



Top 10 hiking trails in the Central USA



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From the glorious vistas of the Rocky Mountains and the lush shores of the Great Lakes to the rugged canyonlands and ancient Native American ruins of the Southwest, the Central **USA** is a hiker's dream. Whether you're a holiday stroller or seasoned trekker, Donna Dailey has some of the best scenic routes for you.

1 Continental Divide Trail

Best for: long-distance glory

Total distance: 3,100 miles (4,990 km)

Total duration: 5-6 months

Running between the Mexican and Canadian borders, this arduous through-hiking route follows the high peaks and rangelands along the Continental Divide of the Americas. Together with the **Pacific Crest Trail** on the West Coast and the **Appalachian Trail** in the East, it forms the Triple Crown of US long-distance trails and is best for experienced hikers.

The trail traverses stunning wilderness and rugged backcountry regions of five states. From New Mexico, it runs north through Colorado along the backbone of the Rocky Mountains, and on through Wyoming's Great Divide Basin and Yellowstone National Park to Glacier National Park in Montana.



Gunnison National Forest wildflower meadows along the Continental Divide Trail by [David](#) via Flickr/[CC BY](#)

2 Deer Valley Loop, Saguaro National Park, Arizona

Best for: desert discovery

Total distance: 4 miles (6.5 km)

Total duration: 2.5 hours

Walking among the giant, multiarmed saguaro cactuses of the Sonoran Desert is a magical experience. The best place to explore this fascinating landscape is on the hiking trails of [Saguaro National Park](#).

This gentle route in the park's eastern quadrant offers fine views of the sweeping cactus forest, as well as unusual saguaro specimens and flowering cacti in season. There are more rugged trails in the western section of the park, as well as Native American petroglyphs.



Ancient Hohokam petrolyphs, Saguaro National Park © Dorling Kindersley/Greg Ward

3 Windows Loop, Arches National Park, Utah

Best for: families

Total distance: 1 mile (1.5 km)

Total duration: 1 hour

Southern Utah is brimming with stunning national parks and canyonlands. One of the most accessible spots for hikers is Arches National Park, where you can walk among the amazing, iconic red rock formations.

Trails range from the easy Windows Loop leading to three sandstone landmarks to the more strenuous but popular hike to the famous Delicate Arch. You'll get fabulous photographs wherever you go.



The Windows, Arches National Park by [Max and Dee Bernt](#) via [Flickr/CC BY](#)

4 Colorado Trail

Best for: Rocky Mountain views

Total distance: 485 miles (780 km)

Total duration: 4-6 weeks

There are stunning mountain vistas everywhere you turn in Colorado, and this cross-state trail, which traverses eight mountain ranges from Denver to Durango, captures some of its finest scenery. Most of this high-altitude route is above 10,000 ft (3,050 m), so you'll need to be acclimated and fit.

But you don't have to tackle the whole thing in one go. The Colorado Trail features 28 segments that let you enjoy its lush forests, wildflower meadows, and alpine tundra in more manageable hikes of 11 to 32 miles (18 to 52 km). The moderate hike from Denver through Waterton Canyon is a great scenic start.



View of the stunning Rocky Mountains via [Pixabay/CC0](#)

5 Superior Hiking Trail, Minnesota

Best for: forests and waterfalls

Total distance: 310 miles (500 km)

Total duration: 2-4 weeks

Lake Superior is the largest of America's Great Lakes. This long-distance trail, known as the SHT, follows a ridge overlooking its shoreline from Duluth to the Canadian border.

Of moderate difficulty, the trail runs through lush woodlands and several state parks, with river gorges, wildlife, and sweeping lake overlooks. There are 53 trailheads for shorter day hikes, including several loop trails. The Split Rock River Loop (5 miles/8 km) has wonderful waterfall views along a scenic river trail.



Fall colours in woodlands along the Superior Hiking Trail by [NatureNerd](#) via Flickr/CC BY

6 Longs Peak Trail, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Best for: bragging rights

Total distance: 7 miles (12 km) each way

Total duration: 10-15 hours

Longs Peak is the northernmost of Colorado's 58 "fourteeners" – mountain peaks over 14,000 ft (4,267 m) high. Each summer, thousands of hikers set out before dawn to make the scramble to the summit along the Keyhole Route, a difficult but non-technical climb. The trail ends at Boulder Field and the final ascent after that is along an exposed and hazardous path.

You'll need to be well acclimated to the altitude – even Colorado residents find it hard going. But the spectacular views and a well-deserved sense of achievement are a just reward.



Sunset at Longs Peak by [Dustin Gaffke](#) via Flickr/CC BY

7 South Rim Trail, Big Bend National Park, Texas

Best for: panoramic views

Total distance: 12-15 miles (19-24 km)

Total duration: Allow a full day

The remote **Big Bend National Park** on the Mexican border is known for its hiking trails, and the challenging South Rim route is considered the cream of the crop. It's a strenuous trek up the edge of the Chisos Mountains, but the jaw-dropping views are worth the pain of the 2,000-ft (610-m) elevation gain.

From your clifftop eyrie, you'll have sweeping vistas across the desert badlands into Mexico. Descend through the lovely, shaded Boot Canyon.



Panoramic desert views from the South Rim trail by [Adam Baker](#) via Flickr/CC BY

8 Beehive Basin Trail, Big Sky, Montana

Best for: alpine beauty

Total distance: 6 miles (10 km)

Total duration: 5 hours

The destination for this beautiful alpine journey is a small, pristine lake surrounded by the towering Spanish Peaks. Although you'll be reaching 9,275 ft (2,830 m), this is a moderate hike – apart from a few steep uphill sections, the trail climbs gradually, with many flat stretches where you can catch your breath.

With meadows blanketed with swathes of wildflowers in summer, the trail is a local favorite. For more solitude and even more spectacular views, continue past the lake to the trail's end below Beehive Peak. Watch out for moose and bear though.



Pristine tarn along the Beehive Basin Trail by [Greg Gjerdingen](#) via Flickr/CC BY

9 Yapashi Ruins Trail, Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico

Best for: Native American ruins

Total distance: 12 miles (19 km)

Total duration: 2 days

The cliff dwellings of Bandelier National Monument were once home to the Ancestral Puebloan people. This difficult backcountry hike takes you up and down steep, rugged canyons to reach largely untouched archeological sites.

Most hikers camp overnight on the mesa and explore the ruins of Yapashi Pueblo the next day. At its height, it stood four stories high and held several hundred rooms. A loop trail leads back to the start.



Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings, Bandelier National Monument © Dorling Kindersley/Tony Souter

10 Angels Landing Trail, Zion National Park, Utah

Best for: high-altitude thrills

Total distance: 5 miles (8 km)

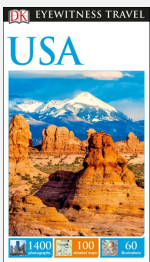
Total duration: 5 hours

You'll need a strong head for heights to tackle this dramatic trail, which takes you to the top of a lofty rock formation above Zion Canyon. A series of tight, steep switchbacks winds up to the ridgetop at Scout Lookout.

If you dare to continue, a daunting path cut into the rock leads across the steep, narrow Hogsback, with stomach-churning drop-offs on either side. Support chains are anchored into the rock. When you reach the summit, the stupendous views are truly heavenly.



The dramatic outcrop of Angels Landing, Zion National Park via [Pixabay/CC0](#)



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