



# 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: **Laurel Bluffs Trail at Eno River State Park**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **5 miles roundtrip, 300' elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** It's the official "adopted trail" of the Durham REI store and a favorite of our employees. It's also part of the NC Mountains to Sea Trail.

**Hike Description:** The Laurel Bluffs Trail is blazed with yellow dots. It starts at an intersection with the Pump Station Trail and goes east to Guess Road. Usually following close to the river, the trail occasionally moves away from the water when cliffs and bluffs force it up and around the ridges. Along the way, you'll pass the chimney and foundation of an old hunting lodge. You'll also see the mostly intact Guess Mill Dam. The trail enters the millrace and comes out at the chimney at the Guess Mill site. Have kids look for the millstone close to Guess Road. To cut your hiking distance in half, leave a car parked at Guess Road, saving you the return trip.

**Driving Directions:** Eno River State Park is just northwest of Durham. From southbound I-85, take Exit 173 and turn northwest onto Cole Mill Road, which ends at the park. Parking is free.

From northbound I-85, take Exit 170 (Hwy. 70) west. Turn right on Pleasant Green Road. Turn left on Cole Mill Road, which ends at the park.

**Tips:** Bob's Hole is a great spot in the river for swimming or fishing (but not at the same time!). There are restrooms at the trailhead.

### Hike Two: **Inspiration Trail at Umstead State Park**

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

Distance: **2-6 miles roundtrip, 300' elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** Great for families, the trail makes you feel like you're deep in the mountains when you're really only minutes from downtown Raleigh and Durham.

**Hike Description:** From the Reedy Creek parking lot, hike north following the blue diamonds of the Inspiration Trail. Keep going to the Company Mill Trail (orange squares). Turn right on the loop, and hike past the old Company Mill site. If your young hikers tire easily, you can turn around here. With older kids who are eager to stretch it out, follow the Company Mill Trail until it loops around to Inspiration Trail again. Proceed south to the parking area. The well-maintained forest trail is foot-friendly gravel, pine needles and dirt. Several benches along the way offer rest and good vantage points for admiring the greenery. On Inspiration Trail, encourage kids to watch for double- and triple-trunk trees. There are an unusual number of them clustered here.

**Driving Directions:** From I-40 in Cary, take Exit 287 (N. Harrison Avenue). Drive north, away from Cary, until you reach Umstead State Park. Turn left inside the Reedy Creek entrance gate and park in the lot. Parking is free.

**Tips:** Be sure to pack a lunch, as there are lots of great picnic spots throughout the park. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Three: **Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve**

Rating: **Easy to moderate**

Distance: **2.1 miles of loop hikes, moderate elevation gain (including stairs)**

**Why This Hike:** The beautiful setting, wonderful bird and wildlife viewing, and the Nature Center with its hands-on exhibits make this a great family adventure.

**Hike Description:** The trail is actually a series of three intersecting loops, beginning at the Stevens Nature Center. From the East Hemlock Bluff viewing deck, go down the steps to the 0.6-mile Swift Creek Loop. Once you've completed the loop, go back up the stairs and cross to the other side of the park for the 1.1-mile Chestnut Oak Loop and its "tributary," the 0.34-mile Beech Tree Cove Loop. Observation decks offer dramatic views (bring your camera). The unusual thing about this hike is the presence of the Eastern Hemlock trees. It should be too warm for them (they like cool, mountain air). But because of the north-facing bluffs and the waters of Swift Creek, the preserve stays cool, even in the summer (a good thing to remember on hot days). These unique conditions have created a mini-climate that's similar to what it was 10,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age. So the trees decided to stay.

**Driving Directions:** Hemlock Bluffs is in south Cary. From the north or south, take Kildaire Farm Road to the preserve (2616 Kildaire Farm Road). From the east or west, take Tryon Road and turn south onto Kildaire Farm Road to the preserve. Parking is free.

**Tips:** Be sure to visit the nature center and encourage kids to check out the animal-footprint sandbox. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

Hike Four: **Falls Lake Trail**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **Up to 6.2 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** Part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, this popular section follows the shore of beautiful Falls Lake.

**Hike Description:** Depending on the time of year, this trail offers very different experiences. In the spring and summer, it's a lush, green hike that gives the feeling of being deep in the wilderness. In the fall, the fallen leaves allow wonderful, unobstructed views of the lake almost the entire route. Small hills, wooden bridges and a few steps offer some diversity over the terrain, and they help you up and down the slopes. Benches provide a place to rest and enjoy the views. Overall, it's an easy and enjoyable trek. To cut your hiking distance in half, leave a car parked at the second trailhead, one mile further up Six Forks Road from the beginning trailhead.

**Driving Directions:** From Raleigh, take Six Forks Road north and, after the volunteer fire station, turn left to continue on Six Forks. Follow this until you get to Falls Lake. Look for the trailhead after the bridge. If you pass Pleasant Union Church Road, you've gone too far (that's the entrance to Blue Jay County Park). Park at the trailhead. Parking is free.

**Tips:** This is a great hike for family groups, including your dog! There are no restrooms at the trailhead, but there are at the nearby park office.

Hike Five: **Bolin Creek Trail**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **3 miles roundtrip, minimal elevation gain**

**Why This Hike:** This is a great beginner trail to introduce kids to hiking, and it's right in the heart of Chapel Hill.

**Hike Description:** This popular, 10'-wide paved trail is open to both hikers and cyclists. It runs from Airport Road to the Community Center Park on South Estes Drive. The meandering path takes you through quiet meadows and peaceful woods along Bolin Creek. It's a great opportunity to teach kids the value of walking softly in nature: A lot of little critters call the Bolin Creek floodplain home. So if they watch and listen, kids may encounter many species of birds, as well as four-legged locals like raccoons and squirrels. For those who really want to stretch their legs, the trail connects to the Battle Branch Trail at the park. This second trail is largely unpaved, and goes on a 3-mile roundtrip ramble to the UNC campus and back.

**Driving Directions:** From I-40, take Exit 266 (Airport Road). Take Airport Road south toward downtown Chapel Hill. Turn left onto Bolinwood Drive. The trail exits onto Franklin Street. Park along Bolinwood Drive or at Chapel Hill Community Center. Parking is free.

**Tips:** The perfect topper for this hike is a stop at Ben & Jerry's for ice cream (it's on Franklin). There are restrooms in the park, but none at the other 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.