

Hit the trail

Hike, bike, horseback ride and drive the trails through Northern Indiana's idyllic landscape – even if you're on a budget

Ah, the great outdoors. It's one of the great pleasures in Northern Indiana, and spring offers one of the best times to hit the trail. Get out of the house, get some exercise and take an inexpensive (even free) getaway.

The world-renowned Heritage Trail

There's a reason Life magazine calls The Heritage Trail "One of America's Most Scenic Drives." The rural landscapes of Amish Country come to life along the 90-mile trail, where you'll discover the rich and diverse heritage that's shaped this community, where about 20,000 Amish make their homes.

Make no mistake, the Heritage Trail is just as the name suggests, it takes visitors on a tour of the back roads of Northern Indiana where they'll learn about the life and times of the Amish, but also learn about how quilts, furniture, band instruments, Alka Seltzer, RVs and even pie have helped shape this region of Northern Indiana.

The self-guided trail is free, and to help you find your way, borrow a Heritage Trail audio CD from the [Elkhart County Visitors Center in Elkhart or other stops along the trail](#). Travel the whole trail, or just do a portion.

Hiking trails

Few places in the U.S. can match the kind of diverse landscape you'll find at the [Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore](#). Yes, you can walk along the 23 miles of the shoreline that stretches from Gary to Michigan City, but what most people don't realize is the natural wonders found well beyond the intriguing sand dunes.

Indiana's only national park features wooded hiking trails, including Trail 7, which winds through the woods and past 192-foot tall Mount Tom.

Nearby, [Indiana Dunes State Park](#) has 16 trails for hikers who want to reconnect with nature, and see birds, wildlife and the sand dunes. Pitch a tent at the campsite, or find a cozy bed and breakfast in nearby Chesterton or Michigan City to extend the stay.

Biking trails

One of the best ways to view the rolling countryside of [Marshall County](#) is by bike. There are three different marked bike routes that go through Culver, Plymouth and around Lake Maxinkuckee, Indiana's second largest lake. The 10-mile ride that loops the lake takes bikers under a canopy of maple trees. Culver, located on the north shore of the lake, is home to the well-known prep college, Culver Academies, also known as the Cape Cod of the Midwest. Get a bite to eat at Cordance Café, where you'll find burgers, wraps and portabella fries.

With routes from 19 to 26 miles, bikers can pedal through rural [Amish countryside](#) through Elkhart, Goshen and Nappanee. Of particular interest is Goshen's 10-mile Maple City Greenway, a quiet and mostly flat trail that connects Shoup Parsons Woods, Shanklin Park and the Elkhart County Courthouse. The Greenway consists of several biking and walking paths throughout the city. The Pumpkin Vine Trail takes you northeast through a city park and then continues through the rolling farmland and connects to Middlebury and then Shipshewana.

For a more rugged trail, try the [Village of Winona Mountain Bike Trail](#) near Warsaw. The trail begins at Winona Lake Park. There are a variety of trails to choose from, some with smooth surfaces to others that have steep down hills, tight turns and challenging terrain.

In LaPorte County, the [Bikeway system](#) includes 20 bike trails totaling 400 miles of natural terrain, communities and parks. Bike loops are 12 to 33 miles in length and vary in difficulty from easy to moderate. While motorized vehicles aren't allowed, bikes have full access to nearly all the trails in the LaPorte County Park, including both paved and unpaved paths.

Hiking and biking trails

Many trails are accessible to both hikers and bikers. That includes [Lake City Greenway](#) in Kosciusko County, which includes three trails that follow lakeshores, woods and wetlands. The 1.2-mile Beyer Farm Trail runs along Pike Lake Park along a board walk and through a 60-acre urban wetland. Trail signs interpret the significant habitat found along the trail. The Chinworth Bridge Trail begins at Trailhead Park on Old U.S. 30 taking bikers or walkers over the historic Chinworth Bridge over the Tippecanoe River. The 140-foot long iron bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This also is a great area for picnics, and also a canoe launch.

The [Heritage Trail of Winona Lake](#) is 1.8 miles and goes around Winona Lake and through the bustling Village of Lake Winona, which is perfect place to rest and grab a bite to eat.

Bridle trails

For a change of pace, and a change of scenery, see the countryside, forests and waterways by horseback. [The Marshland Trail](#), between Elkhart and Middlebury, provides guided trails for all ages and skill levels. Chances are the horses will lead you to sites where you'll see foxes, wild turkeys and deer, among other wildlife.

[Bluhm Park](#) in Westville is known for its abundance of wildflowers. Trails for horseback riding are located on the west side of the park, where you'll find wetlands filled with waterfowl, wood ducks and geese. On the east side of the park, you'll have to venture on foot because the wetlands and woods there are protected areas.

Can't decide whether to travel by bike, on foot or by horse? At [Potato Creek State Park](#), you can go to one location and do all three. The state park, just west of South Bend, has plenty of wooded trails and 327-acre Worster Lake, which is popular for fishing and boating. Trails take visitors in the mature woodlands, restored prairies and wetlands, making the park a good place for those who are looking more than a good hike, but also plant and wildlife observations.

In a single trip, you can experience a diverse landscape, from touring the Amish countryside to horseback riding through natural wetlands. The fact that most of these natural attractions are free makes it even a more attractive way to getaway for the day or the weekend.