

Aquatic Utopia

Deep down, you'd have to be a fish to find happiness on land. —KATRINA WOENICKI

Under a gibbous moon, I slipped into the hotel's infinity pool, heated year-round to 84°F. It felt like stepping into a bath after a long day. It was winter in Arizona, and the sky was the color of slate, the air crisp. No one else wanted to leave the chill, so I had the pool all to myself. From the steps, I waded in, from nine inches to

more than four feet deep. I could hear Oak Creek gurgling nearby. Beyond it, Sedona's sentinel red rocks loomed in the darkness, unseen yet warmly felt. Pools encourage us to look up. We live in a head-down culture, so attached to each of our digital devices that simply to float and gaze upward at the sky is a blessing. I couldn't say

when my passion for hotel swimming pools began, but it's been with me for as long as I can remember. Whether it's a quick road trip or a plush vacation, I choose lodging with a pool versus one without, even if that means spending a little more. After every long drive, after every long flight, the first thing I do after checking into a hotel is head to the pool. This habit—call it an obsession—is why I always pack my bathing suit in my carry-on.

On this trip to Sedona, I brought my own floatie, which rolls up very nicely into my suitcase; this one was shaped like a sprinkled donut. I booked the Amara Resort because it claimed to have a pool with one of the best views in Arizona. The morning after my night soak, I floated in my giant, plastic donut trying to ascertain if the bragging rights were warranted. The saltwater pool wasn't large or deep; you could swim across it in a few strokes. It wasn't really a place for exercise but more a place for meditation. During a sunny afternoon, the same view from the night before was now completely different: tree branches crisscrossing like Chinese calligraphy, the colors of the red rocks shifting constantly from orange to crimson to gold as the sun inched westward, a blue-ribbon sky not rushing any of it.

I don't feel this way about natural sources of water. Oceans are moody and too restless. Lakes are murky and too mysterious. Swimming pools, as artificial as they might appear to some, are always that enticing cerulean color, clear and calm, allowing me to soak up a view instead of heaving for waves or worrying about fish nibbling my feet. Pools are my yoga mat.

Swimming in Sedona reminded me of my recent stay in Positano, Italy, where I swam in another small pool that forced me to look up and admire a big view, the Amalfi coastline. The simple, rectangular, outdoor pool at Le Sirenuse was surrounded by potted lemon trees. It was cloudy and cool all week, but on the one day the sun broke through, I gulped down my cappuccino and changed quickly into my bathing suit. Backstroking across the chilly water, I could see how towering and dangerous Italy's cliffs really are, and how homes and businesses painted the color of Easter eggs cling to these cliffs like barnacles. I was vacationing on a precipice, submerging myself in both the pool and the scenery, a landscape that would look quite different walking along the beach or driving along the hairpin turns on the road.

If a hotel pool is heated, I swim year-round, indoor or outdoor. One long weekend in January, we stayed at

A lemon-scented pool terrace at Le Sirenuse perches on the Amalfi Coast's steep cliffs.



Hotel Pools With Sky-High Views

PARK HYATT TOKYO

Park Hyatt's "Sky Pool" sits on the 47th floor. Yes, this is the Japanese pool from the film *Lost in Translation*.

SWISSHÔTEL ZÜRICH

Thirty-two floors up, the pool presents a 180-degree view of the Swiss city's many church steeples.

HOTEL SAN BEVILLA PLAZA DE ARMAS

In Spain, when the heat of the day peaks, this small rooftop retreat offers the perfect cool respite.

the Hotel Bonaventure Montreal. Its concrete exterior blended in with downtown, but its interior is an urban oasis. An outdoor heated swimming pool is open every day and accessed by a vestibule so swimmers won't be exposed to Quebec's harsh winter winds. The night we swam, it was below freezing; above us, countless stars twinkled against an opaque sky and snowflakes silently fell into the pool.

To swim is to surrender, muscle and mind softening together, defenses down as you embrace new sounds, new sights, new scents, new surroundings. I sample pools the way people try food, and there are many more of them around the world—in cities, on islands, in the mountains—that I am eager to dive into. Rooftop pools, infinity pools, small pools, big pools, they each offer rejuvenation, relaxation, a change in my perspective. After all, bliss comes in many forms.

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