



So You're a Triathlete – Where & How to Swim Train in Hawaii?

Whether you're strong or struggling during the swim – how should you train? For many triathletes, they rationalize that swimming is only a small part of the race – it's better to spend your precious workout time running & biking harder and longer. Plus it's easier. And familiar. And you can do it on your own schedule – so at most go to a swim clinic, then do what comes natural ... train train train. For the swim training (admit it) it's just too easy to put laps in and not push yourself too hard.

Uh-oh – Race Time! Don't you hate the first part of that triathlon? All those swimmers gliding past you even though they don't work out nearly as hard as you do. They hardly look like they're even trying. Grrr.... Swim harder ... Arrrrgggghhh!!! Then to add insult to injury, you're running up the beach, legs *wasted* from kicking so hard; breathing like hell and now you can't get your legs moving on the bike! And since you're not "swim-fit," your heart rate is high at the *start* of the bike. You may pass those swimmers down the line (ahh ... feels good), but you really begrudge how easy the swim was for them and how many minutes you gave up to them.

You can either keep beating your head against a wall, or regularly train with a coach that knows swimming. **More than running or biking, swimming is about technique.** You bike and run for endless hours to take minutes off your time. You buy the lightest equipment to shave a few more. You pay some guy on the internet \$250 for a month of workouts, then you swim monotonous laps reinforcing bad habits and don't get faster. A knowledgeable swim coach can help you – swimmer or triathlete – to improve your technique so you can swim faster, more effortlessly and not be dog tired after the swim. Attending a swim clinic is better than nothing. It can help teach you a couple of things, but chances are you won't remember enough of it down the line to make a difference – so you give up on that. You need more time with a constant trained eye that can give you a little tip to work on – today – every workout – but not everything all at once (too much!).

Good freestyle looks so simple when done right. It's easy to describe the basics that make a good stroke (you want to be horizontal head to foot, rotating back and forth without lifting your head to breathe, relaxed on the recovery and breathing maintaining a streamline position). So you do it ... at least you think you do. Unless you've been swimming a long time and watching swimmers a long time, chances are your body's not moving when, where and how you think it is. Technique is important for running & biking, too ... but not as much ... and it's easier to watch yourself.

Sorry ... there's no magic bullet. No one clinic that'll do it. No 5 or 10 private lessons. It's time well spent in the water again and again, building muscle memory with a coach giving you drills to help you swim right – teaching you to swim fast and easy. Ironically, the easier and more relaxed you swim when done right, the faster you go. Then you can apply all that 'Grrrr... swim harder' energy in a way that makes a difference when it comes to the big race.

So give "masters" a try. First time at most places is free. Don't expect your first day everyone to drop what they're doing just for you. Join in the workout with people of comparable ability. The coach will evaluate what you're doing and try to give you some drills appropriate to your level and your particular stroke. You'll have to stick with it for a couple of months – then re-evaluate whether it's worth it to you. With a little time ... and the cost of one triathlon race, the cost of a good pair of running shoes, or the cost of a new racing tire, or *half* the cost of a month of internet workouts, you can register and swim for 1-2 months with a coach!

Where to go? You can find all the masters swim workouts for all areas of all islands posted at www.hawaiimastersswim.org : **Kauai**, **Hawaii** Hilo, Kona and in between; **Maui** Upcountry, in town, Kihei & Lahaina; and **Oahu** UH, Kailua, Pearl Harbor, and Honolulu.

Oh yeah – don't let the word "Masters" scare you. We're just adult swimmers that like to get wet and get our blood hot with friends.
–Malcolm Cooper www.hawaiimastersswim.org June 2009