs about swimming (especially near or on lock gates). Keep your distance from boats and paddle boards. Wearing a brightly coloured skull cap and using a float can help make you visible to other water users. Leave alcohol for after the swim. Don't disturb water birds, especially if you swim with a dog. Lastly, leave the area as you found it. Take your litter home.

The Great Ouse Valley Trust promotes for public benefit the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire. For more information about the Trust please visit:

www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk

