

Ten Baltimore-area hikes to free your mind, body and soul

Kirk McKoy



A couple walks across the bridge at Lake Roland Park trails after completing a hike. (Kirk McKoy/The Baltimore Banner)

You might not realize this but there are tons of great hiking opportunities right here in Charm City! I just moved from what I considered a hiker's mecca, Los Angeles. But this returning Marylander has been visiting the many area trails — and loving it! I need to give props to the dozens of locations because I didn't know they existed here.

Beside the physical exercise from hiking, being out in the fresh air and sunshine helps me to clear my mind. It soothes and renews my spirit from all the ills of the world. I think Morpheus from the movie “The Matrix” said it best — “You need to free your mind!”

For me, Mother Earth is my doctor, and nature my priest. To prove my point, during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, how many of you felt better when you got out of the house and took a walk?

So, to help you further free your mind, here are 10 of my favorite hikes I’ve taken since returning to Maryland.

The majority of these trails are close. I based all the hikes on an hour’s drive from the Inner Harbor. Each of these amazing hikes can be found by searching the trail name on the AllTrails app. I think they offer the best scenic views within a reasonable driving distance, and I rate the hikes on a scale of easy, moderate and hard.

Preparing for a hike

Rule No. 1: Always plan ahead for your hike, no matter the difficulty. Here are a few things I think are essential to have before you lace up those hiking boots and hit the trails:

1. The route: Familiarize yourself with the route you will be taking.
2. Headlamps: if you are planning a very early or late in the evening hike.
3. Sun protection: sunglasses, sun protective clothes and sunscreen.
4. Hydration: Bring more water than you think you may need.
5. Layers: On cooler hikes, wear noncotton, moisture-wicking garments.
6. Knife: This ex-Boy Scout recommends being prepared!
7. First aid: Even if you’re leaving it in the car, have a kit handy.
8. Emergency shelter: Those thin silver blankets may look cheap, but they do the job.
9. Nutrition: Can you say granola bars?
10. Navigation: Carry your mobile phone for navigation apps and emergency calls.

Lastly, let’s be a little respectful to the great outdoors so future generations also get to enjoy nature as we do. We are but visitors in nature and these beautiful places need our help. Leave the trails in better shape than the way you found them. Leave no trace. If you pack it in, pack it out.

Let’s hit the trails.

Lake Roland loops



Lake Roland Park. (Kirk McKoy/The Baltimore Banner)

Location: Lake Roland Park, 1000 Lakeside Drive, Baltimore

Distance from Inner Harbor: 20 minutes (8.3 miles)

Hike distance: 4.7 miles Red and Yellow Loop (depending on the trail loop taken)

Elevation gain: 275 feet

Difficulty: Moderate to easy (depending on the trail loop, eight different loops available)

Right in our own backyard, Lake Roland Park offers the best hiking trails for the casual and serious hikers. There are eight wonderful loops varying from easy to moderate climbs and distances. The trails offer a great variety of views for birding, hiking and walking.

It is unlikely, during weekdays, that you will encounter many other people while exploring the park. The weekend is a vastly different story during peak hiking season. I am told by local avid hikers that April through September, when the foliage is lush and green, are the best months for these trails, although I did love the changing leaves during the fall. The autumn colors are phenomenal and the weather a bit brisker and more suited for a longer hike. Dogs are welcome and must be on a leash while in the park.