



# TAKE A HIKE

## Escape into Nature with a Day Trip

by Marlaina Donato

**T**o many, hiking means long-distance treks through forests or backpacking remote terrain. "In reality, it's more about getting out into green areas close to home," says Wesley Trimble, of the American Hiking Society. "It's about immersion in nature."

Day hiking can be easily tailored to personal preferences and interests. "Excellent apps and websites list and describe trails in your area or community. We have a database on our site that's helpful," says Trimble (*AmericanHiking.org*). He's personally high on old rail lines that have been converted to wide, accessible paths (*RailsToTrails.us*).

### A Trail for Everyone

Whatever our location, age or fitness level, a hike can provide opportunities for calming solitude or connecting with people we care about. Individuals with disabilities can also get outdoors at accommodating trails such as those at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge, in Delaware. There's always something to be learned in identifying wildlife and plants.

"Families can enjoy time walking outdoors together in ways impossible in other settings," observes Verna Gates, founder of Fresh Air Family, a Birmingham, Alabama, outdoor activities educational foundation. "Nature

aids in well-being in many ways." She points to studies cited at *NatureAndForestTherapy.org/the-science.html* that reveal how trees emit enzymes into the air that help improve our emotional and physical health. "When I lost a child, the only place I found solace was in nature. Sitting in a patch of wildflowers truly brought me back to living," recalls Gates.

### Explorers' Heaven

Following a lovely trail, much like inspired cooking, is as intriguing and delightful as we wish it to be. From wildflower paths to wine country trails, the great outdoors invites exploration of woodlands, glens, forests, mountain valleys, coastal areas, bayous, deserts and other terrain. Experienced day-trippers recommend revisiting favorite trails in specific seasons.

"I love being in the natural world, be it New Jersey, Florida or Alaska. Every trail offers surprises," marvels distance hiker Craig Romano (*CraigRomano.com*). As the author of several day hike guidebooks, he's seen firsthand how, "Every part of the country offers different perspectives and forms of beauty. The greatest biological diversity in our country is found in the Great Smoky Mountains, where the rhododendrons are breathtaking in spring."

The world's largest mapped cave system is in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave National Park. Hiking to observe other subterranean wonders in Indiana or Virginia's Natural Bridge Caverns is no less exhilarating than walking Alabama's covered bridge trail or painter Georgia O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch country, in New Mexico. The Appalachian Trail, running between Maine and Georgia, attracts thousands of adventurous long-distance trekkers, but such trails also offer sections ideal for day hikes.

Geomagnetic points in Arizona's vortex region or America's Stonehenge, in New Hampshire, afford unusual destinations. The wonders of California's Sonoma County include Planet Walk, a scale model path that illustrates our solar system. The Crater of Diamonds State Park, in Arkansas, is the only

## WHERE TO GO

Along with checking your state's departments of tourism and parks and recreation, here are some broader resources for finding local trails.

- AmericanHiking.org
- AmericanTrails.org
- Backpacker.com
- BluePlanetGreenLiving.com
- ClimateRide.org
- FreshAirFamily.org
- GearPatrol.com
- HikingProject.com
- NWF.org  
(National Wildlife Federation)
- OutsideOnline.com  
(Outside Magazine)
- SectionHiker.com



## WHAT YOU NEED

Time spent outside is best when we're well-equipped. Here are some basic tips.

- ✓ Be prepared for weather, stay alert, plan ahead and have a trail map so you know what to expect.
- ✓ Inform others where you will be and what time you plan to be back. Set a deadline to turn around and head back well before sundown.
- ✓ Plan on not having cell phone reception.
- ✓ Wear proper footwear and clothing.
- ✓ Take a compass and a flashlight.
- ✓ Bring water, in plastic-free bottles, and well-sealed snacks.
- ✓ Apply natural, reliable sunscreen (such as Think Sport).
- ✓ Use DEET-free insect and tick repellent. (For an easy home recipe, add 15 drops of geranium and eucalyptus essential oils to a two-ounce spray bottle filled with distilled water. Shake well before each use.)
- ✓ Consider a natural first-aid kit. (DIY guidelines for creating alternative kits are found at [Tinyurl.com/Natural-RemediesTravelKit](http://Tinyurl.com/Natural-RemediesTravelKit) and [Tinyurl.com/AnHerbalFirstAidKit](http://Tinyurl.com/AnHerbalFirstAidKit).)



Hiking in nature is a ready way to reset frazzled nerves.

place in the world where hikers can dig for diamonds and keep what they find, although quartz diamond sites (semiprecious stones less hard than diamonds) can be accessed at other U.S. locales. Coastal walks lead to discovering sea glass and shells. Arboretums in urban areas offer trails flush with local flora.

Joining or starting a hiking club based on common interests is one way to go. "One of our guidebook series encourages outdoor enthusiasts to explore the natural world in their immediate backyards. This approach especially appeals to families, first-time trail users and athletes looking for a quick nature fix after work," offers Helen Cherullo, publisher of Mountaineers Books ([Mountaineers-Books.org](http://Mountaineers-Books.org)), a nonprofit committed to conservation and sustainable lifestyles.

Wherever we venture, take nothing but pictures and leave nature untouched. Cherullo reminds us, "Connecting people to treasured natural landscapes leads to active engagement to preserve these places for future generations. The future of public lands—owned by every American citizen—is literally in our hands." They deserve our vote.

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