

 **SUMMER TRAVEL QUEST #65**

Watch Wild Ponies Swim

The annual event has been bringing horse lovers to Chincoteague Island, Virginia, since 1925

by **Katy Koontz** | Posted Jul 16th 2014 8:50a.m.

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Every July, a wave of people heads to the little island of Chincoteague, Va., for an event that lasts about 10 minutes—a herd of 150 to 175 wild ponies swims across the narrow channel from their home on neighboring Assateague Island.

As they approach the water, the crowd starts yelling encouragement. Once the ponies take the plunge, only their heads can be seen bobbing above the surface as the cheers and whistles intensify. Everyone tries to guess which pony will reach the opposite shore first, and when the winner emerges, the crowd erupts as though the home team just came from behind to score a winning goal.

The [free event](#), begun in 1925, was made famous by novelist Marguerite Henry, author of children's classic "Misty of Chincoteague" (published in 1947 and made into a movie in 1961). The once-beleaguered Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company, official keepers of the ponies, dreamed up

the idea as a fundraiser. The saltwater cowboys start rounding up the animals on Assateague on a Monday (this year, July 28) and swim them over the following Wednesday morning (July 30). Once ashore on [Chincoteague](#), the ponies rest before parading through town to the fairgrounds, which are in full swing all week long. On Thursday, the foals are auctioned off. And on Friday, the adult ponies swim back to Assateague, reclaiming their freedom for another year.

INSIDER TIP

To get the first look at the ponies, watch the sunrise beach walk on the Monday before the swim (July 28), when the cowboys herd the ponies down the beach on Assateague to the island's southern corral.

For the best spot at the swim site, arrive 2 to 3 hours early and wear clothes that can get muddy; the payoff is seeing the ponies swim directly toward you. The later you arrive, the farther down the shore you'll be.

If you'd rather see the swim without standing in a salt marsh, bring binoculars and watch from more comfortable Memorial Park, a few hundred yards away. Free buses run to the swim site and the park all morning.

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