

## Tips for Preserving Nature While Hiking

There are more than 150 long distance hiking trails in the US, and more than 74,000 miles of hiking trails throughout the country. That might sound like a lot, but when you consider that more than 40 million people go hiking every year, it's clear that our trails get a lot of foot traffic. Over time, high usage in places like Madera Canyon can end up damaging trails and the natural habitat that we love to visit. That is why it's so important that hikers follow these tips to help preserve nature when hiking:

### 1. Clean Off Your Boots

As you hike through different areas, your boots pick up soil that may contain seeds, bacteria, and sometimes even small arthropods. When you go from one location to another without cleaning off your boots, you're potentially depositing debris into a new area which could prove to be harmful. Invasive plant and insect species can spread to new areas and replace native species. Tree fungi can damage or kill trees. Chytrid fungus is spreading globally and is deadly to amphibians. Not cleaning your boots can set off a chain reaction of potential damage for the natural world. So between hikes, wipe down your boots and make sure they're clean before you start a hike in a different place.

### 2. Bring a Reusable Water Bottle

Single use plastics are overwhelming the earth. Yet, some hikers still bring single use bottles of water or sports drink when they hike; many end up littering our trails or clogging public trash cans. Invest in a high quality metal or BPA-free **reusable water bottle** that you can carry hiking. A **water pack** is also a good alternative. These containers will hold more water than a single use bottle and are much better for the natural world. Also, pack your trail snacks in reusable containers when possible.

### 3. Stick to the Trail

Every hiker should carry a paper copy of the trail map with them and stay on the **designated trail** no matter what. When you go walking off the trail you can trample and kill plants, break branches off shrubs and young trees, and contribute to damaging soil erosion around the trail. Don't take shortcuts or try to create your own trail- this creates "social trails" which can seriously damage habitat. Stay on the **designated trail** when you're hiking, even where it's wet or muddy.

### 4. Don't Pursue/Annoy the Animals

It's wonderful to see deer, birds, and other animals when you're out hiking, but please remember that you're a guest in their homes! Don't try to approach animals or lure them to you with food. Wild animals can be dangerous! Don't leave food out for animals or try to take selfies with them. Do not pursue them off-trail. Enjoy their beauty from a distance and leave

them alone. You can take photos of them from a distance to post on your social media, but do not approach closely. Use a telephoto or zoom camera lens to get that great wildlife photo from a safe distance for you and the animal.

## **5. Take Your Trash with You**

It's shocking how many people still litter when out hiking. If you have trash- like food wrappers or containers, pack it up carefully and take it out of the area with you. Then throw the trash away, or recycle it, in a proper receptacle later. Never throw your trash on the ground or leave it behind when you're hiking. It's your responsibility to clean up after yourself and help maintain a clean environment.