



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: **Arbor Hills Nature Preserve**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **1.3 to 2.6 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Easily accessible, and with paved trails, this park is where the Plano and Dallas REI stores conduct our hands-on GPS and compass clinics. (We've seen a bobcat hunting mice while hiking here!)

Hike Description: Located in northwest Plano, the preserve is surrounded by the metropolitan area. But it's still a good place to get away, do a little exploring and enjoy being outdoors. One of the reasons it's popular is that it's a good spot for viewing wildlife. Sharp-eyed kids may not only see birds, butterflies and other small critters, they may even catch a glimpse of the occasional bobcat or coyote. The two paved loop trails are concrete and about 10' wide. There are also dirt single-track trails that are used both by hikers and mountain bikers (because of the bicycles, these are not well suited for young children). All the trails are well defined and maintained.

Driving Directions: From Dallas, take the Dallas North Tollway north to the Parker Road exit. Turn left (west) onto Parker Road. Follow Parker past the Midway stoplight. The Arbor Hills entrance is just west of the fire station. Parking is free.

Tips: Visit the observation tower for a great view! Take a picnic lunch along on the hike. Arbor Hills has three covered pavilions near the parking lot. Be sure to look at the natural bio-filter in the parking lot that cleans surface runoff from the parking lot before it reenters the ground water table.

Hike Two: **Cedar Ridge Preserve**

Rating: **Easy to difficult, depending on length (most are moderate)**

Distance: **0.25 to 6 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

Why This Hike: The preserve offers eight different trails in various loops. You can hike them individually or combine several of them for a challenging trek of up to six miles. And for the youngest adventurers, the 0.25-mile Little Bluestem Trail is stroller-accessible.

Hike Description: In a region that's reminiscent of the hill country around Austin, the preserve is a good place for heart-pumping, leg-warming exercise out in nature. You can explore the trails on your own, or arrange to join one of the guided tours led by a naturalist. The guided tours can be a fun way for kids to learn more about the flora and fauna of the area, including safety awareness. For example, there are venomous snakes within the preserve, and though generally shy of people, they should be treated with respect and caution. There is also some poison ivy in the area, so remind your kids of the mantra, "Leaves of three, leave it be." In addition to its 10 miles of trails, the preserve also features a native plant nursery, butterfly gardens and a picnic area.

Driving Directions: From Dallas, take Loop 12 south to Spur 408. Exit left on Clark Road and go two miles. Turn right on Wheatland and proceed one mile. Turn left on Mountain Creek Parkway. Go 0.2 miles to the preserve (7171 Mountain Creek Pkwy.), on the right. Parking/admission is free (donations are welcome).

Tips: Kids will like the raised observation platform at Cattail Pond. It's a good spot for watching birds. The preserve is closed on Mondays.

Hike Three: **Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **0.6 to 2 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

Why This Hike: Multiple trails give kids a great chance to experience several ecosystems, from grass prairie to river to hilltop forest.

Hike Description: This is a fine place for your family to escape the concrete and noise of the city. Ranging from the short, paved, wheelchair-accessible Hilltop Trail to the longer Sycamore Trail that takes you deep into the quiet of nature, the sanctuary offers four unique nature trails. You can walk them self-guided or join a guided hike on the weekends. To give your kids a completely different experience of nature, you can even register for one of the guided night hikes that are offered periodically. "The Heard" is somewhere you'll want to return to several times throughout the year—it changes virtually every day.

Driving Directions: From Dallas, take Hwy. 75 north to Exit 38a and stay in the right lane. Proceed one mile and turn right (south) on Hwy. 5 South and then left on FM 1378. The Heard Museum is located 1 mile east of Hwy. 5 on FM 1378, southeast of McKinney. Admission to the sanctuary is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children (ages 3–12) and seniors. An annual or seasonal Family Pass can also be purchased.

Tips: Two of the most popular spots with kids include Bullfrog Pond and the Austin chalk escarpment where it's possible to find fossils. In the museum, don't miss the interesting exhibits of venomous snakes and Audubon prints, or the hands-on science lab called the "Living Lab." The Heard Natural Science Museum and trails are closed on Mondays.

Hike Four: **Horseshoe Trail at Grapevine Lake**

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

Distance: **4.5 miles roundtrip, 21' elevation gain**

Why This Hike: It's an easy trail close to the city that offers pretty lake views and plenty of side trails for young explorers.

Hike Description: This picturesque trail follows the shoreline of Grapevine Lake for almost its entire length. It provides wonderful views of the lake as well as forests and meadows. The walking is easy—for the first 1.5 miles or so you're on an old paved park road that's now open only to foot and bike traffic. Several short dirt loops along the way offer enticing side trips down to the water's edge that kids will find hard to resist. As the old road nears the second parking area, it changes to a newer concrete surface. It stays that way for the remainder of the hike. Because of this, the trail is in excellent condition year-round, and can easily be navigated, even with a stroller or wheelchair.

Driving Directions: From Dallas, follow Texas ST114 west and take the NW Hwy. exit (ST382). Turn right (east) and go approximately 2 miles. Turn left (north) on Dove Road. Drive 1.5 miles and turn left (west) directly across from the Oak Grove Park sign (if you get to the baseball fields you've gone too far). Drive through the park until you reach the first restroom facility. Park at the restrooms—the trailhead is directly across the road. Parking is free.

Tips: The best wildlife viewing is at first and last light each day. The park is open 6am to 9pm seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Hike Five: **Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **1.0 to 1.5 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

Why This Hike: In addition to hiking, the 2,000-acre Environmental Learning Area offers kayaking at the beaver pond and on the Trinity River.

Hike Description: There are three trails to choose from in the LLELA. The Cottonwood Trail is a loop approximately 1 mile long. It leads to a beaver pond, and along the way you'll find a restored log cabin. The 1.5-mile Redbud Trail loop follows the Trinity River. And the 1.5-mile Cicada Trail winds through two wetlands and a hardwood forest. Kids have a great chance of seeing wildlife, as the LLELA is home to bobcat, river otter, deer and mink, as well as many species of birds. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons have been seen within the park, and there's even a resident herd of bison. The trails are wide, well maintained and closed to all but foot traffic (no horses or bicycles). Pets are not allowed in the park (except for guide animals). In addition to these self-guided hikes, there are a number of educational programs offered on the weekends.

Driving Directions: From Dallas, take I-35E north to Lewisville. Exit east onto Valley Ridge and go to the light at Mill Street. Turn left (north) on Mill and continue to Jones Street. Turn right (east) on Jones, which dead ends at the front gate of the LLELA. Admission is \$3 per person (children under 5 are free). Park at the pavillion, which is also the trailhead for all three trails.

Tips: Primitive campsites are available if you want to make your trip an overnight adventure. The beaver pond is a great place to kayak!



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.