



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: **Barton Creek Greenbelt Trail**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **1–15 miles roundtrip, 0–1,200' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This is the longest trail in the Austin area. But with its various access points, you can customize your hike for the amount of time you have and for your kids' age and ability.

Hike Description: The trail starts at the Barton Springs Pool. It begins easily as a smooth path, and gets a little more difficult—as well as rockier and narrower—as you progress. It runs for nearly 8 miles one way, following Barton Creek. The creek itself can churn with whitewater during the rainy season and be bone dry during the summer. In wetter times, several waterfalls are visible from the trail. The greenbelt offers year-round adventure: depending on the season, you can hike, climb or bike along the trail and even paddle the creek. And it's always a great place for kids to explore the abundant flora and fauna that call the Austin area home.

Driving Directions: Head west on Barton Springs Road and, after entering Zilker Park, turn left at the first available turn. Drive south as far as possible in the parking area next to Barton Springs Pool. Parking is \$3 in the summer and on weekends; other times it's free.

Tip: After a hot hike, kids can take a dip in the Barton Springs Pool, which remains at a constant 68° F.

Hike Two: **Bull Creek Trail**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **4.5 miles roundtrip, 600' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This is an excellent choice for the kids and their 4-legged friends. The Bull Creek Foundation calls the Bull Creek Watershed "The Galapagos of Texas." It is a unique landscape, with waterfalls, limestone cliffs, quiet woods and lots of fun.

Hike Description: The southern part of the trail starts next to what was once a natural swimming pool. This pool is one of the 3 swimming holes along the trail. As the trail ambles north, you cross the creek several times (during the wetter months, the water can be knee deep). You'll also cross under Hwy. 360 a couple of times and pass waterfalls, other swimming holes and various side trails. The main trail follows along the creek. Around the midpoint, you come to Side Falls, which is located just across from the Bull Creek Nature Preserve. The preserve has its own rules that vary greatly from Bull Creek. Please follow their rules if you plan to visit. The trail ends at a parking lot just off Old Spicewood Springs Road. This parking lot is the northern access point of Bull Creek.

Driving Directions: The start of Bull Creek's southern half is on Lakewood Drive. From north Austin, head south on Capitol of Texas Hwy. (Loop 360) and turn left at Lakewood. If you get to 2222, you've gone too far. From the south, get ready to turn right after passing 2222. Free parking is available just off Loop 360, next to the old pool.

Tips: With all of the creek crossings, swimming holes and waterfalls, this is an ideal hike for warm weather. Fido will be happy to know that the park allows dogs to be off leash, so he can hike and swim with the kids.

Hike Three: **Hamilton Pool Canyon Trail**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **1.6 miles roundtrip, 400' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Although the pool itself is very popular, this wonderful trail is still little known. It's a short hike through wonderland.

Hike Description: The trail follows Hamilton Creek as it leaves the jade-green Hamilton Pool and flows into the Pedernales River. Much of the trail is sheltered by the canyon walls. Cypress trees and ferns are abundant. The trail ends at the river, where a bench has been placed in the shade for a nice rest before returning to the pool. Guided nature tours are available on Sunday mornings or by appointment. To protect the ecosystem of the preserve, pets are not allowed, so Fido's going to have to sit this one out.

Driving Directions: Hamilton Pool is approximately 30 miles southwest of Austin. Take Hwy. 71 west from Austin through the town of Bee Cave. Turn left onto FM 3238 (Hamilton Pool Road). Travel 13 miles to the Hamilton Pool Nature Preserve entrance, on your right. Parking is \$8.

Tips: The park is very popular during the warmer months. There's a 75-vehicle limit, so come early in the day. Kids will love swimming in Hamilton Pool before or after their hike (there's no lifeguard on duty). A 50' waterfall pours into the pool—spectacular!

Hike Four: **McKinney Falls/Homestead Trail**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **3 miles roundtrip, 420' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: With so much water, forest and history to explore, this is a terrific place for kids to hike near Austin.

Hike Description: The trail begins at the beautiful McKinney Falls, which is particularly refreshing in the summer. The path then meanders through oak and juniper woodlands. Depending on the time of day you're there, kids may see whitetail deer, raccoons, armadillos, squirrels and numerous birds. They'll also encounter remnants of Texas history, as the trail takes you past the ruins of Thomas F. McKinney's homestead and gristmill. Information on McKinney, who came to Texas in the 1820s as one of Stephen F. Austin's first 300 colonists and for whom the state park is named, is available in the Smith Visitor Center.

Driving Directions: The park is located 13 miles southeast of the state capitol in Austin, off US 183. Take the McKinney Falls Parkway exit off US 183 and go straight to the McKinney Falls State Park entrance. The entrance fee is \$4 per person ages 13 or older, unless you have a State Parks Pass.

Tips: The paved, 3-mile Onion Creek Hike & Bike Trail around the campground is wonderful for beginning cyclists. The 0.75-mile interpretive Rock Shelter Trail is another fun option. Swimming is available anywhere on Onion Creek (there's a great swimming hole at the bottom of Lower McKinney Falls). However, swimming is subject to closure by park officials, so call first if you're planning to take a dip.

Hike Five: **Pedernales Falls**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **600 yards roundtrip, approximately 200' elevation gain (longer options are possible)**

Why This Hike: The falls are the main attraction of the state park, and this easily accessible scenic overlook offers a great view of them.

Hike Description: The trail is wide and made of granite gravel. In the short distance to the falls, it winds through stands of oak and juniper, ending at a manmade rock overlook. The cascading falls flow over the tilted stairsteps of the layered limestone that drops the riverbed about 50' over a distance of 3,000'. More than 150 species of birds, including ospreys and bald eagles, have been seen in the park. There are many fantastic trails in Pedernales that are suitable for families. The 0.25-mile nature trail begins in the campground and leads to a wonderful view of Twin Falls. Longer trails, including the 7.5-mile Wolf Mountain Trail that's open to both hiking and mountain biking, are also available. Check at the park headquarters for a map.

Driving Directions: From Austin, drive west on Hwy. 290 to RR 3232. Turn right and go 7 miles to the intersection at FM 2766. Turn right into the Pedernales Falls State Park entrance. Park entrance fee is \$5 per person ages 13 or older, unless you have a State Parks Pass.

Tips: Although there's no swimming in the river near the falls, swimming is allowed below the Sponsored Youth Group Area where the water level is fairly shallow. It's a great place for the kids to have fun cooling off.



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.