

A user's guide to family-friendly hikes in our own backyard

Ellie Angel – Special to the Town Crier
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Ellie Angel's daughter takes in the sights at Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve.
Ellie Angel/Special to the Town Crier

One of the positive outcomes of being quarantined over the past year due to the global pandemic has been spending a copious amount of time with my daughter outdoors.

In a previous Town Crier column, I discussed the benefits of the outdoors for children and listed activities you can do with them. One of the activities I like to do with my toddler is taking her on stroller-friendly hikes around the Bay Area. There's a learning curve to hiking with little ones, as "be prepared" looks very different for a 2-year-old on the trail.

Following is a guide to local trails that make particularly great places to build your skills as a growing family of travelers – with one bonus adventure a little farther afield. These recommendations that are particularly stroller-friendly if you're setting out with short legs in your crew.

From experience going out every morning with a toddler, I've learned to bring lots of water, lots of snacks, a garbage bag, towels, extra wipes and a diaper bag with a change of clothes – my daughter gets carsick if we drive more than 20 minutes, so you'll notice I don't include many hikes at the top of twisty roads. All of these items are stored in my car in case I need them at an unexpected moment.

• **Stevens Creek Trail, Mountain View and Sunnyvale.** We love this simple trail. It starts on the border of Sunnyvale/Mountain View and goes all the way up to Shoreline Park in Mountain View. It's a nice, stroller-friendly walking trail. If you go to the entrance of the

Sunnyvale location on Dale Avenue/HeatherstoneWay, you can take a walk all the way to downtown Mountain View and grab a coffee or a croissant. It is level terrain with some uphill and downhill, but nothing too strenuous.

- **Shoreline Park, Mountain View.** We love going to Shoreline Park; it is one of our local highlights. There is a nice family-friendly walking trail by the water. Fun fact: If you keep walking north, you will hit the Palo Alto Baylands as well. There is a small play structure next to the trail that is a great pitstop for kids to play in the sand and explore. We also love the open fields for a picnic outside in the grassy field, but be careful of the many geese that walk around. There is a cafe situated next to the Shoreline parking lot, Shoreline Lake American Bistro. It has great coffee, tasty lunch options and open outdoor seating.

- **McClellan Ranch Preserve, Cupertino.** This is a beautiful ranch situated next to Blackberry Farm in Cupertino. You can park by the farm entrance and walk on the trail. As you start walking, you'll be welcomed by some adorable animals, including alpacas, goats and horses. Soon after, you'll come across a lovely park that is suitable for all ages. There are also picnic benches nearby to enjoy a snack or lunch. There is the option to keep walking on the trail and see some trees and greenery along the way. It makes for a nice outing.

- **Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve, Cupertino.** This is a lovely county park nestled in the hills. There are two parking areas that lead up to different trails. The one farther from the main entrance leads to a strenuous mountain hike. I have done this hike with a stroller, and it is not easy. You can only get halfway up and then need to turn back as the terrain is rocky and not exactly stroller-inviting. However, it is great if you want a challenge. The other parking lot leads to the entrance to a level trail that is much more doable. Deer Hollow Farm is a highlight on this path, so stop and see some cute animals along the way.

- **Foothills Park, Palo Alto.** This is one of our favorite spots to visit locally. The park used to be restricted to Palo Alto residents only; however, since December, it has been open to all. It is nestled up in the foothills along a windy road. There is a beautiful lake you can park next to and walk around, or have a picnic in the grass right by the creek to watch the ducks nearby. There is also a trail downhill of the park that is peaceful and stroller-friendly. It tends to get very crowded on weekends, so I'd recommend visiting early or in the afternoon to avoid crowds.

- **Pfeiffer Falls Trail, Big Sur.** If you are feeling adventurous and want to embark on a longer road trip, Big Sur is an excellent option. After 13 years and a \$1 million renovation due to a wildfire, the famous Pfeiffer Falls Trail recently reopened to the public. The trail is family-friendly; if you go, you will be surrounded by pristine redwood trees and will also see a 60-foot waterfall.

Ellie Angel is a local mom and educator. For more early-learning ideas and teaching tips, follow her on Instagram at @mama4learning or visit her blog at medium.com/@Mama4learning.