



# 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: **Skokie Lagoons**

Rating: **Easy**

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

**Why This Hike:** It feels like a remote location, but it's in the middle of the suburbs.

**Hike Description:** The lagoons are a series of seven interconnected pools in a reclaimed marshland of the Skokie River. This narrow trail follows the outer edge of an island in the middle of the lagoons. You'll pass through woodland, shrubs and open meadows. Because it's a wildlife refuge, the area is loaded with critters. Kids could see deer, mink, muskrats, turtles and all sorts of birds (more than 200 species have been documented). The fishing is good, too, so if you've got young anglers in the family, bring your tackle (and licenses).

**Driving Directions:** From Chicago, go north on I-94. Take Exit 33B (Willow Road) and head east. Just past the forest preserve, turn left (north) on Forest Way Drive. The next stop sign is Tower Road. Park along Forest Way Drive, north of Tower Road and just south of the residential area. Parking is free.

**Tips:** It can be tricky finding the entrance to the island. If you park just south of the residential area along Forest Way Drive, walk due west to the trailhead. This is a great place to canoe/kayak at sunset.

Hike Two: **Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **2.5 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** It's part of a huge natural area that has more than 30 miles of trails to explore, with something for everyone.

**Hike Description:** This hike is in the Palos Forest Preserve, Cook County's largest natural area. I suggest that you start behind the nature center on the Farm Pond Trail. It will take you close to the shore of Long John Slough. In the summer, this is nearly covered with lily pads (listen for the bullfrogs). After 0.2 miles you'll come to a fork. Turn right onto the Black Oak Trail. It will take you through a prairie, into dense woods, and past the original site of the schoolhouse, built in 1870. The trail leads back to the Farm Pond Trail and, after about 1.7 miles, the nature center. The White Oak Trail begins across the parking lot. It's a nice 0.8-mile loop with views of glacier-carved Joe's Pond. Kids who don't see many wild critters in the city will like it here. I've seen deer, coyote and hawks, to name a few.

**Driving Directions:** From Chicago, go south on I-55 to Exit 279A. Follow La Grange Road south for 3.5 miles. Turn right on 95th Street and go 1.25 miles. Turn left on 104th Avenue. The Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center will be on the right, 0.5 miles south of 95th Street. Parking is free.

**Tips:** There are many picnic areas in the preserve, so pack a lunch. The nature center has lots of cool exhibits that are fun for kids. There are restrooms at the nature center.

Hike Three: **Linne Woods**

Rating: **Easy**

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

**Why This Hike:** It's an interesting loop, with lots of nearby food when the hike works up an appetite.

**Hike Description:** Start at the far back part of the parking area, near the turnaround. Walk due north to pick up the trailhead. The wide, dirt trail takes you on an easy stroll through Linne Woods, which is part of the Morton Grove Forest Preserve. You'll follow the North Branch of the Chicago River, and can cross it on a footbridge at one point. Kids will have a good chance of seeing wildlife, including deer.

**Driving Directions:** From Chicago, go north on I-94. Exit on Dempster Street and go west about 0.5 miles. Turn right into the Linne Woods parking lot, across the street from McDonald's, just east of the railroad tracks. Parking is free.

**Tips:** There are picnic areas at the entrance to the woods, and fast food across the street if you don't pack a lunch. There are no restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Four: **Chicago Botanic Garden**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **2.7 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** It's a family-friendly trail through beautiful gardens.

**Hike Description:** At different places, the trail is paved, gravel or wood chips. But whatever the surface, it's easy going and very pleasant as you walk through prairie, woodlands and marsh, across islands and among acres of 26 pristine gardens. There's even a Children's Garden with special activities—especially in the summer. In addition to the cultured plant life, lots of critters can be spotted here, including beavers, muskrats, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, opossums, deer, frogs, turtles and toads. And more than 250 species of birds! Be sure to bring your camera to capture some of the amazing sights. Dogs are not allowed (except for service animals), so leave Fido at home for this one.

**Driving Directions:** From Chicago, follow the Kennedy Expressway (I-90/94) west to Edens Expressway (I-94) and US Route 41. Exit at Lake Cook Road and go 0.5 miles east to the garden. Parking is \$12 per vehicle.

**Tips:** The visitor center includes a gift shop and library and has an ATM machine. There's also a restaurant on site. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Five: **Busse Woods**

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

Distance: **1.4 miles to 3.9 miles roundtrip, no elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** The popular, multi-use trail leads you through woods, across streams and beside ponds. And you can even see a herd of elk!

**Hike Description:** If you walked all the trails in Busse Woods, you'd be at it all day. But here are a couple of nice options. From the parking lot, pick up the paved Busse Woods Bicycle Trail as it heads east near the restrooms. You'll follow Higgins Road for a bit, then dip into the woods. At about 0.6 miles, you come to an open picnic area with restrooms. Here's where you have a choice: If you'd like to complete the shorter, 1.4-mile loop, cross the meadow and, past the water pump, follow the orange trail marker onto the gravel-and-dirt path that circles back to the parking lot. But if you'd like to see the resident herd of elk, stay on the paved trail as it goes north from the picnic meadow. The hike to the elk grove and back to the meadow adds 2.5 miles to your hike. Once back at the meadow, just continue to the orange trail marker for the trek back to your car.

**Driving Directions:** From Chicago, take I-90/I-94 northwest. Stay on I-90 as you pass the I-94 turnoff and then O'Hare Airport. Exit on Arlington Heights Road and turn left (south). Go 0.8 miles and turn right (west) on Higgins Road. Continue for one mile and take the second park-access driveway on the right. The paved trail crosses the driveway near the restrooms. Parking is free.

**Tips:** If you don't hike to the elk grove, you can drive. It's on the corner of Higgins Road and Arlington Heights Road. 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](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.