

# 11 Family-Friendly Long-Distance Hikes in the U.S.

Tell Us What You Think your travel club is wanting to develop more desirable outdoor adventures for you and your grandchildren. Please assist us by suggestions to [www.TravelClubAtRegency.com](http://www.TravelClubAtRegency.com) -Program Coordinator Jeannette Chabina 561-573-6665 Cell/Text

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The 11 National Scenic Trails in the U.S. provide great domestic hiking opportunities for families.

**School breaks provide the perfect time to get outdoors and be surrounded by nature. But for many people, the idea of planning a long-distance or multi-day hike can be intimidating, especially when traveling with kids..**

However, with a few simple tips, families can take the plunge and plan a beautiful multi-day hike (or, plan to hike specific sections of the trail, and return for more hiking at a later date). There are [11 national scenic trails](#) in the U.S. that are considered true through-hike trails.

Traditionally, these routes attract long-distance hikers who spend weeks or months on the trail. But, with a little prep and realistic expectations, families can also experience the thrill of hiking them Jul 27, 2021- Program coordinator research-Jeannette Chabina

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## A map of the 11 National Scenic Parks in the U.S

### **Appalachian National Scenic Trail**

Perhaps one of the most iconic trails is the Appalachian Trail. It is about 2,190 miles long and crosses 14 states along the U.S. East Coast. There are more than 250 shelters along the trail, making it attractive for a multi-day or over-night stay. The best times to hike is either in spring or fall, although parts of it are considered a year-round trail.

### **Arizona National Scenic Trail**

The Arizona Trail consists of 800 miles and is entirely in Arizona (from Mexico to Utah). The trail is open to hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and snowshoeing. The Arizona Trail also travels close to many local communities that offer resources for multi-day hikers who don't want to stay the night on the trail. This gives families more options for off-trail lodging. The trail is best traversed during spring, fall or winter.

### **Continental Divide National Scenic Trail**

Another hot favorite is the 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail that goes all the way from New Mexico to Glacier National Park in Montana. The trail crosses five different states, and almost 95% of the trail is located on public lands, making it extremely accessible. It is considered a year-round trail. Hiking the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

### **Florida National Scenic Trail**

The Florida Trail is the country's only subtropical national scenic trail with a wide topography. The trail passes through sand dunes, swamps, rivers and streams through its almost 1,300-mile journey. Many parts of the Florida Trail go along the outskirts of major cities, making it ideal for families who may want to stay in the city and hike certain sections of the trail. The best times to visit are spring, fall and winter.

### **Ice Age National Scenic Trail**

The Ice Age Trail is a scenic 1,200-mile trail system that stretches across Wisconsin and traverses private land, city parks, state parks, county forests and state forest land. Most of the trail passes small towns with plenty of options to stay overnight off the trail. On the trail, there are also six backcountry huts with outhouses that offer a welcome relief for families. It is considered a year-round trail.

Backcountry huts with outhouses are located along the trail.

### **Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail**

The Natchez Trace Trail follows along 70 miles of trail and about 444 miles of paved parkway. This trail system has cultural significance, as it pays homage to Native American history and nomadic settlers in pre-historic times. Sections of the trail are even considered some of the oldest trails and roads in North America. There are numerous side trails, streams, rivers and waterfalls. It is considered a year-round trail.

### **New England National Scenic Trail**

One of the shortest of the hikes, the New England Trail passes through Connecticut and Massachusetts along its 215-mile journey. There are plenty of private campgrounds, cottages and even hotels for a more relaxed off-trail experience. There are on-the-trail lodging options, as well. Fall is the best time to visit, but the trail can be hiked year-round.

RELATED: 5 Family-Friendly Beginner Hikes in New Zealand's South Island

## **North Country National Scenic Trail**

Clocking in at 4,600 miles, the North Country Trail is the longest scenic trail on this list, and it passes through eight states. This trail crosses forests, farmlands, private lands, remote terrain and nearby communities that offer many amenities for hikers. While it is a great challenge for long-distance hikers, it is also an extremely accessible trail for families looking to casually hike in sections, because it passes through diverse landscapes. The best times to hike this trail is in spring, summer or fall.

## **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail**

The Pacific Crest Trail spans 2,650 miles from the southern U.S. border with Mexico to the border with Canada, passing through California, Oregon and Washington. The terrain for this trail ranges from deserts to snowcapped peaks. It climbs nearly 60 major mountain passes and travels through three of the deepest lakes in the nation, making it a perfect hike for that summer field trip. This trail can be experienced all year long.

The Pacific Coast Trail stretches from the southern U.S. border with Mexico to Canada, passing through California, Oregon and Washington.

## **Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail**

The Pacific Northwest Trail spans 1,200 miles through Washington, Idaho and Montana and passes through three national parks and seven national forests, making the whole trail quite scenic and diverse. This trail is best experienced in summer and fall. But traveling here during spring is also particularly beautiful, with wildflowers along many sections.

## **Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail**

The Potomac Heritage Trail follows the Potomac River as it meanders for 1,100 miles. There are shelters and campsites along the trail (available with a reservation), offering up the opportunity to make the hike an overnight adventure. Since the trail follows the river, there are additional opportunities to recreate. Spring and fall are the best times to hike this path.

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### What To Keep in Mind While Hiking These Trails With Kids

- Families looking to plan a long-distance hike need to keep a few things in mind:
- Consider the ages of all the kids when picking a hike so that it is a pleasant experience for everyone.
- Factor weather, distance and elevation gain as well.
- Plan for a maximum of 3-4 miles with kids and gradually increase mileage as they become more experienced.
- Be realistic about the time it will take to hike. A good rule is to estimate the time it will take to complete the hike, double it, and use that as a baseline.
- Stay flexible, especially if this is the first family hike.
- Choose a hike with special features or points of interest to appeal to young hikers for a fun experience.

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Hiking the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

*Credit: 2021 Karthika Gupta*

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