

# BEST HIKING TRAILS IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY

From ridge-top vistas to creekside strolls, the best trails in the region

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From ridge-top Appalachian Trail vistas to creekside strolls and reclaimed wild places, the Lehigh Valley and its surrounding ridges offer hikes for every ability.

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## **SOUTH MOUNTAIN PRESERVE**

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Emmaus, PA (Lehigh County) — Wildlands Conservancy's first preserve (protected in 1973), this 440-acre forest holds nearly 12 miles of trails from easy to difficult, with rocky outcrops and overlooks of the valley. Great for hikers, trail runners, and mountain bikers; dogs must be leashed.

## HAWK MOUNTAIN SANCTUARY

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Kempton, PA (Berks County, just north of the valley) — Founded in 1934 by conservationist Rosalie Edge, this 2,600-acre site is the world's first refuge for birds of prey. The roughly one-mile, strenuous climb to North Lookout crosses boulder fields to a dramatic overlook where you can watch raptors ride thermal currents during the famous fall migration; the Skyline Trail links additional lookouts. A small admission fee supports the sanctuary.

## BAKE OVEN KNOB

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Near Germansville, PA (Blue Mountain, Lehigh County) — A moderate Appalachian Trail hike to one of eastern Pennsylvania's finest viewpoints. Two rocky overlooks just off the trail give roughly 180-degree views north and south across the Blue Mountain ridge and farmland below — a prime spot for autumn hawk watching. The footing is rocky, so wear sturdy shoes.

## JACOBSTOWN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

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Bushkill Township, near Nazareth/Wind Gap (Northampton County) — Often called Jacobstown State Park, this 1,168-acre center of forests, meadows, and the Bushkill Creek includes Henry's Woods old-growth forest and miles of trails from easy streamside walks to moderate loops. Excellent for trail running, birding, and fishing, with colonial gun-making history woven through the grounds.

## LEHIGH GAP NATURE CENTER

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Between Slatington and Palmerton, PA (Kittatinny Ridge) — A nationally notable conservation success story — the only former Superfund site restored into an environmental education center. Its 13-mile trail network connects to both the Appalachian and D&L trails, ranging from challenging ridge climbs to gentle walks through reclaimed grasslands and riparian habitat.

## BLACK RIVER SANCTUARY

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Salisbury & Upper Saucon Townships, just south of Allentown/Bethlehem — The valley's newest preserve, this 187-acre Wildlands Conservancy sanctuary opened in October 2024 with about 4.7 miles of trails through oak, maple, and tulip-tree woodland and wildflower meadows. The steep Horizon Trail climbs to overlooks of Allentown, Bethlehem, and the valley beyond; gentler loops suit families.

## TREXLER NATURE PRESERVE (ADDED)

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Schnecksville / North Whitehall Township (Lehigh County) — A 1,108-acre county preserve with an 18-mile trail network across North, Central, and South ranges, spanning meadows, hemlock ravines, and the Jordan Creek. Home to free-ranging bison and elk herds and adjacent to the Lehigh Valley Zoo — a standout family hike the original guide overlooked.

## **DELAWARE & LEHIGH (D&L) TRAIL (ADDED)**

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Allentown, Bethlehem & Easton (and beyond) — A mostly flat 165-mile multi-use canal-towpath corridor following the Lehigh River through the valley's cities. With crushed-stone and asphalt surfaces and many wheelchair-accessible sections, it's the region's best option for easy, family- and stroller-friendly walking, running, and biking.

## TIPS & PLANNING

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Most Lehigh Valley trails are best from April through November, with mid-October the usual peak for fall foliage. Carry water, wear sturdy footwear, and check conditions before heading out. Appalachian Trail sections (Bake Oven Knob, Lehigh Gap) are notoriously rocky — trekking poles help and grippy boots are a must. Some sites charge admission (Hawk Mountain) or ask trail donations; bring a few dollars. Keep dogs leashed where required, pack out all trash, and start early on weekends, as popular overlooks like Bake Oven Knob get crowded.

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