



Family Hike Recommendations

There are some great nearby hiking trails just waiting to be explored! To get your family started on the right foot, REI employees have selected some of their favorites below.

Be sure to bring these necessities along in your daypack:

- Drinking water
- Lunch or snacks
- Extra clothing layers
- Map and compass
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- First-aid kit
- Insect repellent
- Whistle
- Headlamp or flashlight

For a complete day hiking checklist, visit [Expert Advice](#) on REI.com.



Here Are Five of Our Favorite Kid-Friendly Local Hikes

Hike One: **Huntley Meadows Park**

Rating: **Easy to moderate, depending on length**

Distance: **1 to 4 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Even toddlers and parents pushing strollers can negotiate these trails easily. And you'll see an amazing display of birds and other wildlife—one of the best in the Washington metropolitan area.

Hike Description: A wide, easy, well-maintained trail leaves the visitor center and leads through the mature, lowland deciduous forest to the half-mile boardwalk loop through the marsh. As you follow the boardwalk, you'll come to several observation platforms. The capper is at the far end of the boardwalk, where you'll find a large, multilevel wildlife observation tower. Be sure to bring your binoculars and camera—kids will be able to see everything from beavers to frogs to herons. In fact, more than 200 species of birds have been identified in the park. From the tower, you can retrace your steps or take the Deer Trail and Cedar Trail for a longer loop back to the visitor center. The Deer Trail also extends about 2 miles to the far edge of the park, making a 4-mile hike possible.

Driving Directions: From The Capital Beltway in Alexandria, Virginia, exit onto Richmond Hwy. (US Rte. 1). After 3 miles, turn right onto Lockheed Boulevard. Go west for 0.7 miles to the end of Lockheed, at Harrison Lane. Turn left into the main entrance to Huntley Meadows Park. Go 0.2 miles to the visitor center parking lot. Parking is free.

Tips: Early morning and late afternoon are the best times for bird and wildlife viewing (winter is a great time to look for owls). There are restrooms at the visitor center.

Hike Two: **Bull Run Mountain Ridge Trail, Ridge Loop & Catlett's Branch**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **5 miles roundtrip, 900' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: The crest of Bull Run Mountain has the best views of the Virginia Piedmont and Blue Ridge from the east. Catlett's Branch is one of the most pristine perennial streams in northern Virginia. Walking along its clear water is a real pleasure.

Hike Description: These beautiful woodland trails pass along streams and rise gradually to ridgetop views. The Bull Run Mountains protect the headwaters of two major watersheds: Occoquan River and Goose Creek. Seven perennial streams have their source here. You'll follow these streams, passing through a great diversity of forest types—from mature lowland woods to mountain laurel and wind-carved pines on the western ridge. Because the state of Virginia and the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy protect the area, there's a lot of wildlife here. So be sure to bring your binoculars and camera. This outing provides great family adventure both as a wilderness hike and as a history lesson. The mountains played an important role during both the colonial period and the Civil War. Today, they are a critical greenbelt around the nation's capital.

Driving Directions: From I-495 (Capital Beltway), take I-66 west to Rte. 15 at Haymarket. At the end of the exit, turn left (south) on Rte. 15. Cross I-66 on the overpass, and turn right at the traffic light onto Rte. 55. Take the third right onto Turner Road, pass over I-66 and make an immediate left onto Beverly Mill Drive. Bull Run Mountains Conservancy is at the end of the road, on the left. Driving time from I-66 at the Beltway is about 40 minutes. There's free parking at the conservancy office at the end of Beverly Mill Drive.

Tips: Get a free, detailed trail map at the conservancy office in the trailhead parking area. The conservancy also has a variety of family nature programs. There are no restrooms at the trailhead, but there are services at Routes 15 and 55, about 1.75 miles away.

Hike Three: **Greenbelt Park**

Rating: **Easy to moderate, depending on length**

Distance: **Up to 6 miles roundtrip, 25' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Hidden just inside The Capital Beltway in northern Prince Georges County, this wooded, 1,100-acre park is a great place to enjoy fresh air, take a walk in the woods, and view migratory and nesting birds.

Hike Description: This is a quiet, green oasis, just 12 miles from the White House. Several interior loop trails, as well as a perimeter loop meander through woodlands and across stream valleys. Toddlers and parents pushing jogging strollers will have no trouble negotiating the easy paths. However, the hard-packed dirt surfaces do get a little rocky, rooty or grassy in some places, so small-wheeled strollers might have a bit of a rough go. Some short sections of boardwalk traverse wet areas, and bridges span most of the stream crossings. Several picnic areas are adjacent to trailheads throughout the park, making it a wonderful spot for a mini family retreat.

Driving Directions: From I-495 (Capital Beltway), take Exit 23 and head south on Kenilworth Avenue (MD Rte. 201). Go 0.5 miles and turn left onto Greenbelt Road (MD Rte. 193). Follow Greenbelt Road for about 0.3 miles to the park entrance, on the right. Once in the park, follow the entrance road for 200 yards, turn right onto Park Central Road and proceed to the Sweetgum Picnic Area. Parking is free.

From the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, turn west onto Greenbelt Road. Go about 1 mile to the park entrance, on the left.

Tips: Take the perimeter trail early in the morning, late in the day or on weekdays to see the most birds and wildlife. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Four: **Billy Goat Trail Circuit**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **3.8 or 5 miles roundtrip, no net elevation gain, but lots of ups and downs**

Why This Hike: It gives you the quickest access to the best scenery and trail circuit within 15 miles of the Washington Monument. From April to October, it can be hiked after school or work in complete daylight.

Hike Description: This 3.8-mile circuit trail starts from the parking lot at Old Angler's Inn. You follow a short section of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath to access the Billy Goat Trail up the length of Bear Island. It's a fun scramble, with great views of Mather Gorge and the Potomac River, as well as birds and other wildlife. You'll cross several ravines, winding among and over rock formations. There are a number of places where you'll need to use your hands as well as your feet. So this hike isn't suitable for young kids who need close supervision. But the older ones will love it! On your way back, you'll cross the canal at the stop lock below Great Falls Tavern. You'll then return to Old Angler's Inn via the Berma Road, a trail on the north side of the canal. You can extend the hike to 5 miles by continuing up the towpath to Great Falls Tavern and the Olmstead Island Overlook at Great Falls. Then return down the towpath and Berma Road to Old Angler's Inn.

Driving Directions: From I-495, take Exit 41 (Carderock). Follow Clara Barton Parkway to its end at MacArthur Boulevard. Turn left on MacArthur and go 1 mile to the parking lot on the left, across from Old Angler's Inn. If that lot is full, follow MacArthur 2.5 more miles to Great Falls Tavern where there's more parking. From here, you can do the same circuit, just from the other end. Across from Old Angler's Inn, parking is free; at Great Falls Tavern, it's \$4.

Tips: Point out to your kids the polished, elliptical holes in the granite of Mather Gorge, high above the river. These were formed slowly, over thousands of years, by river flooding.

Hike Five: **Sugarloaf Mountain**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **1 to 7 miles roundtrip, 400' to 800' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: It has several hikes of varying length and difficulty; it's free, open all year, and has great views. In the fall, it's a great place to watch migrating raptors.

Hike Description: Six intersecting trails crisscross Sugarloaf, leaving from the entrance at the base of the mountain and from the East and West View parking areas. Clearly marked trails let you pick a circuit that's appropriate for your family. For example, the summit circuit via the Green, Red and Blue trails from the West View parking area is barely 1 mile roundtrip. But it is steep, so you'll get a bit of a workout. You'll climb a ravine, pass through a mature upland forest and come to the summit where there are scrub oaks and wind-sculpted pines. There are also stunning panoramic views of the Blue Ridge and Catoctin mountains, the Potomac Valley and the Washington skyline. Note that the Yellow Trail is open to horses and (on certain days) mountain bikes. Free trail maps are available at the trailhead in the West View parking area.

Driving Directions: From I-495 (Capital Beltway), take I-270 north toward Frederick, Maryland, for about 18 miles. Take Exit 18 for MD Rte. 121 (Boyd's/Clarksburg). At the end of the exit, stay right and merge onto Rte. 121. Go 0.6 miles to the light at Rte. 355. Turn left onto Rte. 355 (Frederick Road) and drive 0.9 miles. Turn left onto Comus Road. Follow Comus for 4.2 miles to the entrance gate at the base of Sugarloaf Mountain. Park here and walk in, or drive 1.8 miles up the one-way park circuit road to the East or West View parking areas. Note the posted daily closing time on the board at the gate. Parking is free.

Tips: Visit early or late in the day to see ravens, fox and deer. Go midweek to enjoy more solitude. The West View and Devil's Kitchen areas have picnic tables. There are portable restrooms at the trailheads.



REI's PEAK program uses a fun presentation filled with hands-on activities and games to teach kids ages 6 through 12 about taking care of the outdoors.

Ask an REI team member about scheduling a free PEAK presentation for your classroom or youth group, or visit www.rei.com/PEAK for more information.



First Saturday in June The American Hiking Society's National Trails Day, sponsored by REI, is a nationwide celebration of trails. Celebrate with your family by taking a hike, or volunteering for a trail clean-up project. Ask an REI team member about how to get involved, or visit www.rei.com for more information.