



**The SwimF.A.S.T. 2018 Athlete Guide**  
**The Alcatraz and Golden Gate Bridge Swims**  
**April 13-14, 2018**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Letter...	3
Committing and Preparing Q&A...	4
can I do this...	4
distance, conditions...	4
one swim, or both...	4
training commitment...	5
first steps...	5
safety...	5
the hardest part...	5
practice swims...	6
is it a race...	6
cancellation risk...	6
wetsuits, etc....	6
who swims...	8
on the boat...	8
can I kayak?	8
what about sharks...	8
Official Schedule of Events...	9
The Swims...	10
Travel Planning...	11
Event Costs...	12
Fundraising...	12

*"Here's to the crazy ones. The ones who see things differently. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do." - Apple*

Swim F.A.S.T. 2018 Athletes,

Welcome. You are standing at the doorway to an exclusive club of those people who are just crazy enough to swim the waters of San Francisco Bay in an extraordinary way - or two. Very few people in this world experience the preparation, anticipation and elation related to successfully swimming from Alcatraz to San Francisco. Fewer still have seized the opportunity to swim directly under and along the path of the world-famous architectural landmark known as the Golden Gate Bridge. And it is a far fewer select group of people in this world who accomplish both in one weekend.

If they haven't already, people will call you "nuts," "crazy," "foolish" and more. But they won't be able to ignore what you're about to do, and you won't be able to ignore the impact of these events on your own approach to life either.

The 2018 event weekend marks the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Alcatraz and 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Golden Gate swims. The Foundation for Aquatic Safety and Training (The F.A.S.T. Foundation) is honored to play a part in facilitating your escape from your limitations. Whether this is your first event weekend with us or your 12<sup>th</sup>, our hope is that you have a great time, make great friends and come back again next year.

The growth and success of this event over the years is directly attributable to our alumni. The adventure, the people it attracts and the weekend we spend together speaks for itself - whether you're an athlete, spectator, volunteer, or a member of our tremendous San Francisco support team. Be sure to thank everyone involved. Without them, this event would not happen.

We look forward to bringing you and your family together onshore on day one at Aquatic Park, and back on the boat on day two near Sausalito to celebrate your unique, amazing – and a little bit crazy - accomplishment.

Thank you for swimming with us, and thank you for your support of the Foundation for Aquatic Safety and Training (F.A.S.T.)!

Best Regards,

Joe, John and Helen Zemaitis  
Jon Ford  
Sherry Whitener  
Helen Cassidy

*Swim F.A.S.T. 2018  
The Foundation for Aquatic Safety and Training*

## COMMITTING and PREPARING Q&A

### ***Can I really do this?***

The right question to be asking is “do I *want* to do this?” With a commitment to training and a willingness to go through the process to acclimate to cold water and challenging conditions, many swimmers of all ages with a competitive swimming background can successfully complete the swim.

### ***The distance***

The Alcatraz swim is about 1.4 Miles (about 2,500 yards) and the Golden Gate Bridge Swim is approximately 1.2 miles (about 1,750 yards).

### ***The conditions***

**Temperature:** Water temperatures during our swim are in the low to mid 50’s. That is cold water! It’s also the approximate temperature of Bartlett Lake in January and February. Wetsuits are required for the event and for training starting in November.

**Current/Chop/Wind:** The water conditions of the San Francisco Bay can be unpredictable and change rapidly. Our event dates and jump times are chosen to give us the best chance to have favorable currents. Chop and wind can lead to rougher water. This is also difficult to train for as we cannot simulate these conditions in the lake.

**Weather:** San Francisco weather is also notoriously unpredictable. Fog is the biggest enemy of the swim. If safety boats cannot see the swimmers the swim will be postponed or cancelled.

**Water:** There is limited visibility in the San Francisco Bay. The visibility (or lack thereof) is similar to what it is in Bartlett Lake. Swimmers comfortable with sighting and swimming in the lake should be comfortable in the Bay. The salt water in the Bay is different from the lake. The salt water makes a swimmer slightly more buoyant it also “feels” a little warmer than fresh water. Not sure the science behind that, but anyone who jumps in 55 degree fresh water and 55 degree salt water would agree!

### ***One Swim or Both?***

While these swims are in the same body of water only a few miles apart they are completely different and uniquely great experiences. You're trained and you're already all the way out in San Francisco, so do them both!\*

If you're not sure if you will be up for two swims on back to back days then make sure you go to both days of one of our training weekends. If in January/February you can swim hard for an hour in cold water on the Saturday then come back and do it again on Sunday you will probably have the same success doing two swims in San Francisco.

\*P.S. Don't just take our word for it. The vast majority of people in previous years who decided to swim only one event usually remarked that they should've done both.

### ***What is the training commitment?***

The majority of the training commitment for competitive swimmers is what you are already doing in the pool right now. If you are training with a competitive team at least 3-4 days a week you are doing adequate yardage to complete the swim. The lake swims aren't so much about training but more about acclimating to conditions.

### ***What are my first steps?***

1. Be sure you get all email updates: sign up for all email updates at <http://thefastfoundation.com/swim-fast/>
2. Register for the training program at <https://goo.gl/tnjQEJ>. We need one registration per participant! (In other words, if two family members are swimming, the form should be completed twice.)
3. Like us on Facebook for the fastest updates and to connect with everyone involved at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/FAST-Foundation/>
4. You also MUST be a USA Swimming or US Masters registered swimmer to participate in the training swims in Bartlett Lake and the actual event. (If you are not already, we can help: email us at [sjwhitener@cox.net](mailto:sjwhitener@cox.net)).

### ***What safety precautions are taken?***

Event safety is our highest priority. The training swims are designed and monitored to ensure that only swimmers who are strong enough to complete the swim continue with the program. Every year we have swimmers begin the training but realize that their efforts are better directed at a future year. During the lake swims, we have adults in the water swimming with the kids as well as a USA Swimming certified coach on the training course in a kayak in order to quickly respond to any swimmer who needs assistance. Should any situations arise, we maintain a hypothermia kit for use at every training (which fortunately has gone unused for all these years).

For the events, the safety precautions we take are second to none. The Coast Guard recommends that there be one support craft for every 25 swimmers in the water. In past years our ratio has been one support craft per five swimmers. We have a Marine Unit of the SFPD on site manning jet skis in order to instantly respond to any issue in the water. Our support staff is in constant radio communication with the Coast Guard to ensure a safe event. We have a medical response team on standby at the finish ready to deal with any emergency. And we are blessed to be hosted each year by the most knowledgeable and most personally-experienced San Francisco-based planners, event directors, boat captains and guide swimmers possible.

### ***What's the hardest part?***

Many people tell us the training is the hardest part, and for kids it's typically the second cold lake swim. Swimmers only have to get used to open water during fall swims (at 60+ degrees). At the first cold lake swim kids are fired up, although maybe a little nervous about what to expect, but by the second cold swim excitement can be replaced by dread. In reality, the first five minutes of every cold water swim are brutal. It takes five to ten minutes to acclimate and "warm up," and the biggest challenge is to keep going and keep your face in the water. The longer – and more often - your face comes out, the more painful it becomes. Once your hands, feet, and face go numb they don't hurt anymore! Each practice swim becomes a little bit easier once you overcome that hurdle and realize that you can recover within 10-20 minutes of exiting the water. Ultimately, this is a mental challenge as much as it is a physical one.

***How many practice swims do I need to go to?***

We typically have six-eight practice swims on the schedule. You need to do as many practice swims as necessary to be completely confident that you can swim hard for at least an hour in water in the low 50's. For most people that is 4-5 practice swims. Some older, stronger swimmers need fewer practice swims to gain that level of confidence, some swimmers need more. We have an eight-swim schedule because we don't expect that you can make all of them. The first swim we shoot for 35-40 minutes in the water. The second swim we shoot for 45-50 minutes. Each of the remaining swims the goal is 55 minutes +.

***Is it a race?***

The Alcatraz/Golden Gate weekend is an event, not a race. While we do keep time and can let you know what your finish time is we do not post full results or recognize the top finishers in each age group. There are plenty of Alcatraz "races" out there. Our event is different because we focus on the journey, not just the event. The success of your participation has little to do with how long it took you to complete the swim; rather it's about how you challenged your own perceptions of what was possible, how you overcame the many obstacles along the way, and how you ultimately Escaped Your Limitations.

***Is there a chance the swim could be cancelled?***

Yes. We have taken great pains to pick a date that looks, at this point, like the best possible conditions for successful swims. That includes (1) scheduling the weekend in April, as soon as is feasible after Arizona lakes become too warm to simulate the Bay conditions, and (2) scheduling each swim's jump within a very specific time window that sets swimmers up for success. That said, Bay swims are "box of chocolates" swims – you never know what you're going to get. If conditions are unsafe for any reason on the day of each swim then they will be modified or cancelled. If the wind is too great or the water too choppy to allow for a safe event we will not swim. Early morning jump times make high winds and significant chop unlikely, but the chance is always there. If the fog is too thick for the support boats to see the swimmers we will not swim. We will attempt to postpone the start for the fog to lift, but there is a very specific tide window we aim for. Once that window closes the swim becomes impossible.

***Are there refunds if the swim is cancelled?***

Unfortunately, no. By the time that the swim is scheduled all of the money to get permits, insurance, boats, etc. will have already been paid out. Bay swimming experts generally estimate that approximately 5-8% of Alcatraz event swims are cancelled. So, there is a chance, albeit slight, we could go through all this training and not have an event. If that risk is not acceptable or too great for you then we ask that you don't participate.

***What kind of wetsuit do we need?***

Far and away the most important thing about whatever wetsuit you choose is that it fits snugly around ankles, wrists and neck, trapping a layer of water between the suit and body that the body can warm up. Generally speaking there are three kinds of wetsuits: (1) swimming/triathlon, (2) scuba and (3) surfing/recreational. Thinner and typically more expensive, swimming/triathlon suits are usually better for this event, offering more mobility and easier, faster swimming through design, material and construction that in turn generates more body heat to keep swimmers "warmer." Their drawback is that they can be challenging to find in smaller sizes. Scuba suits are easier to find in small sizes, but are heavier and a little more

difficult to swim in, while that additional thickness may make them a little warmer. Surfing/recreational suits are a hodgepodge. Some are thick with knee pads, others are designed more similarly to swimming/triathlon suits but generally with much less-swimming appropriate material and mobility. With any of these suits fit is still most important. Unfortunately wetsuits may only be good for one year because kids outgrow them. On the other hand a wetsuit that is too big will let water into the suit and be ineffective in keeping you warm.

*Wetsuit Resources:*

*www.xterrawetsuits.com* – swimming/triathlon suits for adults and kids. Interactive sizing on site (based on height and weight), 30-day return policy. Up to 60% discount for SwimF.A.S.T. participants using the code “C-ONE.”

*Swim Outlet* – surfing/recreational suits for under \$100. Inventory and range of options varies.

*Wetsuit Rental* – we have a new provider offering wetsuit rental, for \$100 total cost to make the suit available both during training and the swims. Please contact [jonfordaz@gmail.com](mailto:jonfordaz@gmail.com) for more information.

***Wetsuit cap vs. hood?***

You definitely want to wear something on your head! Body heat is quickly lost through your head, making a wetsuit hood a must. A wetsuit hood covers your entire head and neck, leaving only a portion of your face exposed. While warmer, they offer much less head mobility and limit hearing and sight, all of which can make it more difficult to breathe, can feel claustrophobic and somewhat limit the swimming experience. A wetsuit cap looks like and provides similar coverage to a swim cap with a Velcro strap under your chin. The cap doesn't provide as much warmth, but does not limit hearing or sight and has greater mobility. Choose whatever works best for you. Girls with longer hair will want to wear a normal cap under the wetsuit hood. All swimmers must wear a yellow cap over their hood/wetsuit cap during all lake swims and during the San Francisco swims.

***Can we wear gloves, booties, or fins?***

The short answer is “no”. Fins on an able-bodied swimmer amount to just plain cheating yourself out of claiming an amazing achievement. Gloves and booties are often more troublesome than beneficial. These items would only be permitted/approved under special circumstances (e.g. a circulation issue, for medical reasons, etc.). Please talk to a member of the SwimF.A.S.T. Team about concerns or questions you may have.

### ***Who is going to swim with my child?***

The best answer is “you!” Dozens of parents have completed the swims, all testifying to the incredibly unique and special parent-child bonding experience this is. Plus it gives parents their own goal to train and get in swim shape for! If that is not possible there are a couple options:

1. Find someone in advance who can come out and swim with them. I’m sure you know a masters swimmer, triathlete, etc. who might like to tag along on this experience. (Note: triathletes in particular are great targets, as the Alcatraz swim is part of an annual race that can only be entered via lottery.)
2. On the morning of the swim, pair up your child with a local support swimmer. These folks swim the SF Bay every day. We have had great success with them in the past. However, they are in somewhat limited supply and will not know your child's pace in advance.

Note: if want to know who your child will be swimming with, it is best to secure that person in advance. Don't count on the training team to stay with your child on event day, as they'll be attending to a number of responsibilities on that day.

### ***What do we take on the boat?***

This question is a bit tricky, but you can save yourself from disappointment with this general rule: if you take it onto the boat, you need a personal plan for getting it off.

- Alcatraz is “one-way,” leaving from the boat and arriving on shore. The boat crew will not be responsible for anything you leave behind, so most swimmers board with only swim gear (wetsuit, goggles, cap, hood, etc.). If you'd like to have items on the boat, plan to have a spectator\* on board who can retain and return them to you.
- Golden Gate “boat-to-boat,” so any clothing/gear can be managed by the swimmer. Keep in mind that the journey from port to the bridge does take some time (30-60 minutes depending on conditions), so think in terms of warmth, hydration and food.

\*More details about boat capacities and spectator limits will be forthcoming.

### ***Can I kayak in the Bay?***

In a word? No. It takes intimate knowledge of the Bay, its currents and the support team to be a kayaker for the event.

### ***But what about the sharks?***

The man-eating sharks of San Francisco Bay were largely a successful myth designed to keep Alcatraz prisoners from making a swim for it. People have been swimming the Bay daily for the past hundred years. There has never been a case of a swimmer attacked by a shark. Large sharks' migratory patterns have them in the deep oceans near Hawaii from January through July and in Northern California from August through November. The Bay acts as a natural barrier and is fed by 17 tributaries that bring fresh water and silt into the Bay. Large sharks prefer the saltier waters offshore and in April will be thousands of miles away. Is there a danger from marine life? Perhaps, but you have a much, much greater chance of getting hit by a car while crossing the street in San Francisco than getting attacked by a shark. So, put your mind at ease. And look both ways before you cross the street.



## **OFFICIAL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

Experience over the previous years has taught us that people are more likely to combine event weekend with other San Francisco/Northern California experiences of their own making. In response, we have learned to make the event-specific process as simple as possible. The “official” schedule of events list the places where you really need to be. The rest, as they say, is up to you!

### ***Thursday April 12 (times/locations subject to change)***

6:00-7:00pm Pre-Event Briefing at Argonaut Hotel

### ***Friday April 13 (times/locations subject to change)***

8:15am Meet at Hyde Street Pier for check-in/body marking, timing/conditions update

9:15am Board the boat(s)

10:00-10:15am Swimmer jump time (approx.)

10:45am First finishers at Aquatic Park (approx.)

11:30am Final finishers at Aquatic Park (approx.)

3:30-5:00pm Awards/Recap at location TBD

5:00-5:30pm Briefing for Golden Gate Bridge Swim at location TBD

### ***Saturday April 14 (times/locations subject to change)***

8:45am Meet at Hyde Street Pier for check-in/body marking, timing/conditions update

9:30am Board the boat

11:00-11:15am Swimmer jump time (approx.)

12:15pm Finish time (approx.)

12:15-1:00pm Awards/Recap on the boat while returning to Hyde Street Pier

IMPORTANT: All times above represent our best projection at this time. Conditions and unforeseen circumstances can cause times to change. Times will be updated/confirmed during the event weekend. If you plan to swim the Golden Gate we recommend getting a flight out of San Francisco no earlier than 5:00-6:00pm.

### ***Fun things to do in San Francisco***

Alcatraz Tour – highly recommended!

Cable Cars

Fisherman’s Wharf

Pier 39

Bike the Bridge

Golden Gate Bridge

## THE SWIMS

### ***Alcatraz***

Swimmers board the boats at Hyde Street Pier and begin the journey to Alcatraz. Depending on the currents, the boat typically holds at the east end of Alcatraz Island. When the start signal is given swimmers enter the water and begin swimming toward shore, following the directions of the support boats. Alcatraz is a cross-current swim. Participants swim approximately one mile in the Bay before going through the opening to Aquatic park and swimming the remaining 0.4 miles to shore. They swim while the “flood” tide is diminishing, slackens and becomes an “ebb tide.” Swimmers are usually instructed to stay toward the left and aim for the “grey ship” the Jeremiah O’Brien. Being “left” of the Aquatic park opening gives everyone the greatest chance to be successful as the tide shifts and begins pushing them “right.” Swimmers must enter aquatic park through a 60-yard-wide opening, or be picked up and repositioned for the finish.

As you hit the water, the first 10 minutes are the hardest. The shock of the cold water hits your entire body and you have to swim fast right away to get away from the island. ALWAYS follow the direction of the safety boats, as they have the most current (no pun intended...) information, which is generally to stay “left” to reach the breakwater east of the Aquatic Park opening. Once you make it safely through the opening you are almost home free! The friendly confines of aquatic park make for a smooth finish as you swim straight into the beach.

### ***Golden Gate***

This swim is a boat start and a boat finish. The boat leaves Hyde Street Pier and makes its way toward the Golden Gate Bridge. The jump site is on the Pacific side of the South tower of the bridge. The swim proceeds from the South to North as you swim “straight” toward the North tower and the flood tide gently pushes you under the bridge. Take a moment to do some backstroke as you pass underneath. It’s a universally-recognized landmark that millions have driven over, walked over, and biked over but very few have swum under! Continue to the pick up spot on the Bay side of the North tower. If conditions are calm you can touch “finger rock,” the first part of land on the Marin County side of the Bay! Swim to the boat for pick up and get the celebration started!

### ***Spectator Boat***

Depending on final athlete numbers, spectators will either be on the athlete boat or on a separate boat. (Please note that there is a “yet-to-be-determined” cost for each spectator, likely around \$45 in advance, and up to \$55 in S.F. if still available). Specifics and details for how to get your ticket to follow.) This will give you an awesome view of the event and allow you to come as close as you can to experiencing the swim without getting wet! For Alcatraz, the spectator boat will be on the water during the event. If you are on the spectator boat we cannot guarantee that you will be back on the beach when your loved-one finishes. If you have two non-swimming adults in your group it might be a good idea to have one on the spectator boat and one at the beach finish. For the Golden Gate Bridge swim in order to see any of the event you will need to be on the spectator boat. Due to the location of the swim there isn’t much of it that can be seen from shore. Boats will not have food/drinks/snacks for sale. Any food or drink that is desired by the swimmers or the spectators must be brought aboard with you.

## TRAVEL PLANNING

SwimF.A.S.T. does not book group travel for this event. In the past we have not been able to get better “deals” on airfare/hotels than you would get by booking yourself online. We also have learned that people have varying expectations for this trip. Some families extend the trip several days on either side for a “mini vacation,” others have trouble getting away that time of year and get in and out as quickly as possible. We tell you exactly when you need to be at functions relating to the event and give you the freedom to plan travel so it works best for you.

***Driving to San Francisco.*** From Phoenix the drive is about 12 hours. It’s not a difficult drive, especially with multiple drivers in the car. It’s certainly a viable option and can be considerably cheaper than flying.

***Flying to San Francisco.*** We suggest flying in no later than Thursday morning so you aren’t rushed. If you are only doing Alcatraz you should be able to fly out Friday late afternoon or early evening. If you are doing the Golden Gate Bridge swim you should plan on no earlier than a Saturday flight at 5:00-6:00pm.

### ***Hotels***

We suggest a hotel in the Fisherman’s Wharf area of San Francisco. If you are flying for the trip you do not need to rent a car as having a car in San Francisco is expensive to park and it can be hard to navigate if you are unfamiliar with the area. There are numerous hotels within walking distance. Nearly all of the weekend functions are centered around the Aquatic Park. In the past some people have had success booking on sites such as hotwire.com or hotels.com and can find a decent hotel for the most reasonable rates.

### ***Travel Tips***

*Never* place your wetsuit, hood, or goggles in a bag checked with the airline. *Always* place these items in your carryon. The chance of lost luggage can never be completely avoided. You do not want to try replacing your wetsuit the day before! Stay hydrated throughout your trip.

## EVENT COSTS

Training: \$50	Includes all training swims offered.
One Swim: \$325-\$375*	Includes all swimmer event costs, finisher medal, finisher shirt and one event weekend hoodie sweatshirt.
Both Swims: \$450-\$500*	Includes all swimmer event costs, finisher medals, finisher shirts and one event weekend hoodie sweatshirt.

\*Prices vary depending on how early you register and pay. Visit online registration for details.

Online training registration can be completed at: <https://goo.gl/tnjQEJ>

Online event registration can be completed at: <https://goo.gl/pm2ReY> IMPORTANT: ***DO NOT*** use online registration if you are fundraising. ***There are NO refunds for online registration.***

## FUNDRAISING

SwimF.A.S.T. is inspired by the 2006 achievement of Braxton Bilbrey, who at age seven became the youngest boy ever to swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco. Asked what he would like to do in light of the recognition, Braxton chose to support drowning prevention in Arizona. From there the Foundation for Aquatic Safety and Training (F.A.S.T.) was born.

Event weekend proceeds go towards F.A.S.T.'s mission of kids helping kids, teaching drowning prevention, water safety and swim clinics in Maricopa County. Those operational proceeds come through fundraising. We strongly encourage your family to easily create an online fundraising page and promote it via email/social media. Most people who hear about this challenge are quickly moved to give at least \$25, and others are moved to give even more. Contributions quickly add up, and the online fundraising tools do all the work for you. You collect no money. You write no checks. You simply create an individual site, with a personal message or photo if you so choose, and then send the link for that page to family and friends.

And why would you fundraise? Because we'll reward you! A sampling of what we have in mind:

- Raise \$475, and participate in one swim at no event cost.
- Raise \$600, and participate in both swims at no event cost.
- Raise \$850, get both swims and Ghirardelli Square Earthquake desert.
- Raise \$1,100, get both swims and a free four-person Alcatraz tour.
- Raise \$1,650, get both swims, a free four-person Alcatraz tour, a Ghirardelli Square Earthquake desert and up to two GoCar rental hours.

Get started NOW: Visit the link below and click on "Become a Fundraiser" at the top of the page. Then get the word out and watch the support flow in!

<http://www.active.com/donate/swimfast2018>

Questions? Contact: [jonfordaz@gmail.com](mailto:jonfordaz@gmail.com) or [sjwhitener@cox.net](mailto:sjwhitener@cox.net)

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### **Swim F.A.S.T. 2018 Athlete Guide Release**

*(Please complete and return to Sherry Whitener)*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Swim F.A.S.T. 2018 Athlete Guide. I am also aware that it is my responsibility to read all information and policies inside and that myself, my swimmer(s), and any other family member is expected to understand and abide by these policies.

Swimmer Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature (if swimmer under 18) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_