



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: **Lake Murray**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **4 miles round-trip, no elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This is an easy walk for the entire family inside one of the largest urban parks in the U.S., located just 8 miles northeast of downtown San Diego.

Hike Description: This is an easy hike on a flat, paved pathway that curves partially around a beautiful reservoir. Water is something of a novelty in this area, so it's a pleasant experience to have a lakeshore nearby while you walk. Nearby Cowles Mountain, the highest point within San Diego city limits (1,591 feet), is always within view. Because the trail around Lake Murray is flat, kids get to enjoy the lakeside scenery without huffing and puffing up inclines. You can bring along your dog, too, but dogs must be kept on a leash. The path does not fully circle the lake. It ends approximately 3.2 miles from the starting point, when you reach a gate near a dam. Mileage is painted on the path, so you can make your walk as long or as short as you like. After about 2 miles you reach a baseball field and golf course, and this makes the turnaround point for a nice 4-mile round trip. The path is very popular for walking, jogging, bicycling, rollerblading and picnicking, so expect to have company on weekends.

Driving Directions: From Interstate 8, exit on Lake Murray Blvd. north, then turn left on Kiowa Drive. You'll reach the entrance in 0.2 miles.

Tips: Lake Murray reservoir is located within 5,800-acre Mission Trails Regional Park. Approximately 3 miles away you drive to the park's popular Visitor & Interpretive Center. Trail guides lead hikes from the center at 9:30 a.m. every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday year-round. Lake Murray also offers boating and fishing for bass, bluegill, channel catfish and rainbow trout. Fishing (license required) is permitted on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday (sunrise to sunset) from early November to Labor Day.

Hike Two: **Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **0.6 to 2 miles round-trip, depending on the trail; no elevation gain**

Why This Hike: The Tijuana River Estuary is one of the few salt marshes remaining in Southern California – great for birding and for kids.

Hike Description: Several short trails can be found within the Reserve. The North McCoy Trail begins at the Visitor Center's parking lot and continues 0.3 miles to a very peaceful wildlife viewing area. The South McCoy Trail (1.5 miles roundtrip) and the River Mouth Trail (2 miles round-trip) begin several blocks south of the Visitor Center at the corner of 5th St. and Iris Ave. Both of these trails take visitors through prime bird-watching areas and down to the river mouth where the Tijuana River meets the Pacific Ocean.

Driving Directions: Take I-5 south to the Coronado Ave. exit. Turn right on Coronado Ave. and continue on it as it becomes Imperial Beach Blvd. Turn left on 3rd St. and left again onto Caspian Way. Turn right into the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center's parking lot. Parking is free.

Tips: More than 370 species of birds have been documented at the Tijuana Estuary, making this a great area for birding. The flat paths also make this an excellent place to introduce young children to the joys of hiking and enjoying the outdoors. Children and adults both love the exhibits and native plant gardens at the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center. Displays highlight estuary flora and fauna and estuarine ecology.

Hike Three: **Sunset Trail (Laguna Mountains)**

Rating: **Moderate**

Distance: **3 miles round-trip, moderate elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This trail offers beautiful fields of wildflowers, stunning mountain ponds and lakes, and panoramic views of San Diego County.

Hike Description: From the pull-off on Sunrise Highway, follow the shoulder of the road up the little hill until you reach the trailhead (marked with a small sign). Follow this trail and be sure to stay left as the trail forks at the intersection with an unmarked trail. Follow the Sunset Trail north, watching for views of the valley below. After about 1.5 miles you reach a small pond that serves as a good place to spot some tiny tadpoles and other wildlife. This is the turnaround point for a comfortable 3-mile trip. Energetic hikers, however, can continue along the western edge of the pond and up the ridge. The trail ascends the top of a small hill where you get another nice vantage point, then descends to an intersection with the Big Laguna Trail. Here you are a little more than 3 miles from the trailhead (after a cumulative elevation gain and loss of 700 feet). This marks the end of the Sunset Trail. Turn around and return to your car.

Driving Directions: Take I-8 east and exit at the Sunrise Highway exit. Follow Sunrise Highway 5 miles north until you reach the Meadows Information Station. The pull-off is across the road just past the information station and is large enough to park your car.

Tips: If you have the time, there are many other trails to explore in this area, such as the Big Laguna Trail and a section of the Pacific Crest Trail. You can also camp at Laguna Campground which is located farther up Sunrise Highway.

Hike Four: **Chula Vista Nature Center**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **1.5 miles, no elevation gain**

Why This Hike: The Nature Center is located on the beautiful Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge that is home to various species of birds and animals as well as 9 rare and endangered species.

Hike Description: Ride the free shuttle in from the street parking lot. The accessible dirt trail starts across the street from the shuttle stop at the Chula Vista Nature Center. Take this trail straight (west) through disturbed coastal sage scrub habitat until you reach the shoreline. Along the way you'll see old foundations left from a World War I kelp processing factory. Take a minute to observe the bay and the tiny pond to the south. Keep an eye out for the great blue heron that is frequently spotted fishing in this pond where the kelp barges once unloaded. Later, make your way back up the trail toward the Nature Center. Part way up the trail you will notice a trail that travels south. If you follow it you will pass another pond that carries overflow seawater from the Nature Center back to the bay. A few minutes later you will find a peaceful bird observation blind where you can sit on the steps and enjoy the surrounding environment. As you make your way back to the Nature Center, you will pass black mesh cages where young endangered light-footed clapper rails are trained to forage for themselves in the wild. The shuttle runs from the Nature Center to the parking lot every 20 minutes.

Driving Directions: The Nature Center is located at 1000 Gunpowder Point Dr. in Chula Vista. From I-5, take the E Street exit in Chula Vista, heading west. Continue through the first stoplight. At the time of this writing, you must follow signs to temporary parking one block down on the left.

Tips: Once you have completed the hike, visit the Nature Center for refreshments and wildlife exhibits. An entry fee is charged.

Hike Five: **Stephanie Rossi Memorial Trail (Sweetwater Regional Park)**

Rating: **Easy**

Distance: **1.5-mile loop, minimal elevation gain**

Why This Hike: This multiuse trail in Bonita circles Morrison Pond, offering views of numerous species of birds and wildlife.

Hike Description: Start at the entrance near Sweetwater Rd. and travel south until you hit a small stream. If it's dry, cross over the rocks and continue along the trail. (Watch your step; the rocks may be slippery.) If the water is flowing, backtrack until you hit the trail that travels west. Going south or west, follow the trail as it travels around Morrison Pond. Pause and enjoy the beautiful views of the pond at any one of the vantage points along the trail. Also watch for the numerous species of birds and animals that use this environment as their home. After nearly 1.5 miles of hiking you will have fully circled the pond and should be near the starting point of the trail.

Driving Directions: Take Rt. 54 east and exit at Briarwood Rd. Travel south on Briarwood until the intersection with Sweetwater Rd. Make a left, heading east on Sweetwater. The entrance for the Morrison Pond parking area will be on your right. Parking is free in this lot. The trailhead is located at the start of the driveway near Sweetwater Rd.

Tips: There are many benches around the perimeter of the lake that serve as great locations to sit and relax or enjoy a nice picnic.



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.