



# 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: **40-Acre Lake Trail at Brazos Bend State Park**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **1.2 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** My family loves this trail and park. The lake is peaceful, there are lots of great picnic spots, and it's open to pets (on a leash). If you're a geocacher, bring your GPS, because there are caches out there!

**Hike Description:** This relaxing, easy hike circles 40-Acre Lake. The observation tower about halfway around also gives you a bird's-eye view of neighboring Pilant Lake. The tower is a great spot for watching birds (more than 270 species have been seen in the park!). If you've got young anglers in the family, bring the tackle (and your license): There's a fishing pier on the lake. In addition to the birds, the park is home to an astounding range of wildlife, including raccoons, white-tailed deer and even American alligators.

**Driving Directions:** From Houston, take Hwy. 59 south to the Crabb River Road exit. Cross over the freeway and railroad tracks, then just follow the signs to Brazos River State Park. You can also take State Hwy. 288 south to FM 1462 west. Follow FM 1462 to FM 762 south. As you near the park, all routes are marked with brown signs to guide you. Entrance fee is \$4 per person (children under 12 are free).

**Tips:** Bring field guides on birds, wildlife, plants and trees of the area. Your kids will enjoy identifying some of the residents of this naturally diverse ecosystem. If you stay into the evening, check out the George Observatory for an amazing view of the night sky.

### Hike Two: **R.A. Vines Trail at Houston Arboretum**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **0.5 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** This is a nice first hike for kids to explore. The beautiful trees and winding trail offers kids a real feeling of peace and outdoor enjoyment for not too much effort.

**Hike Description:** This year-round favorite ambles through a wetland and follows a boardwalk. (At the pond, have your kids keep their eyes open for turtles and frogs. And, if they're really observant, for raccoon prints.) Most of the trail is mulched path with a little "Houston" hill—not ideal for strollers, but excellent for walking. Winding through the arboretum's ravine, it's a place young explorers will love to visit. The biodiversity of the setting makes it a fun, constantly changing microcosm to visit in all of the seasons. Several other trails crisscross the arboretum—five miles in all—giving you lots of options.

**Driving Directions:** In Houston, drive east on Woodway Drive off the West 610 Loop (inside the loop). The arboretum will appear quickly on your right. Parking is free.

**Tips:** Be sure to visit the Discovery Room in the Nature Center building for fun learning experiences (it's open weekly, except on Mondays). Maps are available there. Dogs are welcome—on a leash.

Hike Three: **Huntsville State Park:Chinquapin, Prairie Branch & Dogwood Trails**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **3 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** A favorite of both kids and adults, this winding, three-trail loop offers great views of the lake and beautiful trees, and it's open to Fido, too!

**Hike Description:** Start on the Chinquapin Trail at the interpretive center trailhead. Follow this trail until it intersects with the Prairie Branch Trail. Then take the second trail as it meanders along the lake. When you reach the Dogwood Trail, follow it back to the interpretive center trailhead where you started. Along the way, you'll walk among beautiful dogwood trees and, if you go when they're blooming, lots of flowers. The loop takes 1–2 hours, depending on your travel speed (and how often you stop to admire the views).

**Driving Directions:** From Houston, drive north on I-45 for 60 miles. Take Exit 109 (Park Road 40) to the Huntsville State Park entrance. There is a \$4 entrance fee to the park unless you have a Texas State Park Pass (available at any REI store in Texas).

**Tips:** Trail maps are available at the ranger station. Be sure to bring extra water and cool clothing during the summer. There are picnic tables throughout the park. Canoes are available to rent. For those who enjoy horseback riding, guided trail rides are also available.

Hike Four: **Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens**

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

Distance: **5 miles total, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** It gives you five miles of easy walking trails through a garden park of trees, ferns, herbs and flowers. It's a wonderful place to show and teach kids about environmental stewardship.

**Hike Description:** The park is divided into two sections by Aldine Westfield Road. On the east, you'll find the botanic gardens and approximately two miles of walking trails in intersecting loops. One very popular spot is the Lily Pond and Tea House, featuring an oriental-themed gazebo and walkway near the bamboo stands. On the west side, you can explore the arboretum and its outdoor classroom, and walk three miles of woodland trails that feature environmental interpretative information. The west side also has a picnic area with tables and grills, and a barbecue pavilion.

**Driving Directions:** From Houston, drive north on I-45 or the Hardy Toll Road, exit at FM 1960 and turn east. At Aldine Westfield Road, turn left. At the second traffic light, turn right for the east side of the park with the visitor center and botanic gardens; or turn left for the west side of the park with the arboretum and picnic area. Parking is free.

**Tips:** Be sure to bring your camera. And be ready to relax. The park is patrolled regularly by local police, so please stay within the posted speed limit.

Hike Five: **Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **1–2 miles total, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** Fun for both kids and adults, it offers beautiful scenery, cool shade and an excellent opportunity to see many of the birds that are native to the Houston area.

**Hike Description:** Several short, easy trails intersect throughout the 17.5-acre wooded sanctuary. The Mary Cravens Trail starts at the main parking lot, next to the restored log cabin. It crosses Rummel Creek and connects to the overflow parking at the church. The West Bank Trail loops from the main parking lot along a short stretch of the creek and a pond. The longer Creekside Trail follows Rummel Creek nearly the entire length of the sanctuary and gives access to all the other trails. The sanctuary is quiet, and the trails aren't crowded, so you and the kids can enjoy some quality time. And in the spirit of being family-friendly, pets are welcome. So bring Fido. Just be sure he's on a leash.

**Driving Directions:** In Houston, take I-10 west and exit at the Beltway 8 Frontage Road. Turn left (south) onto the Frontage Road under Beltway 8. Turn right onto Memorial Drive and go 0.25 miles to the Rustling Pines subdivision. Turn left onto Wilchester Boulevard. The Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary is the second property on the left. Parking is free.

**Tips:** Parking is limited to 20 spaces, but if the lot is full, you can park at the Memorial Drive United Methodist Church and then enter through the electronic gate.



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](http://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](http://www.rei.com) for more information.