



  English

National Hiking Day

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I'm not totally sure of how or when I first got into hiking, but it's a huge part of my life now, and I'm grateful for that. Hiking has some great physical and mental health benefits, and it's exposed me to many amazing views and wild animals that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to see.

Maybe it was a book that got me into hiking. I can't remember how old I was when I first read "Halfway to the Sky" by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, but I do remember that it started a fascination with the Appalachian Trail. I grew up in New York, not on the Appalachian Trail but close to it, yet didn't get to do any part of it until a wrong turn led me and my now-husband through it on a hike a few years ago. When we realized we weren't hiking Anthony's Nose anymore but were on part of the Appalachian Trail, I joked that we started a section-hike and will have to finish the entire trail one day. That hasn't happened (yet) but I've done many other epic hikes throughout the years.

Although I'm proud of the mountains I've hiked, including Mount Mansfield in Vermont (and not just because it's super close to the Ben & Jerry's factory, so I got to reward myself with a tour and ice cream afterwards), Square Top Mountain, and my first 14er (where I thought I broke both of my big toes on the way up and had to hobble the entire way down), hiking isn't always about the high elevation gain or long distances for me. Sometimes the reward is the scenery or wildlife I get to see; sometimes it's simply the fresh air and exercise. Getting out in nature sometimes gives me mental clarity that I can't otherwise get, and it's a different type of workout than walking around my neighborhood.

Great Sand Dunes National Park is one of the most mesmerizing places I've ever been to. Hiking on the dunes poses a unique challenge, and I felt like I was on a different planet as I climbed to the top. Although my entire body got a killer workout, the views are what I'll always remember.

Another place where I felt like I was on a different planet was Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. Kilauea last erupted in 2018, and you can now hike part of the crater in the National Park. It's wild to be able to walk on it while still seeing smoke and steam in the distance.

Other hikes that made me feel transported to another planet include Badlands National Park, Canyonlands National Park, and Custer State Park.

The beauty of hiking is that anyone can do it, anywhere, any time of year, whether you need a wheelchair-accessible trail, a shorter and easier hike to do with kids, or a dog-friendly hike.

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