



Park Prescription

Here's some medical advice you'll want to jump (or run or bike) to heed: Mounting research shows that regular doses of nature go a long way toward keeping you—and your kids—healthy and happy.

Studies have linked outdoor walks with boosts in creativity, improved problem solving, lower stress levels, and even a heightened attention span for kids. When kids are exposed to regular doses of bright natural light, they're more alert and happier during the day and sleep better at night.

This is all especially great news for residents of the Bay Area, where the opportunities for outdoor adventure are boundless. So grab the kids, throw on some sneakers, and take advantage of the healing energy and bonding opportunities that exist just outside your door.

Clockwise from top left: Jason Schuller; Justin Sullivan/Getty Images; Erika Wang/Honey & Hero Photography

Curtis Kim/Stocksy

Where to Go



Mount Diablo

With 150 miles of trails, the East Bay's nearly 20,000-acre Mount Diablo State Park is one of the best places for family hikes. Don't miss Rock City, a series of wind-carved sandstone caves that are perfect for explorers of all ages. In early spring, masses of wildflowers bloom all around the rock formations. In late summer and early fall, the park is a popular place to spot tarantulas. (Don't worry. Despite their scary reputations, they're actually docile and essentially harmless.)

Indian Rock Park

Bring older and more adventurous children to Berkeley's Indian Rock Park. You can climb the carved steps up to a gorgeous view of San Francisco Bay.

San Francisco has more accessible green space than any other city in the nation: 98 percent of residents live within a half mile of a park.

Ardenwood Historic Farm

You can spot close to 100 species of birds, buy fresh produce, tour the Victorian garden, and walk right up to cows, rabbits, goats, and sheep at Ardenwood Historic Farm in the East Bay on the outskirts of Fremont.

The East Bay Regional Park District is the largest regional park district in the entire country, with 65 parks and more than 1,200 miles of trails.



Picchetti Ranch

Along the three-mile loop through Santa Clara's Picchetti Ranch Open Space Preserve, which is due west of San Jose and includes an old farm and winery, you'll see everything from wild roses to peacocks.



Stow Lake

Get away from it all without leaving the city at Golden Gate Park's Stow Lake in San Francisco, where you can rent paddle- or rowboats by the hour to cruise around beautiful bridges, a Chinese Pavilion, even a little waterfall, spotting wildlife along the way. The boathouse, originally built in 1893, couldn't be more charming.



Have a stroller?

Paved pathways abound in the Bay Area. Try out the Nimitz Way Trail at Inspiration Point outside Berkeley near the San Pablo Reservoir, the Verna Dunshee Loop around the east peak of Mount Tamalpais just north of Sausalito, or the Stream Trail at Redwood Regional Park between Oakland and Walnut Creek.



What to Bring

- 1 When walking or hiking, wear layers and carry a small daypack or backpack with water, food, hats, and sunscreen—and don't forget a cell phone in case of emergency.
- 2 Bring along tools that encourage exploration, such as binoculars, a magnifying glass, a small digging tool, a bag for found "treasures," or a journal.
- 3 Pack plenty of high-protein snacks. Nuts, dried fruit, and granola bars are good, portable options.



Photo: Raymond Horn, Food & Prop Stylist; Jennie-Joy/Pat Bates & Associates

Kelly Knox/Stocksy

How to Keep Everybody Smiling

Give your kids a mission, like a nature scavenger hunt. There's one in the Extraordinary Kid Extras insert in this publication, and lots of downloadable options on Pinterest.com

Check out geocaching.com to see if another nature lover has left a "treasure" for you to find somewhere in the park or along the trail.

Let your little ones lead; kids will feel more engaged if they set the pace and determine the course of your nature walk.

Work toward a family goal by signing up to walk five trails or a total of 26.2 miles as part of the Regional Parks Foundation Trails Challenge. Get a free guidebook and T-shirt when you register at www.regionalparksfoundation.org

Healthy Parks Healthy People, a national program designed to promote the health of people as well as the planet, offers free guided nature walks in numerous Bay Area parks every Saturday. Check out the schedule and detailed descriptions at instituteatgoldengate.org

