



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: **Kim Williams Trail**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **2 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

Why This Hike: It's a beautiful, easy hike that's right in town!

Hike Description: This wide, flat trail in a natural setting is the easternmost section of the city's riverfront park and trail system. It runs along an old railroad bed beside the Clark Fork River. Perfect for families with small children, it also offers plenty of enjoyment for older kids. There's a good chance you'll see a variety of birds—from herons and kingfishers to sparrows and dippers to bald eagles and ospreys. Four-legged critters in the area range from small residents (chipmunks) to large passersby (black bear and mountain lions). Hike until you see a sign for the Hellgate Canyon Trail on your right. This is your turnaround point, so simply retrace your steps. Or, for a little different look on the way back, try the single-track trail closer to the river.

Driving Directions: Park south of the Clark Fork River, one block east of Maurice Avenue. This is a small lot by the University of Montana. During busy times, park on the north side of the river, close to the Van Buren Street pedestrian bridge. Parking is free.

Tips: Teach kids to walk softly: If they're quiet, they might see a doe and her fawn drinking from the river (especially if you go early in the morning or late in the afternoon). There are no restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Two: **The "M" Trail**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **1.5 miles roundtrip, 600' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Located in town at the University of Montana, the trail has super views of the valley.

Hike Description: This gravel trail takes you up to the "M" on Mount Sentinel's west face. It gives you and your kids a great opportunity to stretch your legs, get your hearts pumping and enjoy some terrific views. A series of more than 10 switchbacks leads you up the steep path to the university's signature landmark. The "M" was first laid out in stones back in 1908. The current letter is the 4th generation, and has been in place since 1968. As you climb, benches provide nice resting spots where you can take in the views that just keep expanding and getting better the higher you go.

Driving Directions: From I-90, take the Van Buren Street exit. Follow Van Buren south and make a right turn on Broadway. Turn left on US 12 (Madison Street). Turn left again on South 5th Street (which becomes Campus Drive). Follow this behind the University of Montana football stadium to the trailhead at the base of Mount Sentinel on the university campus. Parking is free for one hour.

Tips: Try this hike at sunset. Amazing! But remember to bring flashlights or headlamps for the return trip if you go late. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Three: **Waterworks Hill**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **2.2 miles roundtrip, 450' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: The trail offers beautiful views of the Missoula Valley and the Bitterroots. And it's friendly to both kids and dogs!

Hike Description: Waterworks Hill is one of the best places to go for great views of the whole Missoula Valley. You'll also get dramatic shots of Mount Jumbo (L Trail), Mount Sentinel (M Trail) and the Bitterroot Range. If you go early enough in the season, wildflowers will be blooming along the trail. The path follows the treeless ridge to the top of the hill. It can be hiked either as an out-and-back or as a loop (by returning through Cherry Gulch). You'll climb gradually, so most kids won't find it too strenuous. And Fido can come along, too!

Driving Directions: From I-90, take Exit 104 (Orange Street). Go south on Broadway Street. Take the second left (N. 2nd Street). Continue east on 2nd Street until you get to Greenough Drive. Turn left (north) on Greenough. Take the first left after crossing I-90. Drive one block on the gravel road to the signed trailhead at the end of the road. Park on either side of the road. Parking is free.

Tips: The top of Waterworks Hill makes a great spot for picnics or watching the sunset. (If you go at the end of the day, carry flashlights or headlamps for the return trip.) There's no water on this hike, so be sure to carry plenty. There are no restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Four: **Spring Creek Gulch**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **2.6 miles roundtrip, 300' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Lush and cool, it makes a great summer hike. And it's close to town.

Hike Description: Start at the main Rattlesnake Creek trailhead, and hike along beautiful Rattlesnake Creek. After 0.5 miles, turn left at the Spring Creek Trail and gently climb through thick vegetation and rolling grasslands. Notice the wonderful, dark forest on the far side of the creek. Keep a lookout on your right for the first bridge over Spring Creek. Cross that bridge and return downstream on the other side. But before you head back, the kids are going to want to play in the creek at the bridge, especially when it's hot. When you get back to the main Rattlesnake Creek Trail, follow it back to the trailhead and the parking area.

Driving Directions: From I-90, take the Van Buren Street exit. Go north on Van Buren (which turns into Rattlesnake Drive). At 4 miles, turn left on Sawmill Gulch Road and drive approximately 0.25 miles to the main parking lot. Parking is free.

Tips: Bring a towel to dry off the kids after they've played in the creek. There are restrooms at the trailhead and on the trail at 1.3 miles in.

Hike Five: **Bass Creek to Log Dam**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **3 miles roundtrip, 500' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This is a good trail for beginning hikers and a perfect example of the many canyon trails found throughout the Bitterroot Valley.

Hike Description: The trail follows picturesque Bass Creek up the forested canyon bottom. If there are young anglers in the family, bring your gear (and licenses for those 16 or older) because fishing is allowed. Occasionally the canyon walls peek out through the forest, adding to the wonderful scenery. The hike ends at a pond created by a log dam along the creek. Just as you reach the dam, you'll get a great view of Little Saint Joseph. Bass Creek Trail actually continues all the way up to Bass Lake. But it's a 15-mile roundtrip with 3,000' of elevation gain, so it's not a viable option for kids. This is just one possible route in the Bass Creek complex. There are also several educational loop trails, including the Larry Creek Fire Ecology Trail and the Charles Waters Nature Trail. Both can be accessed from different trailheads off Bass Creek Road.

Driving Directions: From Missoula, drive 20 miles south on Hwy 93. Turn right on Bass Creek Road. Go 2.5 miles to the trailhead at the end of the road. Parking is free.

Tips: There are campsites and picnic tables at the trailhead, making this a great destination for the day or an overnight adventure. There are restrooms at the trailhead.



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.