

Taking the Plunge Close to Home

Tired of just cannonballing in the neighbors' pool but don't want to stray too far? Here are seven water parks within a four-hour drive of the Beltway. We've included approximate drive times, prices and attractions—plus each park's splashiest thrill. —Anne McDonough



SOAK ZONE

| PARK | VITALS | WHAT'S THERE | THE BIG SPLASH | NOTES |
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| Camelbeach Waterpark Tannersville, Pa. 570-629-1661 www.camelbeach.com | Drive time (from Beltway): About 3 hours 45 minutes (225 miles). Cost: \$26.95 (11 and up), \$22.95 (3-11), 2 and under free. | 35 acres, 22 slides. The Kahuna Lagoon wave pool features the biggest manmade waves (up to six feet) in the Northeast. The six-story Triple Venom has three speed slides that run a combined 1,024 feet. There's a bowl slide for families (the Spin Cycle raft ride) and one for thrill seekers (Vortex, a high-speed body slide). | 4,000 gallons of water per minute flow through the Checked Flag Challenge , an eight-slide racing complex that drops you more than 48 feet while you race headfirst to see who crosses the finish line first. | If you're just there to keep on eye on the kids, pay the \$12.95 spectator fee instead of full price. . . Parking is free. |
| Paradise Island Largo, Md. 301-249-1500 www.sixflags.com/parks/america | Drive time: About 10 minutes (five miles). Cost: \$36.99, \$25.99 (under 54 inches), 3 and under free. | 35 acres, 14 slides. The closest major water park offers a five-story interactive treehouse (Crocodile Cal's Outback Beach House), four-foot waves at the Monsoon Lagoon and the super-speedy Bonzai Pipeline slide. For an even bigger Six Flags splash, head to Jackson, N.J., and the 45-acre Hurricane Harbor, whose 18 slides include the 294-foot-long Jurahnimo Falls. | Tube it on the Tahiti Twister , where you'll shoot down an enclosed flume and end with a splash in the 65,000-gallon landing pool. | It's inside the Six Flags America theme park (included in ticket price) . . . Parking is \$9. |
| SoakZone Ligonier, Pa. 724-238-3666 www.idlewild.com | Drive time: About 3 hours 20 minutes (180 miles). Cost: \$20.95, 2 and under free. | 11 acres, 14 slides. This small park-within-a park offers stationary Hydro Blasters (think water guns on steroids), a massive swimming pool built in 1932 and lots of watery fun for the little ones. Hydro Racers lets four people slide headfirst and compete at the same time. | Two-person rafts twist, crash through water curtains and then drop 50 feet on the Pipeline Plunge's enclosed chutes. | Ticket includes the rest of the 200-acre Idlewild amusement park . . . Free parking . |
| Splash Zone Wildwood, N.J. 609-729-5600 www.splashzonewaterpark.com | Drive time: About 3½ hours (190 miles). Cost: \$27.99, \$22.99 (48 inches and under). | Four city blocks, 16 slides and rides. The twisty, dual-tubed Spider's Web has both enclosed and open chutes. Clock your speed on the Speed Dominator, float down the Adventure River or stand under the 1,000 gallons of water dumped by the Giant Bucket every three minutes. | The Jersey shore's only Beast of the East whitewater ride can carry up to six people per raft. Catch a great view of the beach and boardwalk as you careen down the wide slide. | It's on the boardwalk in Wildwood, so you can cool off in the ocean as well . . . Parking included with two full-price tickets. |
| Water Country USA Williamsburg 800-343-7946 www.watercountryusa.com | Drive time: About 2 hours 20 minutes (145 miles). Cost: \$34.95 (6 and up), \$27.95 (3-6), 2 and under free. | 43 acres, 30 rides and slides. The surf's always up at the mid-Atlantic's biggest water park. There's the Adventure Isle obstacle course, the Surfer's Bay wave pool (Virginia's largest) and Aquazoid, a family raft ride with special effects. The Caban-A-Rama Theater offers diving shows. Toboggans fly on Meltdown, the park's fastest, steepest ride complete with 180-degree turns. | Water Country's newest ride is the 1,500-foot, 3.5-acre Hubba Hubba Highway , a lazy river of sorts. It's not totally relaxing, though: The coconut trees lining the park's largest attraction dump water on you as you float by. | It's about four miles from both the Busch Gardens theme park and Colonial Williamsburg . . . Parking is \$8. |
| WaterWorks Doswell, Va. 804-876-5000 www.kingsdominion.com | Drive time: About 1 hour 30 minutes (75 miles). Cost: \$43.99 (7 and up), \$29.99 (3-6), 2 and under free. | 19 acres, 19 slides. Get soaked in Big Wave Bay, a 650,000-gallon pool that serves up four-foot waves; Surf City Splash House, a water-filled funhouse with a swinging bridge; the Spiral Chute, with two enclosed, intertwining tubes; and the Lazy Rider rafting river. The Lil' Barefoot Beach is just right for tykes. | Thrill-seekers flock to Pipeline Peak . The attraction consists of four slides, including Night Slider, the world's tallest enclosed tube—which zips riders down 77 feet in complete darkness. | Park is inside King's Dominion (included in ticket price; check Web site for major discounts) . . . Parking is \$8. |
| Wildwater Kingdom Allentown, Pa. 610-395-3724 www.dorneypark.com | Drive time: About 3 hours 15 minutes (180 miles). Cost: \$35.75 (over 48 inches), \$16 (3 and older and under 48 inches), 2 and under free. | 30 acres, 18 slides. The park was refurbished in 2003, with 10 new slides. At 70 feet tall and 700 feet long, Aquablaster is one of the world's longest elevated raft rides. Get clean in Kid Wash, a carwash-theme attraction; tube your way down Runaway River, a 1,600-foot-long winding river; and surf in the 560,000-gallon Wave Pool. | Patriot's Plunge has three slides (red, white and blue, of course) leading from a 52-foot-tall tower. Following the theory that bigger is wetter, four other slides at the 40-foot level let riders access the Wildwater Rapids. | Admission includes all of the rides and other amusements at the on-site Dorney Park theme park . . . Parking is \$7. |