

Are lakes and rivers a freshwater idea for oil-spooked summer vacationers?

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Living in a coastal state and within an easy drive of the coastlines of three other states, it's natural for Atlantans to head to the beaches of the Gulf or Atlantic for summer vacation. In fact, for me, the salty air, Spanish moss and gentle waves of Georgia's Golden Isles are synonymous with summer holidays. But with the oil spill causing so much uncertainty, I can see why some people are looking at alternative destinations this year.

Many friends and neighbors who normally head for Orange Beach, Destin and even eastern Florida beaches will simply stay out of the water and enjoy the pool or other diversions if the oil decides to show up during their stay. A getaway is a getaway (especially one you've already paid for), and there is plenty to do in those towns without actually hitting the beach or wading into the water.

For me, however, sitting poolside by the beach or watching the waves is not enough– I'm the type that wants to be in the water. Finding a house or condo with a pool at the beach has never been a priority for me, because I know that I will just walk past that pool and into the ocean for the majority of my stay.

No matter the oil situation, I will still go to St. Simons this summer to visit my family. But if it turned out that I wouldn't be able to get in the water on my official beach vacation, I would be looking for another place to go to make the most of my summer break this year.

As I pondered the magnitude of the spill and the uncertainty of its spread on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, I thought of my family in Michigan and friends from Canada, for whom a summer vacation means getting a cottage by the lake. Granted, the lakes up there are well...Great Lakes, complete with beaches and waves. However, the idea of a freshwater summer holiday seems a possible alternative for those who want to be sure they can get in the water (not just the pool).

You could head north to those Great Lakes, but the South is chock-a-block with our own lakes and rivers that also offer a relaxing day on the water. Plus, having attempted a Memorial Day dip in Lake Huron in Ontario a few years back, I can say that our lakes are considerably warmer.

Georgia offers a wide range of lake options, from Lake Lanier in Atlanta's backyard and Oconee east of the city to upcountry lakes like Burton and Hartwell or southern gems like Blackshear and Seminole. Camping sites, along with cottage and/or boat rental options are available at most Georgia lakes. For more information on Georgia lake and river getaways, click here.

If you're itching to get out of state, you can cross the line into Alabama, Tennessee or South Carolina. Lake Keowee in South Carolina is just minutes over the Georgia border, as is the Alabama part of West Point Lake. Guntersville Lake is also a favorite spot for some of our friends with family in Alabama. To our northwest, Tennessee's TVA lakes like Nickajack and Chickamauga are beautiful and just a short drive from Atlanta.

In addition to lakes, southern rivers offer good opportunities for fishing, boating, kayaking and canoeing. The Altamaha River in southeast Georgia was recently cited as one of the state's top five hidden treasures.